**Paul:** Good morning. This is Paul Seacrest for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, September 22nd, 1995. I’m in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey with Joseph Hannan. Joe Hannan was in the Coast Guard at Ellis Island beginning January 10th 1942. He was in boot camp there for six to eight weeks and then made a return appearance at Ellis Island in 1944 before he was given a new assignment.

Present also is Kevin Daily who’s running the equipment. We are in the Florida room as it’s been called in the back of Joe’s house here. Joe, can we begin by you giving me your full name please?

**Joseph:** Joseph Francis Hannan.

**Paul:** Your date of birth please.

**Joseph:** February 26th, 1923.

**Paul:** Where were you born?

**Joseph:** Paterson, New Jersey.

**Paul:** Can you give just kind of a thumb nail sketch of your family background?

**Joseph:** Yes, Irish Catholic on both sides. My grand fathers were both mill workers. Grandmothers stayed home. My father was a city employee. He was a foreman of the Shade Tree Gang in Paterson, New Jersey.

**Paul:** The what gang?

**Joseph:** The Shade Tree.

**Paul:** Can you spell that please?

**Joseph:** S-H-A-D-E, Shade Tree Gang.

**Paul:** I may be asking you to spell things because we do transcribe these interviewers.

**Joseph:** My mother died when I was 10 years old. She didn’t work. She stayed home. I was kind of raised by a conglomeration of aunts, although my father did remarry. My stepmother and I didn’t get along too well, so I became kind of semi-street kid. I didn’t spend a lot of time at home.

**Paul:** Can you tell me your parents’ names please?

**Joseph:** Parent was Frank Hannan and my mother was Alice O’Neil. You want my stepmother too?

**Paul:** Sure.

**Joseph:** Lillian Hasinger.

**Paul:** Can you spell Hasinger?

**Joseph:** H-A-S-I-N-G-E-R.

**Paul:** Were there any other brothers and sisters?

**Joseph:** No, only child.

**Paul:** You grew up in Paterson.

**Joseph:** Till I joined the service which was … I was 17 going on 18 I guess.

**Paul:** That’s 1942.

**Joseph:** Yes, right.

**Paul:** Can you tell me how you got involved with the service?

**Joseph:** I was [inaudible 00:02:41] theatre in Paterson.

**Paul:** Can you spell Fabian?

**Joseph:** F-A-B-I-A-N.

**Paul:** Thank you.

**Joseph:** I was there when Pearl Harbor was bombed. We were called to the rear of the theatre and the managed said, “They’ve just bombed Pearl Harbor.” Where is Pearl Harbor? We didn’t know. We had to go through the audience and tell all the service men to return to their units immediately. I was going with my girlfriend, my present wife at that time and she said, “What are you going to do?” I said, “I’m not going to do anything.” A lot of people, of course, said the draft was an effect and I was still in high school. Somehow I really don’t remember what the circumstances … I decided that I was going to list.

I used to go fishing out of Jersey City with my father on one of the big party boats; the Palace I think was called. I always saw the Coast Guard, the big white Coast Guard boats moving in and out. I thought, “That’s a good surface again.” They had openings there so I went and joined the Coast Guard. My father had to give me permission but I have no recollection of going over to New York except for my physical and for final day, but I must have gone over and listed or something.

I went to see almost immediately because I was sworn into the service at the [inaudible 00:04:19] office which is down around the president lower Manhattan. I guess the building is still there. Went to see immediately because they marched across to a small boat, I think it was called the Lady Three Footer. We were filed to board that and taken over and deposited on Ellis Island.

**Paul:** Can you tell me a little bit about the process of enlisting? What that actually entails? What you went through?

**Joseph:** I went down. It was only a physical. I guess they gave me a written test too. I don’t remember it at all. The physical was filing through nude and getting examined. The fact they really had a discussion because I weight about 115 pounds.

**Paul:** 115.

**Joseph:** I was the same height as I am now, 5’7. They were afraid that I suffered from malnutrition and there was a little debate amongst them whether they should take me or not. They were taking lots of people; probably in worse shape than I. they passed me. Then I went home and they sent me a letter. I can remember the forwarding too. It said, “Dress properly in order to make a good appearance upon your first day in service,” words to that effect. I put on my finger tip, reversible coat, and my square toe shoes. They were the style in those days, rubber soles. I reported that way.

**Paul:** Can you describe what a fingertip jacket is?

**Joseph:** It’s called the fingertip because it hangs down as far. I really don’t know. It actually was a reversible rain coat and of course, a clean underwear. Good thing I did because I was in those clothing for 13 days before I was issued a uniform.

**Paul:** At Ellis Island.

**Joseph:** On Ellis Island.

**Paul:** Why was that?

**Joseph:** They didn’t have supplies. I hope I washed the underwear although I don’t remember.

**Paul:** How did your father feel about your decision to [crosstalk 00:06:33]?

**Joseph:** I think he was kind of pleased. I really do. He and I got along alright but we weren’t [inaudible 00:06:40] close. I was a very poor high school student. I was thrown out once. Well, I dropped out really. He wanted to make me out. I think he was kind of relieved that I was doing something like that. He also told me I should get some kind of training so if I came out I would have a job.

**Paul:** Did he have any military experience in his background?

**Joseph:** No, he did not. I guess his age for World War I was a little off. I have his draft course so I know he was eligible but he wasn’t taken.

**Paul:** When you were brought to Ellis Island, did you know what that was or even where they were taking you for that matter?

**Joseph:** Nope. I had no idea where I was going or what I was expected to do. I didn’t for a couple of days after I went either.

**Paul:** Does anything stick out in your mind about the ride from battery pack to Ellis Island that very first day?

**Joseph:** I can remember it but I can’t really that it was … Since I had gone in and out of that area many times I saw the things that I always saw: the sugar … I thought it was the sugar factory. Colgate was there and that kind of thing. I was familiar generally with that. No, I didn’t remember anything particular about it.

**Paul:** Can you describe the boat that brought you to Ellis Island that first day?

**Joseph:** The Coast Guard called 83 Foot. It was 83 foot long, a very narrow patrol boat, almost a harbor patrol boat. It really wasn’t designed to carry groups of enlistees. We were just crowded aboard my recollection.

**Paul:** How large was group that was going there?

**Joseph:** I have no idea.

**Paul:** But there were more than-

**Joseph:** Oh yeah [crosstalk 00:08:28]. I would say that the least would have been 50, but I really don’t know.

**Paul:** What’s the first thing that happened once the boat docked at Ellis Island?

**Joseph:** There is something I want to put in before that too because I think it was interesting. We were standing out in front of the [inaudible 00:08:43] office … This was inside the [inaudible 00:08:48] office. The officer, I guess wasn’t an officer, could have been a chief … I don’t know who administered the oath of our enlistment oath said, “Now is anybody changing their mind? If you are, step forward now.” It crossed my mind as I see this is only time. I have no idea going to war. I don’t really know what that meant and but I said this is the only time I’m going to have a chance. I glanced over at my father and he didn’t say yes that bad so I continued with the oath.

They brought us outside and then we said if we want to put the number at 50 marchers who had never marched before. I’m sure we weren’t marchers. We got down to the boat and got aboard. A recollection on the other end is clear to me is because the ferry boat that is there now that was in and I watched that. We pulled up on the starboard outside of the harbor and we unloaded right in front of the immigration building.

**Paul:** What happened? What was the process once you were on?

**Joseph:** Specifically, I really can’t say. I know that in my memory there is tremendous number of lines people waiting to get shots, waiting to get food, waiting to get the supplies and so on. I was brought up in a very modest Irish Catholic house. I was a little uneasy with the nudeness that went around there. Also I remember I guess I also had trouble going to the bathroom because it always somebody when I had to defecate.

There was always a line. I looked in one of the other toilets there and it had a red cross on it. Nobody was in there so I said, “I’ll use that,” because I thought that was for pharmacy space, but it wasn’t. It was for venereal disease patients. I didn’t know that though after I used it a couple of times.

**Paul:** Can you describe for me the facilities where you slept on the island?

**Joseph:** Yes. Are you familiar with the island at all? You’ve been in it-

**Paul:** My office is there.

**Joseph:** No, I’m talking about where we were.

**Paul:** Oh yes, but explain it for someone who doesn’t know.

**Joseph:** I’m asking you because I want to know. We were in what’s called the drill shed. I think it was called the drill shed. It’s the room with the great big campus painted on the wall. It’s still there when I was there a few years ago. The bunks, of course, we were not drilling in there. The bunks had to be at least three high. My brain says it was higher than that but I kind of doubt that it was. We were in bunks three high, maybe four, who knows, for of all the time I was there.

**Paul:** How many people in the room?

**Joseph:** I don’t know, hundreds and hundreds I guess. You fear that whole room was full of these stack bunks.

**Paul:** Was that the only room where people slept?

**Joseph:** I don’t know. It’s the only one that I saw in here.

**Paul:** How many bathrooms were attached to that?

**Joseph:** No recollection of that at all. There was another big room that was the mess hall and I think the bathrooms were off the mess hall. The physical characteristics, the layout of it was kind of vague to me.

**Paul:** You mentioned the campus painting on the wall. Can you describe that a little bit for us on tape?

**Joseph:** I suppose it was to teach you how to box a campus, how to use a campus. It wasn’t used for that while we were there. If we had any training and we did have some, they were done in small rooms and small groups scattered around the building. That room was never used for instruction to my knowledge. It wasn’t used for drill. If we did our drill, we went out in the yard or most of the drilling that we did was open in front of the immigration building.

**Paul:** Can you describe what drilling entailed?

**Joseph:** They taught us the manual of arms, how to carry a riffle and parts of the riffle. We never fired one, the left turn, right turn, about phase that kind of thing.

**Paul:** Were the riffles functioning riffles or were they dumb riffles?

**Joseph:** Yes, they were. We knew they were functioning riffles because part of the assignment that we had was to guard the seawall, to walk the seawall carrying a riffle and an ammunition belt, web belt. They gave us one clip of ammunition which we carried in the belt. We were forbidden to put it in the riffle. There was Springfield … I don’t know, 03s. I think they were from 1903. I’m not sure. We were instructed never to put the clip of ammunition in. none of us knew how to … I don’t think unless we experimented. None of us knew how to put the ammunition in and of course certainly not how to fire it.

There was a range on the island but I never remembered using it.

**Paul:** Riffle use was never part of your instruction there.

**Joseph:** It was. We had regular classes in it, but there were classes. They weren’t practical.

**Paul:** All in theory, none in practice.

**Joseph:** Of course, we were there to prevent saboteurs from coming aboard the island and from prisoners, aliens we also guarded escaping. I never had any acute occasion to stop anyone. Although we were told that when we off the relief game we had to challenge them at a true military fashion, whoever goes there probably had passwords too. I don’t remember it as a big problem.

**Paul:** Can you talk a little bit about the guarding of the aliens and what sticks out in your mind about that experience?

**Joseph:** That is the thing that most sticks in my mind. We were taken down to … One of the guard positions that was outside. The one I just described was outside where you could see other people around you. Then inside the building probably in a basement of the immigration building, they had these two giant rooms. By giant, I mean they were awfully big to me. One side were females and the other side were males. Of course, I didn’t know what this what all about. [Inaudible 00:15:34] didn’t mean anything to me.

I don’t think anyone ever explained it. We didn’t carry guns when we were down there. We carried clothes. We were told that we had to make sure order was kept and that there was no intermingling through sides because those were families broken up, the females and males. I remember the overriding thing that I could smell was oranges. It’s interesting. I guess they were given oranges to prevent scurvy or something. I’m sure they were fed alright, but that was the odor. You would think maybe an odor of you and sweat or things like that, but it may have been but the thing that stuck with me was the orange smell.

I was fascinated by it because, first of all, why were they there kind of thing? Because they were Americans, most of them. I delighted in looking at some of the teenage girls because they were my age or just about and they’re rolling in the Bobby socks, and their angora sweaters and everything like that and talking English although we were not supposed to talk to them, but you could hear them. It was very mysterious kind of a thing.

**Paul:** That was one of your instruction that you were not speak to the-

**Joseph:** I suppose it was. I don’t remember anyone specifically saying it but somehow we didn’t.

**Paul:** Do you remember an occasion where did speak to one of these people?

**Joseph:** No, I never remembered doing it.

**Paul:** You mentioned you thought they were Americans. Do you recall any other nationalities being held at Ellis Island at that time?

**Joseph:** The Germans seem to be at least in my mind … I have tried to find out why they were there were mostly German. I think a lot of them were … I must have either overheard or talked because I know some of our neighbors, I think it was German Baker had been picked up. I didn’t see him or anything like that. I didn’t know our Baker was scorched so he wasn’t one of the enemy aliens. I never remember seeing any Japanese. Italians, yes, there was a lot of Italians. [Inaudible 00:17:54].

**Paul:** Would guarding the enemy aliens be a daily thing for you? Was that part of the routine or was that a special?

**Joseph:** It was a daily thing but not necessarily for me because we would rotate different. You have your training sessions, and your classroom sessions, and your guard duty. That would be at night by the way. I guess we did during the day too. Sometimes your guard duty would take you to other places in the building, so you might be a messenger. One of the spots, which I’ve been back to the island and searched for it, can’t find it. It’s so clear in my mind that I can’t believe that it not inexistence.

One of the spots was in front of a big wall, [inaudible 00:18:42] bigger than this room. Not what they said actually but what in the house was the valuables of the people who were in turned. When I went back to Ellis Island four, five years ago with Brian, we couldn’t find it.

**Paul:** Let’s just say for the sake of the tape that the Brian that you’re referring to Brian Finny. Can you describe for me … You’ve done a little bit of it already the daily routine starting with the time you got up and what you did and go on through the day.

**Joseph:** I really can’t specifically say. I know that we were out five o’clock in the morning.

**Paul:** How were you woken up?

**Joseph:** Probably a boson’s whistle. Bosons would walk through blowing their whistle. I don’t remember Bill would call but there couldn’t been that. Someone else maybe remembers something different. Then you would get up and you would have your breakfast and the bathroom facilities. Then you would go to whatever you’re going to do that day. They would post the orders of the day, post what uniform would be when you got a uniform.

**Paul:** When you have-

**Joseph:** As I said.

**Paul:** Where did you go for breakfast?

**Joseph:** It was a med school, right there.

**Paul:** When in relation to where you actually slept? Did you have to walk?

**Joseph:** I remember it being that way, pointing left but I’m not really sure that’s where it was.

**Paul:** Can you describe for me what they would feed you for breakfast?

**Joseph:** I imagine the usual thing, French toast, shit on a shingle as I said, cereal I imagine. I’m reconstructing that. I really have no specifics. I don’t remember ever being hungry except hunger of a young man who didn’t snack all day. They didn’t keep us tremendously busy because I don’t think they had room to keep us busy. There was so many people and they were struggling to get this thing organized. Nobody expected it to happen. It was so new. The war was so new. After all, you were talking only a little over a month after Pearl Harbor. No uniforms for a long time, for me anyhow, I guess for others too.

**Paul:** What the general age category of the men who were brought out at your time?

**Joseph:** I would say that that was the general age.

**Paul:** 18.

**Joseph:** Some say early 20s, late teens. Although occasionally my best friends in service I met … It was next assignment. I guess you want to discuss that. It didn’t originate on Ellis Island. He was a man in his … I think it was 33 which is quite … Accidentally we stayed together for the next two years after that. He was kind of popped to the group because he was so much older than the rest of us.

**Paul:** You’ve mentioned guard duty on the seawall and guarding the aliens. What were some of the other things that you went through during the boot camp experience at Ellis Island?

**Joseph:** One of the things that really sticks in my mind, right then by the time I was there was late winter or spring. They had a parade in New York called New York at War Parade. All of the military units in the whole area were going to march in this parade because it was the last 16 hours which I think it did. I think it was 16 hours.

**Paul:** The parade itself was the last 16 hours.

**Joseph:** We were non marchers and we were taken out to the parade, the seawall really. We were put through the [inaudible 00:22:46] as far as marching and turning properly and so on, but we still didn’t become marchers. At that time too I saw Jack Demsy for the first time because he was in charge of physical training for the coast guard: heavy weight champion at a world at one time. He came out and I saw him. I didn’t speak to him or anything, but he came sure for a few minutes and talked to the officers or something and went back in again, back to New York again. We were taken by truck then into New York.

Now the parade would start uptown, probably [inaudible 00:23:37].

**Paul:** You’re taken by truck from Ellis Island.

**Joseph:** We’d cross Ellis by ferry I’m sure and then got on trucks at the South street seaport kind of area, that area. Then we were taken uptown to where the parade started. I don’t know 60th maybe, somewhere up there.

**Paul:** 60th Street.

**Joseph:** Then we were marched down and that was the funny part because we were a couple of guys in the group. They were two professional boxes, Cowen and Friedman I think the two names were. Earl Cowen and I forget Friedman, what his first name was. They were really tough guys. I guess somebody told them to get into coast guard so they wouldn’t have to go fight which I don’t think they did. I think they stayed at Ellis Island the whole time. They’re both New York guys, Brooklyn guys. They weren’t very much for marching.

We were marching down 5th Avenue and somebody in the rear of me said how that screwed up. I think his right shoe full of his shoulder and somebody in the background, “Get in fucking step you fucking Jew bastard.” He stopped right there, right in the middle of the parade, “Who said that?” He was ready for a fight. I got to know them a little bit later. They were both really nice guys. I enjoyed them. They were characters. I tried to look them up, but I did find one of them as far their records because I’m sure they were in a record book. Friedman was called the man Brooklyn area. He always called himself.

**Paul:** The Brooklyn area.

**Joseph:** Arena that is.

**Paul:** Time you met this makes me think that, were there athletic activities going on with the Coast Guard at Ellis Island that were for recreation?

**Joseph:** If you look at the records of the Island, I have some of this here. When it became a receiving station, they had a tremendous athletic program. In fact, they were the champions on the area in a couple of sports. Baseball I think was one of them. A lot of big name athletes came through here. Usually they didn’t stay. [Inaudible 00:25:55] was the only other big name that I remember. I never saw him but he refused to do thing like that. He wanted to be an enlisted man and he stayed an enlisted man the whole time he was in service. Others were good athletes. They were out there because it was a lot of recreation but not while I was there.

**Paul:** In your time there, there was nothing like that.

**Joseph:** Not that I remember.

**Paul:** Because you’re talking about the boxers being there and [crosstalk 00:26:22].

**Joseph:** I just happened to run into them. I don’t know what they were doing. I was going through camp I suppose.

**Paul:** What other things were you taught in boot camp to do?

**Joseph:** We were taught knots, learned to tie knots like a sailor, nomenclature.

**Paul:** Can you explain for me how they taught you to do the knots? What were the circumstances?

**Joseph:** I don’t remember where it was, but I’m sure it was just like boy’s scouts. This is not [inaudible 00:26:54] and this is how you tie it, now we’ll all practice that kind of thing. I’m sure that’s how it went down. Where in the building, I don’t know, but also we also had classes in Seamanship, what to do board ship. When you go and aboard a ship, you always have to salute the colors and then officer of the deck will be there. We knew a lot of this stuff. We never had a chance to use it. The only kind of thing that maybe is a combination of recreation and training. One of the things they did they had life boats on the island, on David’s so they could low it into the water.

A couple of time we were given life boat drill and we would put down into the life boats, climb down into the life boats and then taught how to pull [inaudible 00:27:43] or how to act when the coxswain said, “[inaudible 00:27:49].” Then we would roll out to the Statue of Liberty and go around that and then come back in again. That’s the only actual sea training that I had. Another thing that I remember, I guess everybody kind of liked this because it was a chance to grab a nap. They showed us slides of the various silhouettes of airplanes. This is a zero and this is a … Whatever bomber they were using the Japanese and German planes. We had to identify them just by the silhouette. That’s because every sailor no matter what he was going to be eventually, was trained to be deck hand and an observer.

I never had any occasion to use that, but I dozed off many times in that class.

**Paul:** That’s interesting. I’ve not heard that before from any of the Coast Guards. Did they offer any kind of recreation while you were there?

**Joseph:** I have no recollection.

**Paul:** Movies, anything like-

**Joseph:** They may have. I don’t remember anything.

**Paul:** Not that you remember. You rode around the Statue of Liberty. Did you have any other occasion to go over to Bed Lowe’s Island to the Statue of Liberty in your time?

**Joseph:** We didn’t land there. We just went around it. Some of the other coxswain would taken on but we didn’t. Mostly I spent my time, my free time brooding because when you go out to the rear of the building, you’re only about a couple of hundreds of yards from the Jersey but I couldn’t get there. I was homesick as hell as all of us were I’m sure. Just go out there and kind of brood. I think that’s probably a good military procedure that all of us sailors and soldiers do.

**Paul:** Maybe you could explain for us exactly the process of getting Liberty and how often you were allowed that?

**Joseph:** We weren’t allowed any liberty during boot camp. I don’t know when it was that I had. I know I tried to get liberty because my class was graduating from high school and that time they graduated in middle of the year. It was a big high school in Pattison, East side. Graduation was in there somewhere and I was supposed to do graduate. I wasn’t a good student as I said and I had to slay to graduate before but I never did. Then I went in service, the vice principal told me that since there is a war, there has been a law on the books in World War I, anyone going into service with so many credits is automatically graduated with their class.

I asked for a leave to go home so I could participate because I could envision myself going up the highland in my uniform, if they would give it to me. The only time we thought we were going to get off the highland was they got up one night and said that we’d be prepared to go on a shore to help fight a fire which I later found was the [inaudible 00:31:25] burning. We were alerted but never went ashore. Eventually I know that we got liberty and I think it was probably every other night.

Usually when you’re sure [inaudible 00:31:38] every other night. I know that I got it because what you had to before you were finally finished enough of training, you had to be able to recite the articles. The articles of war now … What the other thing I’m talking about? The duties of a century. I guess that’s what it was. You had to be able to recite those to an officer without referring to any notes and everybody studied like crazy. I remember studying like crazy. I went home, but then I was back the next day.

**Paul:** Would that be towards the end of your time?

**Joseph:** Yeah, I would think that, maybe after about a month because I remember many times waiting for ferry in the Ferry House over in Manhattan waiting to come back out.

**Paul:** Was that a problem when you were on Liberty, the boat schedules?

**Joseph:** No, they run very often. I don’t remember anything. I think that those of us who were nervous always worried about it if because you get late you’re really in trouble. I don’t think so. They were very frequent and unless there is fog or something like that there was no reason for them not to be.

**Paul:** Did you or any of your colleagues ever get punished for some reason for something that was done that sticks out in your mind?

**Joseph:** No, I did have a captain’s mask which was a punishment mask. Actually it’s a captain’s request place. They used it for punishment. That was in Puerto Rico, but I wasn’t on the island.

**Paul:** Nothing that you remember.

**Joseph:** No other person that I know of.

**Paul:** Was there a place at Ellis Island that you remember that was used for punishing the coast guards?

**Joseph:** Yeah. The brig was down on a basement. I saw that. That was still there when I visited the island. It was board room. See, what the island was at that time was kind of a peculiar combination of things because of the health services. The public health hospital was there. There would be a lot of guys in the public health hospital who probably were quarantined or weren’t allowed liberty, but they would get [inaudible 00:34:01] somehow. There was always talk about the brig, that somebody ended up at a brig, but almost scuttle but That’s the word that was used, that you learn after you take seamanship. Its scuttle buts. I have no direct knowledge of anyone.

**Paul:** Did you have any opportunity to go to the public health service hospital or any of your colleagues?

**Joseph:** The only time I went over there … It wasn’t for sickness. I guess I was on messenger duty and somebody needed to see the captain, the commanding officer. They told me where he was. He was playing poker over on the other side near the public health hospital. I’m not sure maybe where his quarters were, but I went to his quarters and give him the message that he was wanted some place.

**Paul:** Tell me about the officers that stick out in your mind at that time and why they stick out in your mind.

**Joseph:** Actually they officers really don’t stick out in my mind because we didn’t have much contact with the officers. We had contact with the [inaudible 00:35:12] men. There was one guy that everyone hated, Reed Miller, I think his name was. He was the boss in charge. Since I’ve been going out to these reunions and talking to other people. His father owned the store up in Manhattan and that influence. He was there the whole war. He was mean son of a gun. He always screaming and supposedly punishing people. I don’t remember anything, but we were afraid of him. We really were. He's the only one that stands out in my mind. He’s such a threatening figure all the time because they were always screaming. It’s true of any service. They are always screaming at you for something and five times you don’t know what they are screaming at you for.

**Paul:** Was there an inspection process that you had to undergo?

**Joseph:** Yeah. You had to lay out your sea bag.

**Paul:** What is a sea bag? Can you describe what the big is?

**Joseph:** Sea bag is along like a hallow tube, close that one end with a draw string at the top in which you packed everything that you owned. Usually had a mattress to wrap around it too, so when you picked that mattress and sea bag up, you were ready to go.

**Paul:** It was must have been a thin mattress.

**Joseph:** Yeah, it was pretty thin. Not uncomfortable. I don’t remember it being unable to sleep or anything like that. In the sea bag would be all of your winter uniforms when you got them, all of your summer uniforms. They all had to be rolled a certain way and stopped. They had little thin stop cords, it was called, in which you rolled them up and then tied the two ends with a square knot. It had to be a square knot. Then you would have to take all that stuff out of sea bag and lay it out so that the inspecting person, probably an officer would be able to tell at a glance whether anything was missing. I still have the sea bag in out of stash and the uniforms by the way.

**Paul:** Who would do the inspection?

**Joseph:** I don’t know. I guess it would upon on their assignment. On board ship would probably be the executive officer. He was the guys that run the ship, but then sometimes it would be captains inspecting too. It would be the same thing. Captain would come and inspect the sip for cleanliness and also inspect some of the guys too. I don’t really remember it. I wish I had taken notes about that.

**Paul:** You mentioned earlier that the boatswain was in charge of waking everybody up. Can you talk a little bit about the boatswain’s role in this society?

**Joseph:** The boatswain is the man who is in charge of the deck forces. He’s in charge of everyone really, but basically he’s the one that supervises the deck for us. Usually they were guys with along service, excellent sailors. They really knew the business. On Ellis Island, they weren’t because they were just guys they got in the coast guard and for whatever reason, influence or because they have a main streak, they were put in charge. Some people can’t be and yet they would be in charge of things.

The island was kind of confusion of things. We have these old souls who had been to sea for 20 and you had these other people. They were not officers or even petty officers. They were two kinds of petty officers. There is up the first class. They would wear a sailor suit and are commissioned but they were not commissioned, but they wore the big cap and the suit coat kind of thing.

**Paul:** What were some of the other duties of the boatswain in a boot camp situation other than waking you up?

**Joseph:** I have to go back a little bit about this. Now the boatswain of boarder ship, I have to refer to what his normal job would be. He would be in charge of that camp. The story comes alongside to refill that [inaudible 00:39:39]. That the boatswain, usually the chief boatswain would be in charge of rigging it. You do all the rigging and telling it, how it’s done, give the orders on the [inaudible 00:39:48] things like that. There is another person aboard a ship which is called the master at arms. His job is discipline. You get up in the morning, administer punishment. I don’t know whether this guy, Red Miller, if that was his name, was a master at arms which would be probably a boatswain’s mate, called right arm mate, [inaudible 00:40:17] right arm, your deck force, your left arm, your black gang.

He was acting the part of master at arms which was a disciplinarian, which ship … They’d come find you in your sack in the morning after everyone’s supposed to be rise up. They [inaudible 00:40:34] punishment. They would put you on report. I don’t really know. Things were so confusing. I think his rate was coxswain which is one stripe right arm rate. I think that was his rate when I knew him. But whether he was actual boatswain’s mate, I don’t know.

**Paul:** At Ellis Island, these traditional roles all kind of got blurred.

**Joseph:** At least in my mind. Maybe other people being more sophisticated as far as sailors went, they weren’t so blurred but to me they were.

**Paul:** Were there parts of the island that you were specifically instructed not to go to?

**Joseph:** We weren’t allowed over to public health service at all. Anything that’s called Officers Country, you’re not supposed to go to unless you had had a guard, but I don’t remember where that was on the island. I guess of all the places where we could do, we were allowed on the drill field, the outdoor drill field.

**Paul:** Do you remember where that was in relationship to maybe the integration building?

**Joseph:** It faced New Jersey that was it. It was kind of like if you’re looking at the Ford’s New York City and the immigration building is on your right, so behind the other buildings was the field. I walked up there with Brian and went down to the end because part of that was given over to the aliens for their exercise area. Then part closer to New Jersey was our area. I suppose we did drilling their too.

**Paul:** How was the area that was used for aliens to come outside? How was that delineated from the rest of the space?

**Joseph:** It’s just a wire fence outside.

**Paul:** Do you remember how tall that was?

**Joseph:** I guess it must have been seven, eight foot tall.

**Paul:** Did you ever have any duties outside guarding the aliens?

**Joseph:** No, sea war watch. There were no aliens out there. Sear war watch could be any place on the highland. That’s why we have to go down through the public health and around to see what was right there. I was thinking that you have to careful. Don’t let your imagination [inaudible 00:43:11]. This spec could be a story I heard, maybe not actually. Somebody sneaking back aboard after being absent without leave into the hospital. I wouldn’t swear that I actually saw that, but it was in my mind that I did but I’m not sure.

**Paul:** You mentioned earlier of Victor Meteor who of course was a big Hollywood film star at that time. Were there any other well-known people either who were detained or who were in the coast guard at that time that you remember?

**Joseph:** No, I don’t remember them. I read about them. I think he was there while I was there, but I can’t bet on it because I don’t know the dates. I could check it. Anzio Penzo, the opera singer was there. Reading his autobiography lately, after maybe about 10 years ago is the first time I read it. He describes what they had to do on Ellis Island while they were aliens. I’m not sure that he was there when I was there. It’s a possibility that he was but I never I saw him.

**Paul:** Kevin is there anything come to you? Any questions that you’d like to ask?

**Kevin:** What was playing in theatre when Pearl Harbor occurred that day? Do you remember?

**Joseph:** No, I don’t. That’s a good question. That’s a beauty of a question.

**Paul:** [Crosstalk 00:44:39] question.

**Joseph:** Because my buddy and I were … Center Isle. In fact, I later became … At that time I was captain of [inaudible 00:44:49], but when I was working the Center Isle after we saw our show five or six times, then we could do the musical numbers and sometimes we would. I don’t know that. That’s interesting.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about the second and last time you were at Ellis Island when you went, when it was a receiving station. If you can give me like a quick sum up of what happened in between 1942 and 44 when you went back to Ellis.

**Joseph:** At the preface a little bit if you had time to do with that with-

**Paul:** 15 minutes, sure, go ahead.

**Joseph:** Because when I came back, I was sent to Puerto Rico. There was no electricians made in the entire Tent Noble district which was the Puerto Rico [crosstalk 00:45:40]

**Paul:** Is that what you were that was your [crosstalk 00:45:42]?

**Joseph:** What I did was … I can you fill you in between. I didn’t go to Electrician School on Ellis Island. From Ellis Island I went to what they called the boarding detail in which we lived in boarding houses if there were any places we could find a room on Staten Island. We would report to Staten Island headquarters down at the ferry in the morning then we would be given assignments to board a vessel coming into the harbor either from the Atlantic or up at the end coming from [inaudible 00:46:14]. Then we would be put aboard that with the pilot with a 45 which we didn’t know to … At least I didn’t know how to fire. We were board that and then stay on that until we were relieved, as a saboteur kind and thing.

We had our gathering place at Staten Island and somebody in there one day and said, “Who’d like to go to electrician school?” I remember my father said, “Get a trade.” I said, “I do.” I said, “Okay, Come on.” That’s how I got into … The guy that I had met. The older guy was already a subway electrician, a very knowledgeable guy. He put his hand up. He came together and they said, “Okay, get your sit bag was in a pile probably as big as this house of sit bags,” because you just took out the things you needed to live in Staten Island. We had a search through that pile of seat bags to find out where our seat bag was. People don’t believe. We went to Seaman’s Church Institute which was down near the battery and from there we went to school which was on a ferry boat tied up onto the Washington Bridge.

We would march every morning from Seaman’s Church Institute to school at Washington Bridge where we were taught by a man who was an expert electrician on housing electricity. He didn’t know too much about marine electricity. We came out of there and we went to Puerto Rico. We were sent down to Puerto Rico. I forget that I interrupted myself on something, another thought that. After 18 months in Puerto Rico I came back and I went to … It wasn’t the badge office but somewhere around there that’s the coast guard district office I guess. I went in and there was an officer on duty. It was Saturday. I came back and got married by the way. 10 days later I got married.

The officer on duty was in office and then upfront was a yeoman. He said, “Where are you come from?” I said, “Puerto Rico.” He said, “How much leave you have?” I said, “10 days,” he said, “10 days, that’s what you have.” I said, “Yeah.” Then I heard him to say to the officer, “So this guy just came back from the South Pacific and only got 10 days leave.” The officer said, “Give him another 10 days.” They sent me another 10 days and then when I reported back, I went to Ellis Island like one day and then they sent me to Manhattan Beach. There my assignment was the USS General Gordon. We went to check Manhattan Beach and from there went to Bayonne. That’s where the ship was fitting.

**Paul:** Can you talk just briefly about Ellis Island’s purpose this time? What had it become?

**Joseph:** That’s what it did. People coming through for other assignment.

**Paul:** Coast guard’s men still.

**Joseph:** Yeah. They would be kind of processed through Ellis Island. In other words, they had other place sleep and eat and be the roster somewhere. That’s where they’d wait. That’s where they were assigned to, whatever: school. I was sent to school. By the way, those lists … I have them in fact if you want them. Maybe you gave them to me. I don’t know. I have lists of the schools with my name on it, old schools. They would go to Sailorman School, Damage Control School, Electrician School, Radioman School all over the country, most of the East Coast. That’s what its process was. It was kind of like treating them.

Then they had a permanent company there whose job was to run the island and to do all the paper work. They were the ones that had the job of the beauty of living right around New York with recreation, plenty.

**Paul:** Does anything else stick out in your mind about that one day that you spent there?

**Joseph:** Nothing really. I can remember thinking, “That damn ferry boat again,” and being on the island, that whole depressed feeling that I had on the first time I was there. It came over me again. Then when I got to Manhattan Beach, it didn’t help much because everyone was on their way through. Nobody was … I was put in charge of cleaning the floor, running a waxier. Here I am, electrician quite second class. I’m running a waxier. I didn’t stay there long because what happened was the plug came out of the wall and I went over and pushed the plug unit. The waxier, I didn’t have switch off started spinning around and [inaudible 00:50:57] drove through the captain’s, the training officer’s door.

I left after that. I don’t know whether they were looking for me, but then I went from there. I went to Bayonne.

**Paul:** How long did you stay in the Coast Guard?

**Joseph:** Let’s see, four years and I guess about 40 days after that. I don’t remember my exact date. It was in February though, just before my birthday.

**Paul:** When you look back on your experience in the Coast Guard especially Ellis Island because that’s sort of the beginning of it all I guess, how do you think that experience has influenced the rest of your life?

**Joseph:** I think being in the coast guard that ever happened to me except marrying my wife. It gave me a real purpose at least for those four years. I knew where I was going. I’ve always appreciate it. Then of course the GI bill of rights that led to two degrees and a whole career. That was gravy, but I remember seeing that posted for the first time about the GI Bill of Rights and said, “Jesus, I always wanted to go to college but I never studied. This is another chance I’m going to get,” and I took it.

**Paul:** Talk a little bit about going to Coast Guard reunions now and what that feels like.

**Joseph:** That’s interesting because for years and years and years I’ve been saying, “I remember I think was the first convoy that came out of New York City and went directly into Europe, Northern Europe and we landed at Shamong.” We didn’t land Shamong. I didn’t find out till I went to reunion. It was [inaudible 00:52:42], but then I sent for the log of the ship. I know where the ship was every day that I was assigned to her which was practically her whole life because I was [inaudible 00:52:53] and I left there only about three weeks before the army transport took her over. I say it was really a great thing for me experience to have. Even with all the fears of we’re under attack in the name of channeling and you’re looking … I’m in the engine room and that’s my assignment. I’m looking at the escape hatch, how far is the escape hatch? If a torpedo comes through and took transport, that’s what they were looking for, but I never had any real fear. I never felt that I was going to die or even get injured. I don’t know. It was a really early great thing. In fact, I think I would have stayed in if I was under different circumstances.

**Paul:** We should say for sake of the tape the name of your wife.

**Joseph:** Marge.

**Paul:** Marge.

**Joseph:** Marge is what we call her. Her name is Margaret Condon Hannan.

**Paul:** Can you spell that please?

**Joseph:** C-O-N-D-O-N.

**Paul:** When did you marry?

**Joseph:** April 13th 1945. Let’s see … 44, yeah. Celebrated our 50th anniversary last year.

**Paul:** Children.

**Joseph:** Five.

**Paul:** Can you name them please?

**Joseph:** Yes. Joseph is the older, just turned 50. Then Kathleen, she’s next and then Frank, and then Matthew, and then our baby who is Aileen. I have seven grandchildren too. We have seven grandchildren.

**Paul:** Joe, I want to thank you very much. We’ve been trying to do this for some time now and we finally got around to doing it. Paul Seacrest signing off with Joe Hannan today on Friday, September 22nd, 1995 with Kevin Daily in attendance here in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey. Thank you.

**Joseph:** Okay.