**Paul:** Good morning. This is Paul Secreast for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday August 10th, 1995. I’m in Ardsley, New York, which is in Westchester County with Anthony Randomski. Mr. Randomski was at boot camp at Ellis Island for the Coast Guard beginning in July of 1941 and then bounced back and forth between Ellis Island and the ocean liner the Normandie for about four months before finally going off to serve.

I also want to say that Kevin Daily is present in the room running the recording equipment, and we are in a neighborhood where you may hear [unclear 00:00:40] in the trees and also a low droning sound in the distance, cars also may be picked up on this, and an occasional dog barking.

All of that said, Mr. Randomski thank you for letting us come out. Can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

**Anthony:** June 11th, 1917.

**Paul:** Where were you born?

**Anthony:** New York City.

**Paul:** Can you tell me a little bit about your family background?

**Anthony:** My mother and dad came from Poland. They didn’t speak too much English. Talking at home was always in Polish.

**Paul:** Do you know any details about their immigration? What year they came and how old they were?

**Anthony:** No, that I don’t know. I had two brothers that were born [inaudible 00:01:29] and can’t say very much. It was very difficult; they didn’t talk English. When he did work he worked in the stevedores on the waterfront.

**Paul:** Do you know why your parents came to the United States?

**Anthony:** That I don’t know. My older brothers knew all that information. It was just never passed on. I guess like many other people they came over for the same reasons; America.

**Paul:** You’ve got two brothers and yourself, right? You said you had two brothers born in Poland?

**Anthony:** I had two brothers born in Poland. We were 13 children all together.

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

**Anthony:** Three of them I can’t tell you about because they passed away in Poland. However my oldest brother was Edward, the next one in line was Alex, then the next one in line was Felix, then a sister Sophie, and my brother Walther, then myself Anthony, then a pair of twins Eddie and Jim, and a sister Jeanne, and a brother Frankie. I think I’ve mentioned them all.

There was a brother Johnnie, he was killed when he was three years old. He fell off the window on 13th Street New York City. I still remember the whole thing. My mother was coming from shopping and she actually saw him going down. She just didn’t know it was me or him because we looked alike. Needless to say it was quite a serious, bad scene and I remember the little white wagon where they were putting him away in a little chariot, a little white horse, and I was sitting on the fire escape. It was just a tragedy. He lost his balance on one of those low windows. One of the boys… they were playing upstairs and handed him a stick and he toppled right over and that was it.

**Paul:** How old were you at that time?

**Anthony:** I was five. As a matter of fact I was sick. They had some plague, I don’t remember what they called it; influenza, and people were just dying at that time. In fact the doctor didn’t even get to the house so my mother got a new apartment, cleaned it all up, and we moved. And I guess you see I did make it.

**Paul:** What were your parents’ names?

**Anthony:** My mother’s name was Lillian.

**Paul:** And her maiden name?

**Anthony:** Lillian Rykowski.

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

**Anthony:** R-Y-K-O-W-S-K-I. My father’s name of course was Alexander Randomski.

**Paul:** Can you tell me what it was like to grow up with immigrant parents in this rather full household?

**Anthony:** It was… I could use the term ‘hell’ if I can use it. We lived in Hell’s Kitchen at 39th Street on 11th and 12th Avenue, that’s where I was born. Across the street was a slaughter house. I guess we had free gang way as kids because what could a parent do with a whole gang of kids like that? Everything was a survival situation.

We used to chase the cattle of the streets. People question that, well, we lived across the street from a slaughter house. They used to have these portable carrels that the animals were transported by railroad because there was a rail right on the avenue there. They had these portable carrels and we used to chase them into the carrels and of course they led them right into the slaughter house there.

**Paul:** What else do you remember about the slaughter house situation?

**Anthony:** It was a terrible odour and we lived right across the street from it. They also shipped the cattle in on trains and badgers and we’d been sitting up on the carrels because we have to chase them in there. The hardship was in the winter. You didn’t bang on the pipes and get steam heat. You had cold burgers. You had a stove that you cooked on and you had to supply your own fuel.

When the trains went by with the coal, I guess [unclear 00:06:30] but we used to hop that train and kick that coal off and of course we were chased by the detectives or else we would’ve died. If we got caught we were just too small to do anything with I guess, and then we’d come back. Needless to say I didn’t get caught too often anyway so we’d go back and pick up the coal off the tracks and take it in the house.

**Paul:** You mentioned that you spoke Polish in the house. Did your parents make any attempt to learn English?

**Anthony:** I don’t believe they made enough attempt. Mostly because there was nothing around; there was no work, there was no nothing. My mother scrubbed floors in office buildings, and I guess they were just too busy. My dad… it was just too much for them and it just wasn’t realistic that they would go to school. As a matter of fact my father would… if you had to make a choice you didn’t make a choice, dad ruled the household. If I said I’ve got to go to school sometimes he would just tell you school isn’t going to give you anything to eat.

You had to survive some way so I shined shoes at [unclear 00:07:50] so to speak and that’s the way we grew up. There was a place called the Burns Brothers on the waterfront. The waterfront was kind of… you could go and swim in there if you had a mind to because they had more or less little beaches along the Hudson River at the time I was there and they still had ships coming into some of the piers. Some of the piers were still there around 48th Street.

Then there was a place where the Queen of Bermuda used to come and they those trips they would take and I used to shine shoes around there but of course right next to that I used to go [unclear 00:08:32] right in there too because the badgers were not too far from there. The piers were there and we’d hope on the badgers and we had street fights with the kids. This was during Depression but this was during probation day so there was a lot going on for the probation days.

We didn’t go to church very much but I’ll tell you we had our religion. I learned how to pray in Polish and of course when I figured like Our Father if I start thinking Polish because I haven’t spoken it in a long time. We made our prayers. I can still remember some of the words.

**Paul:** Would you like to say one for us that you might remember?

**Anthony:** I can’t really say it out but…

**Paul:** That’s okay, maybe it’ll come to you later.

**Anthony:** It just don’t come out, not the way it should. [Unclear 00:09:45]. I have to be conversing with somebody for a while and then those words are meaningful because I haven’t spoken the language in a long time.

**Paul:** This is a good time for me to ask you how you got involved in the Coast Guard and maybe your parents’ reaction to your desire to be in the Coast Guard.

**Anthony:** We can omit the Civilian Conservation Corps. I got a job out of grammar school; my brother gave me his job and I was a little guy. My brother went to the CC camps. That kept us off welfare, because we were a welfare family but we were off welfare much lower than the average person. That was a shame that I had to [unclear 00:10:41] from my mother and that was a very embarrassing situation for me anyhow. Going to the CC camp meant that my mother would have a couple of bucks coming in.

**Paul:** Someone who may be listening or reading this not familiar with this particular program, the CC camp that we’re talking about is the Civilian Conservation Corps and can you just quickly explain to the listener or to the reader what that is?

**Anthony:** The Civilian Conservation Corps was what President Roosevelt started for the young fellas on the streets in 1933 and believe me if it wasn’t for the CC camps, I think we’d all be learning how to talk Japanese now because we had almost two million men ready for the armed forces.

**Paul:** How did it prepare you to go into the armed forces?

**Anthony:** I was 19 years old and I was working in the defence plant for a while in Edgewood Arsenal Maryland. I was a labor foreman there.

**Paul:** What was his name?

**Anthony:** Edgewood Arsenal Maryland. I was a labor foreman and we were building warehouses for the chemical warfare department. I got my brother’s jobs there from the CCs I got other fellas’ jobs on the CC camps from New York. I had room and board ready for these guys I said, “If you don’t get a job within a week, you had a week’s vacation”. I never saw that money in my life like I was getting there. I was getting $56 a week and in New York City I was getting $7 a week and the most I ever made was $9 a week and I got paid in a check and of course that went right to my mother when I was a youngster. I had had that job for five years so I quit that job finally and went to the CC camps.

What the CCs did, it was run by the War Department, we were civilians, we had all the discipline except we did not have guns. We had the same uniforms practically except for the buttons. I think we had the World War One vintage. We went the [unclear 00:13:07], were processed, and I lucked out; I went to Mount Rainier National Park and after Mount Rainier National Park I spent a year in CCs there the first time then I shipped out again with a brother and we went to… I missed the roll call and he was afraid. He was only 16, changed his birth certificate, made him 17, he came in with me because one had a twins.

We got split up because he was afraid of Salt Lake City and I went to Whitehall, Montana. For me that was a very bad six- month period. I was taking care of all the young kids [inaudible 00:14:00] but I had already had experience hoping that somebody was taking care of my kid brother. He learnt how to smoke, he learnt how to do everything that I had hoped he wouldn’t pick up; but I liked he took take care of himself.

Then we came home; I had a pretty bad incident at home. I won’t get into that because it was a [unclear 00:14:23] I could explain it better.

**Paul:** We should get you into the Coast Guard. Tell us how you became interested in the Coast Guard.

**Anthony:** We had boxing matches with the Coast Guard on the West Coast. You win some and you lose some. It was great but I didn’t have too much respect for the Coast Guard at that time because I thought it was a CC outfit. It was until later that I found out it wasn’t. I found out that the beach combers were some of the toughest guys there was to fight that surf. In fact I believe that they were the guys that made us to serve part of the war safe. They could come up on a surf with LSTs… because that’s a heck of a situation on the surf, you to come up on the beaches like that.

It came to pass though and when I got finished with Edgewood Arsenal, in fact my older brother got drafted and I had this whole group now that was my responsibility to see everybody was in line. My older brother did it that time. I decided to wrap it up and go back home so we all packed in and we went back home to New York. Now I got heart to try for the navy.

I went downtown, it was still peace time so everybody is… they are pretty strict. You had to have a high school diploma to get into the navy. So I went to the recruitment place, I didn’t know you had to have a high school diploma. There were about 15, 20 guys there and I come in, come to the educational factor, I said, “No, I didn’t go to high school.” But the guy looked at me, looked me over, and he said, “We’re going to give you the test anyway.” I failed by two points. It was silly things but I failed.

In my mind Coast Guard was not too far away. I said I’m going to go try the Coast Guard. They had the same test. It was worded a little differently but the same test. I passed by four points and I was in the Coast Guard. It was the greatest thing in my life. It was because I never knew I was developing what I finally wound up doing with kids because I always organized bodybuilding when I was in the Coast Guard. Wrestling, boxing, everything; I never had formal education for that but I took some many beatings when I was a kid, because I was a sickly kid, that I joined the YMCA and when I joined the YMCA that’s where I got a lot of know-how too. Anyway the wind up came; I got in the Coast Guard, reported to Ellis Island…

**Paul:** How long between when you took the test did you have to report for duty? What kind of timespan was there?

**Anthony:** Not too long, as a matter of fact I guess it was a couple of weeks because they were drafting people all over. They were getting ready for whatever they were getting ready for. The draft was wide open at the time. I think the war started in Europe already so it didn’t take very long and I was processed and right in.

When we got into Ellis Island, that was also an area where the immigrants were still coming in. Immigrants were still there as a matter of fact our area was a big dome on our side, and then the immigrants came in there was a big fence for these people and they had an area where they walked around, kept exercising and I imagine they had their own particular quotas for resting and sleeping. I don’t know that part.

**Paul:** Did you have any interaction with any of the detained immigrants?

**Anthony:** Not really because boot training was boot training. You had to train with all the manual arms, we did throwing all around the island area with the boats, and we had our races back there and everything was knot- tying and drilling and knot-tying. Then the government took over the Normandie. They had to have a detailed go to the Normandie.

**Paul:** The Normandie was at dock at this time, yes? She was docked.

**Anthony:** The Normandie was a big ship. She was on 48th Street and strangely enough I lived a block and a half away from the Normandie in previous years before I left Manhattan. That’s where I used to get the coal right around that area the whole figure. the big park there that was our so-called playground.

**Paul:** Can you describe for me the first day that you reported for duty at Ellis Island and what the procedure was to process you?

**Anthony:** We went to Coney Island. Your health was your first thing so you went in there, you were lined up.

**Paul:** You said Coney Island, you mean Ellis Island?

**Anthony:** Ellis Island, excuse me on that. When we went to Ellis Island, we got in this big area and you got your second physical. I guess this had more meaningful situation, then you got your shots, you got everything you would require then you went right into… the boson may come and introduce himself and just laid the law down.

To me it was great because I had three years at CC camps. I felt right in. When it comes to the exercising, that was nothing for me because I was assistant leader at CC camp so to me it was a nice situation.

**Paul:** Were you taking your order from the boson?

**Anthony:** The boson is the guy that gives you the orders then you had your chief there, then you had all your subordinates to him, you had your first class, second class and third class, then you had your seamen first, and apprentice seamen. I was the apprentice seaman there. As a matter of fact I found a fire on the Normandie before she was sabotaged. I handed it, this is when I’m at boot now, and I handed it to the guy on the next watch, he got commended for it; they mentioned my name but then he got commended for it. But that fire was started underneath a drum of oil. To me that’s still an outstanding thing. I don’t give a lot of damn, I made it, I don’t care.

**Paul:** So you had your physical first, that was the first thing you did. Then were you issued your uniform? What was the series of…?

**Anthony:** You went online, that was all standard procedure. They got your sizes, they issued your uniforms, you got your dress blues, undress blues, your denims, and your denims were your general work clothes.

**Paul:** I understand you had three separate uniforms that you were issued with. Could you describe each one of them for me please?

**Anthony:** You had the white uniform without the stripes on it. You had your Coast Guard shield of course, and you had the… we had the same kind of uniform as the navy except that the only difference was the insignia, the Coast Guard emblem, the shield.

**Paul:** We’re talking about a pair of pants…

**Anthony:** You had your pants, you had two sets of pants because you had the ones for dress and then one for undress because if you stood watches, it all depend on where you were standing at watches. If you were standing in watches in a formal place you wore your dress blues; if you were in a place where nobody’s going to be around too much, undress blues. That was more or less your work clothes anyway. You had your side arms, and…

**Paul:** What about a hat? Did you wear a hat?

**Anthony:** You had your regular navy hat, we had a flat top with the red win on it but we had Coast Guard instead of navy, that was the only thing. Of course you didn’t wear it if you were on a vessel. You didn’t wear the name of your vessel because that was for security purposes. You just wore U.S. Navy or U.S. Coast Guard, period.

Before the war, you didn’t have to worry about having the name of your ship. You wore the name of your ship, but then as war threatened, they just took a lot of meaningful stuff off.

**Paul:** What about things like shoes, socks, underwear? Was all of that supplied by them?

**Anthony:** All your clothing was supplied. Your medical was taken care of, your clothing, just like any… it was the military, really is. As a matter of fact people just don’t realize what the Coast Guard does. The way I understand it and through history, the Coast Guard was our first navy. They were our first ships; it was the Coast Guard. Then they were integrated with another organization that was a marine outfit.

**Paul:** The Merchant Marines?

**Anthony:** Not the Merchant Marine but it was similar, very similar. They were like the Rumrunners. The Rumrunners joined the probation days. It was a force to be dealt with so they integrated with this particular force and made the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard goes back when you really look into it through the history. You find that there was a lot of little disciplines around that they probably had a joint forces because it was too much politics involved in it.

**Paul:** Let’s talk about your experience at Ellis Island. You mentioned that your medical was all taken care of. How?

**Anthony:** You got your general shots. If you got hurt you were transferred to any marine hospital, any government hospital. This particular case because one time I did get hurt, I was sent to the marine hospital in Stapleton, Staten Island, New York.

**Paul:** Did you get hurt on the Normandie or at Ellis Island?

**Anthony:** I got hurt towards the end of the war. I got hurt in an accident; I’ll tell you that story, it’s not for the record either. I’m a believer that when something happens and it could get somebody in trouble, you just don’t turn that person in unless it was… I don’t know how to explain that. This particular incident required something of the like.

**Paul:** Was there some sort of infirmary at Ellis Island that you remember?

**Anthony:** They always have that; they have sick bay. If you don’t feel good you go to sick bay and they do have the doctor there, the nurse. They have a nice set up for…

**Paul:** So it was available to you if you needed it?

**Anthony:** I just never had to go. In fact very few guys have had to go. The only time guys went there were the regulars if they got drunk then they didn’t feel good they’d get a shot of castor oil so they weren’t ready for getting sick very often.

That was the biggest medical thing in the CC camps and the Coast Guard. If you said you had a headache you make them suspect if you don’t want to have duty. If they’re going to give you castor oil you just got out. It was kind of silly but it worked.

**Paul:** Can you describe for me the dormitory where you stayed?

**Anthony:** The dormitory was double-deckers, double beds, all the way down the line on two sides. The place was full of beds.

**Paul:** How many men to a room?

**Anthony:** There were no rooms, it was a big dorm.

**Paul:** How many men in that one?

**Anthony:** I would say three, four hundred at least.

**Paul:** How many of these dorms were there? Or just that one?

**Anthony:** I only know of the two I was involved in that area because other areas were out of bounds. When you’re going through boots you’ve got to be in one particular area and that’s your spot and you already get used to that. You had enough bathrooms to go around, showers…

**Paul:** What else in that room? Were there lockers in there?

**Anthony:** No locker; sea bag was your life. You let out your sea bag, you rolled your clothes, you had your inspections, you had to be clean. There was no such thing as having dirt around.

**Paul:** Describe the inspection process for me. How did they inspect you?

**Anthony:** Inspection right on your bunk. You had a sack; you had your own mattress. You carry that around everywhere, and you had two blankets. Whenever you moved you got all your clothing all mixed up in your sea bag, all rolled up. You never had to iron anything; everything was rolled up. You roll it up and you there’s a picture in your blue jackets manual and it looked like that when you’re ready.

When the guy comes by, the chief comes by with one of the officers and they go right up and down the line. If you get any marks against you that means no liberty when the time comes, no serious privileges until you pass all your inspections.

**Paul:** Were they inspecting you also or just the bunk?

**Anthony:** You’re inspected too; you’re dressed up for inspection. If it’s informal you’re in undress blues, if it’s formal you’re dressed up. You’re checked before you go on liberty. You don’t have your proper uniform on, you don’t go on liberty. You’ve got to have whatever the uniform of the day is, that’s the uniform you’ve got to have on.

**Paul:** How often were you inspected?

**Anthony:** Serious inspection you’d get once a week because that was your glove inspection, but otherwise you’re checked all the time. The boson may feel like you could slide with anything because that first part of your time is very critical; that’s where you’ve got to learn your habits. You’ve got to learn to be able to be fooled around with when any pipe plays a joke on you, you’ve got to know how to take it there, you already feel if it’s a joke because first impressions usually last.

If somebody makes a joke around you, that usually sticks with you so you’ve got to be very careful. If somebody calls you a name for instance, if you don’t like the name now’s the time to say, “Hey fella, I don’t like it.” You don’t get nasty about it because you’ve got to live with each other. However, if you let it ride, that sticks with you. Somebody called you a Joe Blow from Idaho, if you don’t like it that’s the time to talk.

In other words, you learn many special things; how to get along with your peers et cetera, which is very important. You’ve got to know when to say no, you don’t want to be a fall guy for somebody. We had an incident where a fella was sleeping. We used to wake the boxing team so this was a heavyweight boxer, a black man, hell of a nice guy. He was sleeping then one of the guys gave him a hot foot.

**Paul:** Can you describe what that means on tape please?

**Anthony:** Hot foot is when you put matches on your shoes and it light it up. Only this fella, with his bare feet, he was sleeping and this guy come along and he put a whole pack of matches there and he lit them up. It was a terrible scene and when this guy jumped, this guy had to go to sick bay.

Needless to say the chief came in there and wanted to know who did it. We know who did it. The guy wouldn’t say nothing, nobody said anything. Then they said everybody’s restricted for the weekend. We earned that weekend pass. Guy wouldn’t turn himself in so I guess I was one of the party, I got three or four guys, we went to him and said, “You turn yourself in or we’re going to turn you in”. I said, “If you make us [unclear 00:32:56],” we had other names for it, “You turn yourself in or we do, and you know it’s going to put a mark on us by turning you in.”

So the guy turned himself in. Fortunately he didn’t get hit heavy but he did get himself a restriction. If he got a fine he deserved it but you just don’t do things like that. Because you’re not an old-timer you don’t know how to take this guy. There are a lot of things that you let slide because you don’t want to be a wise guy either. As bad as the scene was, it’s just something that you sometimes have to cope with.

**Paul:** I’d like you to talk about boxing on Ellis Island specifically and talk about your involvement in that and its importance with the Coast Guards men there.

**Anthony:** This is quite a story. We were taken from the Normandie to box because Jack Dempsey was having a Jack Dempsey night. In other words they were going to have fighters there so they pulled us out to box.

**Paul:** You’re talking about at Ellis Island. Jack Dempsey is at Ellis Island?

**Anthony:** Yes. Jack Dempsey was at Ellis Island and as a matter of fact he toured commando type I think it was at Manhattan Beach, I’m not sure. But he was a guest at Ellis Island and they were going to have boxing for that.

**Paul:** Was boxing just an entertainment for the Coast Guards men or was it part of the training?

**Anthony:** At that particular time I would say it was training but in the Coast Guard all your outfits, all army, navy, marine, everybody, they had inter-service boxing matches all over the country so you could call it entertainment. It was entertainment.

**Paul:** But it was very much a part of life at Ellis Island in the Coast Guard? Boxing was very…

**Anthony:** They did have special events; that was one of special events. However, to be taken from one station and taken to the island to box, my question was who were we boxing? The chief says, “The CYO”, I said, “That’s fine, but how about our training? How much training are we allowed to have?” Because we were on the Normandie, we didn’t have training. The only training we had there is once in a while we’d put the gloves out with each other because I organized that kind of thing.

**Paul:** Could you also say what the CYO is for us on tape?

**Anthony:** CYO was the Catholic Youth Organization in the north, and the CYO, those fellas were tough because that’s all they [inaudible 00:35:42. These guys they boxed for watches. They didn’t want to be professional so they boxed for watches.

**Paul:** Watches? Wrist watches?

**Anthony:** Wrist watches, that was the price. They were really a tough bunch of boxers. So he said, “You’re boxing day after tomorrow”, I said, “Without training? I’m sorry”. He said, “They’re guys just like you”, I said, “No they’re not.” He says, “I’m familiar with the organization, I know a lot of these people.” So the wind up came, I was in charge of waking up our boxing team.

However, they got a scrub team out and it was a terrible scene. We lost every match; it wasn’t nice. I knew the commodore, he was the captain of the whole New York court and I knew him personally from the New York Athletic Club because I used to work out there. My brother wrestled there so I used to work out under his tail. I never went into competition but I loved to do it just for my own usage.

**Paul:** Do you remember where the boxing ring was at Ellis Island?

**Anthony:** It was right in our parade ground area. They had it indoors in the parade ground area. I can’t describe the whole thing because I didn’t get to really see it because they weren’t talking to me too well. This was after the fact that when they didn’t know what they were going to do with me… in fact the whole team quit, wasn’t just myself.

We wanted to work out. I said, “Give us two weeks and we’ll fight anybody” because it’s just a matter of principle. You don’t want to look like a silly whatever and get your head handed to you for nothing. These guys were… I don’t care, I’m for real. I boxed a lot of guys and that was never a problem. I always organized it. I think I was the only guy that ever had a punching bag, had it welded onto a [unclear 00:38:07] and I was going to destroy [unclear 00:38:08].

**Paul:** Let’s talk about boot camp specifically at Ellis Island and what you went through at boot camp.

**Anthony:** Boot camp was knot-tying…

**Paul:** What kinds of knots? Can you give some of the names?

**Anthony:** I’ll describe some; bowling on a bike…

**Paul:** Bowling on a bike, can you spell bawling please?

**Anthony:** Most probably I could tell you I knew a lot of splicing; splicing lines, displaced lines, back splice, splice in the middle of the line, two splices on… there’s all kinds of splices which is very helpful when you’ve got broken lines, you want to splice them together you can splice them together. I can still remember how to do that.

**Paul:** Did you have knot-tying class? How did they teach you to tie knots?

**Anthony:** You had a pole that simulated the railing on a vessel, and because you’re using a couple of half hitches to put a fender over this size… you know what a fender is?

**Paul:** Like a bumper.

**Anthony:** A bumper that keeps from bumping into the pier or wherever you’re going to moor. As a matter of fact you learn how to make some of these bumpers too but the splicing is done for that purpose. One of the main is not a knot, its half hitches. When you sling it over the bar, over the railing, you flip it over twice, and you just let it go and the fender hangs.

When they taught you knots they taught you the basic notes that you would learn from the old sailing days. When they had sail boats, sail ships, these were the knots. I couldn’t recall through it all, there are so many knots involved. There’s knots that you’ve got three or four loops and they tie a different line on each one. They all have a specific meaning. All I know is we learnt how to make these kinds of knots. You don’t learn right away, you’ve got to really figure them out and then…

**Paul:** How often did you do this? Was it once a day that you…?

**Anthony:** They had a schedule that you had to go by. They had a whole list of different things you had to do. You had the semaphore drills, you had the blinker, you had your classes for signalling because don’t forget, visual communication was a big thing. You had your blinker lights. You’re dancing there, if you don’t know the moss code you had to know that. You practised with somebody, good; if you didn’t practise with somebody, you didn’t do so good.

Semaphore, I had a mental blockage for semaphore because I learned how to send it while at camp but I couldn’t receive too well because I didn’t have too many people… sometimes we didn’t have time to practise. You had somebody different. You are so busy through boot training it must be like the army or any outfit.

You are so busy learning the business of being in the Coast Guard but you don’t have time to think some time. Like if you want to write a letter, you’re thinking about I want to pass this question. The only way you’re going to get liberty, and this is what they held over you, of course it’s good. Some people might be of objection to it. You don’t learn this, you don’t get time off, you don’t get your liberty when the time comes. So you learn, you sit down and you learn. Sometime bubble to yourself like you have to know your general orders. [Unclear 00:42:18] posts in a military manner, same general orders you have in any military outfit you learn them all, and I did.

**Paul:** Do you remember where the semaphore was taught?

**Anthony:** Semaphore was taught right on the pier. You had this one area where the boats were, on the [unclear 00:42:37] where they hung and you learn how to put the boats in the water and you roll them up, bring them back up on the boat floors, on the cleats. Some of these words are coming to my mind, it’s like I’m almost in there again. I’m very fortunate and picture my mind about what we’d do, and everybody gets a chance on that, how to secure these lines, how this falls here.

**Paul:** What kind of a boat were you learning to secure?

**Anthony:** This was the boat we rode in. It was like a whaleboat. The surf guys used them a lot. They used to be able to turn those things over, right-side them up, and get back in. That’s why I said I never considered myself a real good Coast Guard man because I could not perform that. Not only because I didn’t have the training, but these guys had that requires a lot of stamina and power to do something like that.

**Paul:** People would row the boats around Ellis Island?

**Anthony:** That’s right. We would row around the island.

**Paul:** Were there classrooms that you can remember?

**Anthony:** You were already in units, so when you performed and you were not in a classroom per se, you’d have a bunch of fellas over there in different areas, whatever the activity that you were learning about. They had specific areas. You could consider them classrooms if you want. I don’t think they had the…

**Paul:** But you’re talking about outside?

**Anthony:** It was outside, and climate weather you had some more areas inside. There was always an activity going on that you had to learn.

**Paul:** You were there in the summer and the early autumn so that you could be outside.

**Anthony:** That’s right. That’s the way that part worked.

**Paul:** Talk to me about the signalling. What is that that you were signalling with?

**Anthony:** First we signalled with the semaphore, that’s the flags, and you’ve gone through the alphabet, after that they had these little cards that… it’s a simulated blinker, just like on a ship except the white background and then when you press it down it blackens it out.

**Paul:** But it’s made out of paper?

**Anthony:** It looked like a book of matches or just a little bigger.

**Paul:** And it would simulate the blinking on and off of a light.

**Anthony:** When we were on liberty sometime we have these in our pockets and sometime we’d be sitting on the subway and we’d be back and forth, which is great practice. Read with one another and that’s how we learned the codes.

**Paul:** Would that be done outside also?

**Anthony:** Inside or outside depending on the weather. Everything is of course like anything else, is the weather. You didn’t stop eating so you didn’t stop working.

**Paul:** When you were at Ellis Island did you ever have a chance to work with the actual lanterns that you would have been using on a ship?

**Anthony:** In some area they possibly had one. I never got to it because I was on the Normandie for a while and back and forth. From the Normandie I went back to Ellis Island and they kept me there for a while. I was on gun watch when the Russians were getting ammunitions.

**Paul:** Gun watch at Ellis Island?

**Anthony:** No, not at Ellis Island. They shipped us right over to Hoboken. We performed some watch duties even while we’re going through boot.

**Paul:** We haven’t even talked about that. Can you describe for me the process of standing watch and how often you had to do it?

**Anthony:** Because we were boots I would imagine that we would’ve gone into an installation where they had a lot of ammunitions. This was before we were in the war. We had to go on these piers, they would give us a rifle, no bullets, and we would walk our posts in a military manner and of course we had our own feelings about that. If a stranger come by we had to stop him and go right through a certain procedure, and God-forbid anybody was there to sabotage we wouldn’t have a chance.

**Paul:** So you were detailed out to other places? Hoboken had ammunitions; there were no ammunitions at Ellis Island. Were you trained to do the watch at Ellis Island?

**Anthony:** Yes.

**Paul:** Where did you learn that and what was the procedure for being taught how to stand watch?

**Anthony:** Our procedure was to be able to handle the riffle, drilling was there. We’d be matching a little bit here and there.

**Paul:** Do you remember what kind of a rifle it was?

**Anthony:** It was the old Springfield, the old army rifles.

**Paul:** Was there a daily procedure that you followed for learning how to stand watch at Ellis Island?

**Anthony:** Yes. You had your spats, your leggings. When you had your leggings on you were getting ready for a watch, unless you were going to a parade. They had parades in the city. I was involved in two parades, I don’t know what the special event was but we had two parades.

**Paul:** Did anyone stand watch at Ellis Island?

**Anthony:** Definitely.

**Paul:** Where did that happen?

**Anthony:** We got posted in different areas around the water area. You had a night patrol; you had guys walking just like any security situation because that’s what they were intended for. That was your Coast Guard and believe me that’s exactly what they had to do.

Your discipline was not easy; you had to do what you’re there for. They used to call it, and for whatever reason trying to be smart, they used to call it the Jewish navy because it was supposedly an easy way out of the war. That’s a crock because we did a lot of dirty jobs for the navy. They had us do things like if a ship broke down, we’d have to go rescue. All I know if it was the Jewish navy we’d have one hell of a top navy there because they were really performing.

**Paul:** Was there a brig or a jail at Ellis Island at that time?

**Anthony:** If you were out of line, disorderly, you got put in a brig. It was for minor things but if you did something serious, you were sent to wherever they had to send you.

**Paul:** Did you have any interaction with that particular part of Ellis Island?

**Anthony:** No.

**Paul:** What about eating? Where did you eat on the island?

**Anthony:** We had a big dining room and we ate in that dining room and that’s why I said they had no walls to speak and that was just big open spaces for the most part and that’s the way we ate. It was clean, it was really nice.

**Paul:** Was it just Coast Guard men who were eating there?

**Anthony:** In our area just Coast Guard and possibly some other people that… the officers had their own mess. They had their own area there somewhere and I guess anybody who had any authority had their own particular… they had their own set ups. I wasn’t too much involved in that. All I was an apprentice seaman but I could see a lot of happenings.

**Paul:** Can you, if you remember, tell me hour by hour what you did? Like what time did you wake up? What time was roll call?

**Anthony:** You got up about 5:30, 6 o’clock.

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

**Anthony:** Didn’t take very much, sometimes with a [unclear 00:51:47] then sometimes with that boson whistle. He’d go [whistles].

**Paul:** It’s the boson who’s in charge of waking everybody up?

**Anthony:** That’s right, and if you didn’t get up you got up. There was no such thing as any baby, you woke up.

**Paul:** Then what was the first thing that you did?

**Anthony:** First thing you did if you were smart you get up earlier than the guys and you go right into the shower room, take your shower, shave, the whole thing, you do your toiletries, come out and then you go to your bunk. Go to your bunk you fold up your blankets, you roll up your sack because the army had everything made up like about a quarter off it. We only had that thin sack, you put it over your bunk, you roll it right up and you’re ready for inspection.

**Paul:** There was a type of inspection every morning?

**Anthony:** Every morning, because when they look right down the line and everything is straight and nobody better be off. Whoever was off has got a problem. Then it comes to the point where everything is okay, then you look at the order of the day what you’ve got to be doing, and you do that by units.

**Paul:** Every day a different unit would be doing a different thing?

**Anthony:** Every day was a surprise because it was a stimulating situation. You didn’t get time to get lazy.

**Paul:** Was there any entertainment provided for the Coast Guards men at Ellis Island?

**Anthony:** During boot training, not too much. Sometime an entertainment group might come in and entertain but I don’t recall too much of that through boot training because I was always busy. If there was a place to work out I always worked out. If I wasn’t working out I’d be pushing up on the bed.

**Paul:** Was there a place to work out at Ellis Island? A gymnasium of some sort?

**Anthony:** Not that we could go to. The guys that were stationed there permanently for the time I imagine they had their own situation. Realistically if you’re a workout bug you can go to the city and work out; there’s all kinds of gyms in the city. But there was a place there on Ellis Island where you could work out. What kind of workout do you really need there? You don’t have weight lifting room but you can always work out your calisthenics you had.

**Paul:** Were there organized calisthenics for everybody?

**Anthony:** That’s right. When you got through with your organized calisthenics it was great because you felt stimulated and you did all these exercises with your rivals so you didn’t need to worry about exercise. You got plenty of them.

**Paul:** Is there any officer that sticks out in your mind for some reason?

**Anthony:** Not on Ellis Island. On Ellis Island only the chief boson stuck out in my mind because he was our disciplinarian. I don’t remember his name but he was a boxing champ with the Coast Guard that’s why I had few words with him because he would ask to go get beat up. We didn’t see eye to eye but that’s the part of it.

**Paul:** We have five minutes left on the tape and I’m going give you the choice of where you’d like to go. Would you like to talk about the rest of your life in the Coast Guard or would like to spend the last five minutes talking about the artwork that you’ve done and the piece that you’ve donated to the Statue of Liberty, to our collection? How would you like to spend your last five minutes?

**Anthony:** I’d like to spend the time with what I made for the Ellis Island.

**Paul:** So we’ll just for the sake of the tape clear up. You got off of Ellis Island later in 1941. Do you remember what month it was?

**Anthony:** I don’t recall the month but I had transferred to a light ship in Essex, Connecticut and I had a real rough winter there. You’re anchored out on a light ship. You get 22 days of bouncing like a top and 8 days liberty it took to start working normal again. I had that for six months.

**Paul:** Why don’t you start telling us about the artwork that you do and what it is you do and how you do it?

**Anthony:** Actually I learnt my leather craft on a destroyer escort. They had ship’s leather so we’ll get away from that but that’s how I started.

**Paul:** I should say that this is tooling leather into figures and creating relief…

**Anthony:** I’ll get into that. I was fascinated to work with leather so when I got transferred… let’s get away from that part. They had this big celebration when they named the Statue of Liberty, Liberty Island. That was Bedloe’s Island before it was Statue of Liberty. I went to all four days when they had the 100 years anniversary.

**Paul:** Yes, 1986.

**Anthony:** I went there for the four days. I did duty on the Statue of Liberty when I was on the communications area and I was going back and forth on that ferry boat and it was two of us on watch all the time because during the war they threatened to blow that place up so we were on duty there.

When I came back and forth, I saw these circulars all over the street of different things. I had been in leather craft already; I’d been doing a lot of leather all through. I had this big piece of leather and I said I’m going to start doing something about that anniversary thing and I started working. I picked up one off the circulars on the street… as a matter of fact I picked up two; one at the Statue but only this part.

**Paul:** From the bust up.

**Anthony:** That’s right. The other one was a slightly smaller version but it had… I wanted it with a book. You know how she holds the book there? I managed to get the big part on first and then I exaggerated the smaller part with a book and I got that book in there and the rest I just adlibbed on there. The deeper I got the better it started looking, the final thing, did you see it?

**Paul:** Yes we saw it yesterday. Can you say for the tape in two minutes, how you colored it?

**Anthony:** Everybody thinks that I used all kinds of Indian mixtures to color it. All I use is a permanent magic marker colors and I also blend in a little bit to differentiate the color a little bit because there’s only five or six real strong colors I could use and I wanted to have a little different color and that’s how I get all these different colors in there.

People seem to be fascinated by all this coloring and if you make a mistake it’s there. I thank God for what I’ve really outline and put all these marks in there; how I could get away with that.

**Paul:** Did you make that to donate for our collection or did you make it for yourself?

**Anthony:** I made that for the Statue of Liberty. I already talked about it with my director at [unclear 01:00:06] village, we got a hold of the secretary and she did the corresponding. I said, “Maria, I want to donate that to the Statue that’s why I made it.” She said, “Ski, we’ll do it”. The directive to have a boat waiting for us the [unclear 01:00:23] day was unbelievable. The reception we got; they took us on a whole tour.

I climbed that tower; the arm. It was restricted. They had a storm one night and we thought somebody was up in there messing around. We went up there; I wouldn’t go up alone, that was how bad it was, spooky as heck. So the two of us went up there that were on watch, expecting somebody had broken a lock on that entrance there. So I said, “I’m here, I’m going up in the arm”. So I went up into that cradle, I went up into the torch, and the breeze was so swift I came right down I said, “I was up there”, and that was it. That’s the last thing I remember about the Statue of Liberty; I took some chances. The wind up came where things just turned off pretty good that way.

**Paul:** We need to end now. I want to thank you very much for letting us come out here on a day’s notice. You did a wonderful job; we’re always looking for information at Ellis Island at that time and I thank you very much. This is Paul Secreast signing off with Anthony Randomski on Thursday, August 10th 1995 here in Ardsley, New York. Thank you.