**Paul:** Good afternoon. This is Paul Seacrest for the National Park Service. Today is Thursday, August 10th, 1995. I'm in Yonkers, New York with William Saretsky. Mr. Saretsky was in the coast guard from 1943 to 1946 and during that time was in various positions in New York Harbor. Can we begin, Mr. Saretsky by you giving me your birthdate please?

**William:** I was born on September 1st 1923.

**Paul:** And where were you born?

**William:** I was born in the Bronx hospital, Bronx, New York.

**Paul:** Can you give me a little bit of family background about your parents and where they were from and that sort of thing?

**William:** Well both parents came from Russia but they met in New York City. My father originally settled in Canada with his family and spent about two years there and then came to New York City where he met my mother. My mother probably came through Ellis Island. I don't know. I'm not sure where she came from but I know my father came through Canada.

**Paul:** Do you know the dates of when your parents came to this country?

**William:** About 1916 or 17 my father. I don't know when my mother came but it was about approximately the same time.

**Paul:** And what were their names?

**William:** My father's name was Leon Saretsky and my mother's name was Sonia Zhuckovitsky.

**Paul:** Zhuckovitsky and you said to me earlier you weren't sure how to spell that.

**William:** No, because she changed her name here to Dylan.

**Paul:** Dylan?

**William:** She came through as Zhuckovitsky when she came to whatever... I don't know how she came through into the United States, where she entered but her name was Zhuckovitsky when she got here.

**Paul:** Say it one more time slowly.

**William:** Well it's like they had a general in the Russian Army during World War II whose name was Zhukov and that was a Z-H-U-K-O-V and her name was Zhukovitsky, so it made it easier for me to pronounce. Of course his name was in the headlines and all that.

**Paul:** Is there a story about why your mother changed her name to Dylan?

**William:** Just easier to spell. I won’t to use that name. I used Saretsky which is easy to spell and everything, but it confounded people.

**Paul:** I should also say for the sake of the tape that the recording may pick up cicadas that are in the trees around the house. Tell me a little bit about your parent's experience once they got to America?

**William:** What I know about is they were going together and my father was in the millinery business making hats and my mother was a cap maker. She told him when she got engaged to become a cap maker because they made more money than a person working in the, I guess it was a garment center, making hats.

So they both came into the needle trades actually and he became a cap maker. Eventually they got married and my mother had an uncle who was in the dry goods business and he worked in selling piece goods and dress fabrics and eventually he opened his own store in the Bronx. About 19... How old was... Just was when I was born, about 1923 he open a store in the Bronx.

I was born about that time he opened his store. He was in 170th Street in the Bronx and he was there till my mother died in 1960 or something like that. That's where he made his living was working in a store in the Bronx. I worked there for a while and then I had my own store for a couple of years and then I became a taxi driver because I hated the retail business.

**Paul:** Did you have brothers and sisters?

**William:** I have a sister.

**Paul:** And her name?

**William:** Emma Saretsky.

**Paul:** Can you tell me a little bit about growing up in a household, your parents were immigrants? What was this like as a child for you?

**William:** I led a normal childhood. Actually I was living next door to a school or I was living on the same block as a school and it was very easy. My father had a store. We lived in an apartment, a tenement apartment building, on 170th Street the Bronx corner of Townsend Avenue.

He had a store on 170th Street which was the main business street because the subway brought... they had all the stores there. We lived in an apartment that overlooked the school yard and I was the last guy to school because I looked out the window I could see where the lines of the [inaudible 00:04:47]. It was a happy childhood, very happy childhood.

**Paul:** What language did you speak at home?

**William:** We spoke English. I picked up a little Yiddish but that was just because I was interested but my sister doesn't know a word.

**Paul:** What about your parents. What did they speak?

**William:** When they didn't want me to understand, they would talk Russian. They could talk Yiddish and I understood some of it so they were careful.

**Paul:** But was there a large Jewish population in that part of the Bronx?

**William:** Yeah, it was 90%, 95% Jewish there, a very Jewish intensified area there. The only non-Jews, they were a lot, but they weren't a lot but they were some. I had some non-Jewish friends but a very small percentage.

**Paul:** But for the most part, your family stayed within...?

**William:** My father didn't have many non-Jewish friends. I had them because I was in the streets and I was associating with everybody. My friends were mostly Jewish but there were a few non-Jews there.

**Paul:** Tell me if there were any traditions that your parents brought with them to the country that you remember having to follow when you were growing up?

**William:** Yeah, my father was a socialist and he did not follow the religion. We were not a religious family. We were a non-religious family. The only thing was like the main holiday I wouldn't go to school but that was it, when we had the [unknown 00:06:17] on Passover- an uncle.

But I didn't have any religious training or anything because he was a... He wasn't an ardent socialist, but he was a socialist. He didn't follow the religion.

**Paul:** Was there a socialist community up there with other people who-

**William:** I guess there were but he was so busy working. The people that worked at that time worked terrible hours. The retail business was terrible. They used to open the store at 10 in the morning and stay open till 12 O'clock at night waiting for the people.... The entertainment at that time was movies.

People shopped at midnight at that time to buy things but that's people that came out of the movies. He didn't close for the people who left the movies who on their way home and did some shopping.

He worked six days a week, miserable hours and on Sundays, he used to put in a couple of hours in the store in the basement, preparing orders or doing stock work or whatever you had to do. They were a very hardworking people but nothing that I would ever want to do. I talk about them and I built up a hate for the retail business. I got out eventually but I should have gotten out sooner.

**Paul:** Well it's like they don't even have lives of their own.

**William:** No. Their life was work. They had no lives. We went to the park on a Sunday or something or he took a trip with the subways. Wherever we went we had subways. We didn't have a car until 1947 because we had no cars, and we went everywhere for the subways, it was a nickel.

I went to school down in lower Manhattan, I went to Stuyvesant High School and we used to go to the subway. It was an hour's ride down to Union Square and back and we walked five blocks- six blocks to school and didn't anything of it. No buses, no nothing just that was the way life was and that's what we did.

**Paul:** When you were a child, did you have any particular ideas about people in the military?

**William:** No, I was busy playing ball. We played stickball. I didn't live close to a park and we used to take broomsticks and get a rubber ball, you could buy them, [inaudible 00:08:46]. We used to get the rubber ball, three of us put in a nickel, I think it was 15 cents or something and we used to play stickball. We used to go through the garbage cans when people threw out their brooms where we used to break the sticks every once in a while. Quite often we used to go to garbage cans and take the broomsticks and strip of the [inaudible 00:09:06] and use it to play ball.

I lived next to the schoolyard and my whole childhood was spent in the schoolyard playing ball. I didn't join any organizations or anything like that. I guess there were some boy scouts or things like that. I wanted `to play ball. I liked to play ball. We didn't play hard ball because it was concrete and we did play football, touch football, and we played roller hockey in the gutters because there were very few cars at that time. We played roller hockey and we used the lids of the sewer lids, if you knocked this hockey puck which we made out of cheese boxes.

Cheese at that time came in wooden boxes and the ends were little squares, and we played roller hockey and we played hockey. There was a lot more snow, there was no cars and whatever the difference is and we all had the flexible fliers. In fact I still got one in the garage, not mine my son's. But we used the flexible fliers and when the snow. Then we went to the park in the streets where there was some cars. There wasn't many cars that you had to watch out and we used to go sliding down hills in the winter. That's how we spent our time.

**Paul:** Tell me a little bit about how you got interested in joining the coast guard and why you wanted to do that.

**William:** I was a patriot and I had just graduated high school and I saw the draft coming and everything. I went down to the marines to enlist in the marines. A friend of mine and I went into the marines and I was rejected for my eyesight. He passed and he was killed in New Ireland during the campaign for [inaudible 00:11:11] or one of those islands down there.

I guess I did alright by failing. I owe my life to rotten eyes or something. I feel there's a certain amount to that. So I said, “Well they won't take me in the toughest outfit I'll go into the coast guard.” I didn't want to go into the army so I was in the coast guard and I went in about the same time I would have been drafted anyhow.

**Paul:** How did your parents feel about this?

**William:** They expected it. It was happening to everybody. It was no big deal, everybody was going. We knew everybody this age was going. A lot of it was already gone because I was younger at that time. I was 19 when I enlisted so they would get to the 19-year-olds so they were drafting the younger kids then.

**Paul:** Of course by this time, Pearl Harbor had been bombed.

**William:** Oh, yes.

**Paul:** Do you remember where you were when Pearl Harbor was bombed?

**William:** Absolutely.

**Paul:** Could you talk about that?

**William:** I was at the polo grounds where I was selling score cards at the polo grounds. When the announcement came from Colonel Donovan to report, we didn't know nothing. What happened was I didn't realize Pearl Harbor happened at that time, it was on a Sunday. We came back, when we got home, we heard that Japan bombed Pearl Harbor. I said, "They're crazy."

We used to think of them as little nothings. We didn't realize that they would be a tough opponent, thought we would go marching at them in five minutes. I said, "What the hell are they doing this?" I also remember that Sunday night, I went to a hockey game. Toronto Maple leafs were playing, and I was a fan of the Toronto Maple Leafs because my father came from Canada and everybody were the Rangers so I had to take the other side. I was at the hockey game and I was a friend of a couple of the hockey players and we went to see them in the hotel before... And we were talking about it. That's how I spent Pearl Harbor day.

**Paul:** After you were rejected from the marines, this was a little bit later. Tell me how you went about then joining the coast guard.

**William:** Well I was working at the time at Curtis Wright in Paterson, New Jersey. We made airplane engines, it was in defense work. I knew how to operate machines because I went to Stuyvesant High School and they had a machine shop. I enjoyed working in the machine shop, so I got a job over there at the time and I knew I was going so I just enlisted in the coast guard.

**Paul:** Did you have to take another exam?

**William:** Oh yeah.

**Paul:** Can you describe the process please?

**William:** First I went to the marines then I went to the navy air corp. I wanted to go in there and I failed again for my eyesight. I failed that also for the eyesight and then I finally went into the coast guard. I had a choice of the services. I'd rather than go into the army. I didn't feel I'd be happy in the army.

**Paul:** What kind of a test? You said you took a test.

**William:** A physical.

**Paul:** Oh, I see. An examination.

**William:** Well no. To go into the navy air corps, you had a very tough test then they gave you a second test but I passed the first test so good. I went to high school that you do a lot of math and I was good in the test. The test was mainly math, so instead of taking the second test, they just sent me right to the recruiting offices [inaudible 00:14:48] I remember very well.

Of course I skipped that other test and he said, "Why do you want to be a pilot?" I say, "I feel I can do the most damage to the enemy as a pilot." I guess I was an individualist or something. He says, "Okay." He sent to a physical and I never passed a physical. I took the physical, I didn't pass it. I took it again about two weeks later and I didn't pass it again. My eyes weren't good enough. At that time, the requirements were very high. They had the pick of the crop at that time.

**Paul:** Then how long did you have to report after they took you?

**William:** After I was in the coast guard, they said come back in about a month I guess. I don't remember. I'm not sure. After I passed the coast guard, I was accepted by the... And they sent me out to Manhattan Beach which was a training station out in Brooklyn.

It was in the winter, it was a cold winter that winter, and the barracks were all CCC barracks, CCC camps which was from the depression, they had these camps and they built these barracks down in the south and things and in the country and the government appropriated them and moved them and made them for the soldiers at that time. But the CCC during the depression they were sending the people into public works.

**Paul:** For the sake of the tape, can you say on tape what CCC stands for?

**William:** Civilian Conservation Corp. They were guys that were drifters and everything and it was the depression and it was hard to get work. The government was putting into these... They had this camp, they had the NRA, they had this CCC, they had the WPA, they had all different programs.

I think Tony Radomsky went to the CCCs. A lot of the guys came out of the Cs and went into the service. They used to call it the Cs and the WPA, NRA, TBA, this was during Roosevelt administration.

**Paul:** I should say for the sake of the tape that Tony Radomsky whom you just referred is our interviewee EIS647 and Kevin and I have just come from his house. You and Mr. Radomsky are friends, old friends. You said they did public works, what kinds of things?

**William:** They put them out in the woods and they were chopping down trees. I don't know. I didn't belong to the same... But young men who were drifters or couldn't get work were going there. It was still kind of a job doing maybe cleaning the parks.

These were for the younger men. The WPA was for the skilled construction workers, so this was for the younger men. They were cleaning up parks and they were all through the south and all over the country I guess. I was too young for that.

**Paul:** So you were put up in these CCC camp barracks which had been reconstructed at Manhattan Beach. Was this your boot camp?

**William:** Yes.

**Paul:** Is that what it would be referred to?

**William:** Yes.

**Paul:** Can you describe for us what boot camp is and what you learned there?

**William:** It was crash course because at that time, the coast guard needed men and I was only there six weeks before they shipped me out. It was a six weeks period they did, they run the boot camps that lasted much longer and I think today even guys have six months courses. They just gave us basic marching, used to sing when we marched. We got our shots, got our uniforms, learned how to clean the uniforms.

They just gave us basic training, that's all the boot camps were. It was basic training. We got very little training actually at that time because it was 1943 and they needed everybody they could get at that time when these submarines were running wild in the Atlantic and that's what most of the coast guard men were being prepared for .

**Paul:** You said you sang while you marched? Do you remember what you sang?

**William:** Yeah.

**Paul:** Can you sing something-?

**William:** Bell bottom trousers, coats are navy blue. Climbing through the rigging like his daddy used to do. Now along came a bar made from down in Drury Lane, a master he was good to her, her mistress was the same, till along came a sailor from far across the sea. He was the cause of all her misery. I remember it. I'm amazing, I still remember that.

**Paul:** And you would march in rhythm to that?

**William:** Yeah, they'd sing other song but that one I remember. That one I learned in the head.

**Paul:** Oh, thank you.

**William:** We used to march along... I'm sure that's well known.

**Paul:** You were there for six weeks and you got basic... I mean it's very basic and then you were shipped out. Where did they put you first?

**William:** They sent me to Greenport, Long Island. I was assigned to the third naval district. Greenport, Long Island was the sailboat fleet. They had a line of sailboats that ran... Because this was the submarine menace, you still go out on patrol off the coast of the US and up in Canada. The first naval district in Boston area, I don't know how far they went, we did the third naval.

We used to get out in these sailboats and we went up and down in a grid. The lantern was divided into grids. You were safe in sailboats. Of course no submarine is going to come up and knock over a sailboat and the torpedo would just go under the keel anyway and never hit us. We used to go back and forth in this grid patrol. Never saw anything.

**Paul:** How long were you stationed there for?

**William:** I was there about two months. I was called to the school for this lookout tower detail in New York harbor which got me to the Statue of Liberty and all that. I had good mark1s, I was pretty bright guy and they took the brightest to go into what became the quartermaster's signalmen. We took some training and they sent us first to Bridgeport and then to Rowan, New Jersey and the towers were ready.

We were there getting training till the... We practiced blinker light which was our main thing, flashing lights. We were going to use the blinkers and the flags and then became signalman and quartermasters. At that time the rating in the navy and the coast guard you were what was called signalman quartermaster. You had to do both jobs. Now they're all quartermasters and we went to that school and you had to be... The higher intelligence guys went to that and became radiomen and things like that not regular swabbie.

**Paul:** What were the positions in New York Harbor? I assume there were several.

**William:** I know them all, seven.

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

**William:** The headquarters was the barge office. It was U41. I think I remember them all.

**Paul:** I think I should say for the sake of the tape that the old barge office is approximately where the coast guard building stands now in Battery Park.

**William:** The barge office was headquarters, the first naval district. The third naval district headquarters was in 42 Broadway. That was the head of all the naval affairs. The coast guard had their office in 42 Broadway. The barge office controlled the captain of the port which was over the pier guards and the picket boats and everything else. Our tower, the headquarters tower was on top of the barge office, U41. We were all given the U designation.

**Paul:** There was a tower that was on-?

**William:** Yeah, they were built on top of the... Then in the Statue of Liberty, we were built in the base where those columns are and we were facing two directions. That was U42. One was facing towards Brooklyn and we could see the harbor, it was at that angle, and the other one was facing towards the barge office. We didn't use this part facing Jersey. That was U42. U43 was the Starett- Lehigh Building on 28th Street and 11 Avenue that controlled Hudson.

**Paul:** Can you say that name again?

**William:** Starett- Lehigh Building. It's still there.

**Paul:** Starett? S-T-A....

**William:** R-E-T-T Lehigh, like the train.

**Paul:** L-E-H-I-G-H.

**William:** Yeah, building on about 28th Street and 12th Avenue which hooked and patrolled the Hudson. Across the harbor, at that time there was a tower on top of the Hoboken Train Station. It's gone now. We were stationed in that tower. They built a building up in this tower up there where we also controlled the upper Hudson. That was U45.

U44 was a seaman's institute, Seaman's Church Institute which was right across the street from our pier. We were on pier 9 east river that was like peck slip, right by the Treasury Building. They got their mint building or they had some building down there, official building which is still the US mint. They tore it down, the Seaman's Church Institute. That was U44.

U45 was Hoboken. U46 was Brooklyn on top of pier six Brooklyn where the Brooklyn Army base was where 90% of the stuff that shipped out of New York was stored there before they were put on the freighters. U47 was Staten Island, on top of the town hall on Staten Island back from the ferry slips and out to [inaudible 00:25:19] lookout at the entrance to the harbor controlled the- so that’s over New York harbor. That's where the 47 towers were.

**Paul:** Just for the sake of the tape, can you explain what it was you were looking for?

**William:** At that time, convoys, and they were up to 100, 150 ships, they were so many, used to come into New York. They didn't have pier space for them so they used to anchor down in Grave's End Bay in Brooklyn, up the Hudson, outside the Statue of Liberty. They had to use these anchorages so the piers could handle them.

What we were looking for when the ships came to New York, probably out by Ambrose and [inaudible 00:26:05] even further out, they had radio silence. No one was allowed to transmit, their radios were sealed. No one was allowed to transmit because of spies, security reasons.

The only contact with a lot of these ships, all the ships in the anchorages had went through these signal towers. They used to... Send a tugboat, we need help, we need a doctor.

That's what the signal towers were and also we watched the piers for fire. In fact I reported one fire one time, pier fire before they got it and we watched the piers for fire and security. We used to also enforce the laws of the port which was that you weren't allowed to block these piers with tugs or barges or whatever thing. We made sure if something was wrong, we caught them up and they sent the patrol boat to clean them out.

**Paul:** Ships were traveling in large convoys because this was the height of the war for safety.

**William:** Oh, yeah. Coming and going. Coming they were empty, going, I used to see them going, we could always tell by the waterline what they had in there. You could tell a ship had anything on it. That's why we were there for. We worked for the division of the coast guard called captain of the port. It was in charge of security, patrol of the harbor and the headquarters was right in the barge office.

**Paul:** Who was the captain of the port of New York at that time?

**William:** I don't know. Captain of the port is not a captain. It's a division called captain of the port. On every pier, they used to have three or four guards because the Normandy burned and in fact they were there when the Normandy... and to watch security against spies and saboteurs. Every pier in New York had piers which were a division of captain of the port.

We were called the LTD, lookout tower detail. That was our division. We had about 50. There was hundreds of pier guards. There were pier guards in Brooklyn and Staten Island, in Manhattan and Chelsea barracks, Brooklyn barracks, over in Staten Island, over in Hoboken and Jersey City was when I patrolled the Jersey piers but this was all security, protection against saboteurs.

**Paul:** Can you describe for me the actual process from the time you left your barracks till the time you got to your post and what you had to do when you got to the post?

**William:** Every post was manned by two men. To get to the Statue of Liberty... We lived on pier nine. Pier nine, you could walk across street to the seaman's church institute.

**Paul:** There were barracks at pier nine or something?

**William:** That's where we all lived. We all lived at pier nine on the lookout tower detail. We also had the picket boats there that patrolled the harbor. Picket boats were a lot of these different divisions. But the picket boats from Manhattan were at the pier nine East River. Pier 11 East River had navy picket boats but they weren't in charge of the port. They did naval services.

We could walk to the barge office from pier nine. We could walk to seaman's church institute from pier nine. To go to the Statue of Liberty picket boat was the 38 footer. It used to take us through the dock at the Statue of Liberty and wait for the... We relieved the people up there, whoever was on duty, wait for them to come back and they came back to pier nine. Everything was pier nine.

**Paul:** So the picket boat would stay there and pick up the people that-

**William:** They dropped off somebody and picked them up.

**Paul:** Do you remember where on Bedloe's Island the dock was?

**William:** Probably the same place it is now, with different dock.

**Paul:** Which is where, if you can just say that?

**William:** What I remember if you drew a line from the Statue of Liberty to the barge office, it would be somewhere in that area.

**Paul:** Somewhere in the front of the Statue as you recall?

**William:** Well if you had to draw from the Statue of Liberty from the north end of the Statue towards the south end of the barge office. You could draw a line from there. On there there was somebody from the National Park Service who was very friendly with the guys there. They got to know him very well. In fact, Tony knew him very well. There was a family that lived on the- that was in charge from the National Park Service that was in charge of the statue and all of that. Were you aware of that?

**Paul:** No.

**William:** There was a family that lived on there and Bedloe's Island was controlled by the National Park Service at that time. They had a family there. I'm sure some of them knew more. I didn't spend that much time there but Tony Radomsky spent a lot... I know they were very friendly with the people that took care of the dock and whatever services they had. It was like a lighthouse service or whatever it was. I'm sure it was the National Park Service. They were in charge of Bedloe's Island at that time.

To go to Brooklyn, we used to go by jeep and go to... There used to be a jeep that used to take guys going to Brooklyn. Guys that were going to Staten Island used to walk over to Staten Island ferry, take the ferry across [unclear 00:31:35] and walk up to the... So we used the Staten Island ferry as transportation going between pier nine and Staten Island.

At Hoboken, we had a jeep that went up to west side, went to the Starett- Lehigh building on 28th Street and dropped off someone at the Hoboken thing ferry. When they picked up the people at the Starett- Lehigh building and then waited for the Hoboken ferry and then they came back to pier nine. That was the transportation between these piers, between our posts.

**Paul:** Say at the Statue of Liberty, you've come in by the picket boat then where did you go? Just retrace your steps.

**William:** We walked to the Statue of Liberty to the base. We took the elevator up to the top which was actually part of the base.

**Paul:** To the top of the base.

**William:** Top of the base, and we got out. I think we might have one been [inaudible 00:32:32] to the top.

**Paul:** And there was an elevator as you were pulled?

**William:** Elevator, same elevator. I had been there a couple... I think it was the same. I recall the elevator. We took the elevator up, we signed out, the others signed in, and they went back, took the elevator down and walked out to the pier out where the picket boat was waiting and went back to the pier.

**Paul:** You said you had to sign in. Was there another person on duty there with a log of some...?

**William:** Yeah. We always kept constant log at all towers and you had to sign in and sign out. There was two people in each tower and we relieved each other. You had to sign in. the other guy had to sign out.

**Paul:** How large of a space did you have these two people to sit or however you were doing your watch?

**William:** Well the watch in the Statue of Liberty, you had to go outside. The office was inside. You had to go outside and look over the balconies, I guess, they were balconies and we were in the base of where those columns are. This is the part that's interesting. I remember when we were building this and I was on the first detail out by the statue of liberty and it was full of guano. We had a boatload.

We loaded it up and we had to clean out all the pigeon droppings. It was loaded with pigeons at that time. But they built inside that wall so when they built an office with a telephone and we had the breaker lights. That was our communication to shore. That was the Statue of Liberty. The others we all had telephones and they were, how big were they? I don't know, maybe 10 x 10, something like that space. We didn't have much equipment then.

**Paul:** Were you allowed to sit?

**William:** Oh yeah.

**Paul:** So there were chairs?

**William:** I guess there were chairs. I don't even remember. I'm sure there must have been some chairs there or something. But we didn't sit in there. We were there to look and watch the harbor. We were outside most of the time.

**Paul:** How long was the actual watch in hours?

**William:** Four on, eight off.

**Paul:** Four on, eight off.

**William:** Four hours on, eight off. There was four shifts and somebody had two days off and that then was rotating.

**Paul:** Were you using any sort of device for scanning, like a telescope?

**William:** We had the good navy binoculars. We had binoculars and we had... That's the only thing that I can recall. I've got a picture somewhere when I was... We had foul weather gear and we carried a pistol because we had codes. We had codes in there and we had books like the naval to interpret messages.

We actually never used them. You could send messages by flags then you had to look up in the [inaudible 00:35:25]. Everything we used to Morse code and that was our communication with the ships.

**Paul:** What kind of things were you taught to see on the horizon that would give you a clue that something was going on?

**William:** Just scanned, nothing special. We knew the laws of the piers because we were actually working for the piers and the captain of the port and he was in charge of all the piers. We watched the piers and we watched anything unusual or if we saw driftwood or some kind of a danger to shipping, big logs or things like that, we reported those things and they send out tugs or whatever they did to pick it up or the debris. Just generally useful but the main point we were there was to maintain communication between the ship to shore.

**Paul:** And this is going on during the day and the night or just at the night time?

**William:** They had 24 hours a day.

**Paul:** 24 hours a day.

**William:** We reported fires. There weren't many of those but just general security.

**Paul:** Are there other incidents that stand out in your mind where there was a security hazard?

**William:** With the enemy? No, I remember I was on duty the fire started right down on pier nine where we lived and it came right through the roof of the barracks there and we reported it. But that wasn't [inaudible 00:36:54]. It was just accidental, electrical wiring or something. No incidents with the enemy.

**Paul:** Did you ever have any interaction with any of the refugee ships that were coming in from Europe at that time?

**William:** I don't recall any refugee ships. I don't recall any refugee ships. I remember we were dealing with mostly, which was 90%, liberty ships, which were cargo vessels. The escorts went to the navy yard or they had a base in Staten Island where naval vessels. I don't know. The coast guard vessels had base down.

One time I remember when I saw the Franklin come in, I was on duty and that came in from the Pacific, I guess. I was shocked. Two holes, you could look right through the ship were a kamikaze hit it and it exploded and we saw the naval vessels come in. The big thing was the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth used to run and they didn't even run with escorts.

They ran across because they had such speed they could outrun submarines. They ran unescorted but we always knew when they're going because we could tell their foghorns were huge. You could just tell. They used to blow their foghorns when they were getting out of the harbor and coming in. We knew they were in. But they was the biggest ships I like to remember, was the Queen Mary and the Queen Elizabeth.

**Paul:** Can you describe for me the uniform that you wore?

**William:** Regularly we wore jeans. I've got pictures of them. We wore jeans, dungarees and denim shirts. In the winter we had foul weather gear we had something that was issued to us for foul weather but on duty we were supposed to wear a hat and a gun and the denim shirts and the jeans that was our uniform.

**Paul:** How many times do you think you were at the Statue of Liberty?

**William:** I wasn't there much because I was on the... I was one of the bad guys. They had the guys that behaved good go out to the statue because that was a prime place. They used to send me to the outskirts, Staten Island or Hoboken.

**Paul:** What did you do that put you into the bad guy category?

**William:** I thought I was smarter than these... Because we were in charge of two chief petty officer and one was a real moron. I just used to give him a lot of lip and he knew I didn't respect him. The other one was okay but he was dead head. I just thought I was smarter than them so they realized it. But we got along.

**Paul:** You said you were stationed at the Hoboken piers. What kind of traffic is coming in to the pier at this time?

**William:** Hoboken pier was for the ferry. They used to run the ferry between Hoboken and New York. It was a commuter ferry and the Jersey train station was under it.

**Paul:** It was just the commuter traffic that was going back and forth.

**William:** No, there was Hoboken piers as you look further down, I've got pictures here, you could see the freight and general harbor traffic was in there. I don't know if Hoboken had the naval traffic or the liberty ships. I guess they were all over but I don't recall that. But that's Hoboken what mainly a commuter station.

People used to run across, take the train, run down to Wall Street, it ran right across to Barkley Street, somewhere right in lower Manhattan the Hoboken ferry. They had a ferry there and I don't know if they had one a week. No, they didn't have one a week. They might have had a ferry a week. But that was one of the main transportation between New Jersey and Manhattan.

**Paul:** The few times you were at the Statue of Liberty, do you have any recollection of there being visitors, civilian visitors?

**William:** Oh yeah, all the time, all the time.

**Paul:** Does anything stick out in your mind about seeing them?

**William:** A couple of guys used to make dates with the girls there. I know they used to talk about it. I didn't spend that much... They'd go down and screw off a little bit and talk to them because it was quiet or something. One guy could actually man it at the time. Yeah, there were visitors just like you have now. They were running the Statue of Liberty boat. There was a big tourist thing.

**Paul:** Who ran the Statue of Liberty boat? Do you know?

**William:** I have no idea. Private enterprise, I would say. It was a private enterprise at that time.

**Paul:** Could you talk a little bit about the picket boats and exactly what their purpose was in New York Harbor.

**William:** The picket boats were the 38 footers. They're called picket boats.

**Paul:** These are wooden boat?

**William:** Wooden, 38 footers and their job was to police the harbor. We were part of the captain of the port. They used to do the same thing. They made sure the piers were maintained right, that they weren't blocked so a fire boat could get in because sometimes these barges, they used to put across them and then they used to put three wide and they weren't allowed to. They used to patrol. Picket actually means patrol boats. They were patrolling the harbor and doing services like running naval personnel to the ships.

The harbor was loaded, at times there might have been 30 or 40 or 50 boats at anchor because they couldn't get into the piers. There was just so much space. We used to run, I didn't do it, and they just were patrol boats. That's what their job was and they did on the network. They weren't there for us but as long as we needed them that was the way they were going to use them.

**Paul:** And they were run by the coast guard? These were coast guard boats.

**William:** Coast guard ran the picket boats. The navy had this launches, the bigger boats, open... Picket boats have a little roof on them and launches were open boats and they used to work between the naval vessels, I guess but we worked to all the merchant marine and the tugboats.

Most of our messages were calls from the ships to send a tugboat. They ready to go to the pier and they're getting tired of waiting and things like that. They had a big towing company I thought we worked for them. The company was named Dalzell. "Please send Dalzell." That was half the messages. “We're waiting, get in touch with Dalzell."

**Paul:** Now at night from these different lookouts, were there lanterns up there that you could send messages with?

**William:** We had blinker lights.

**Paul:** Blinker lights. Can you describe a blinker light for us on tape?

**William:** Blinker light was a powerful beam with a powerful bow and had the-

**Paul:** So it's electric?

**William:** Oh yeah, it had a handle on each side. I guess it was like 18 inches in diameter, 20 inches, 18, 20 inches and had a handle on each side with a spring on it and it sent dots and dashes, used the Morse code. You could see it up and down the harbor. It could go for three or four miles which is what was actually needed. I was on it when I was on a navy ship, no, a coast guard ship, a naval vessel. The coast guard manned some navy ships at that time. That was after the war.

I sent a message to a ship 80 miles away by bouncing it off a cloud. We were in the Suez Canal and we were passing messages off a cloud just for the fun of it. It worked but those were with the big cleaver lights. Those were like electrodes. These were just bulbs. We had these powerful bulbs. I don't know how many watts they were.

**Paul:** I know you were discharged from Ellis Island and we'll get to that soon. Did you have any other interaction during that time with Ellis Island or had any stories about anything that went on there?

**William:** I had a friend there whose cousin played for the Ellis Island basketball team. Every base had some kind of intramural thing or whatever it was.

**Paul:** Sure. And it was a coast guard base at that time.

**William:** Yeah and we went over to see his cousin at Ellis Island play one time but that's about the only time I did go to Ellis Island except as a receiving station. When I got discharged, they sent me from there to the discharge station, but that was like a waiting station holding you.

**Paul:** When you went over to the basketball game, does anything stick out in your mind about going over there?

**William:** It was only one day. Yeah, there was a great hall was there. I still remember the great hall. That was the first time I saw the great hall and I remembered I was very impressed with that great hall. The great hall was very impressive and when I went to see it a couple of years ago with my grandchildren, I said, "I was here." I felt it. I felt that I was there. I remember that.

**Paul:** I guess what I'm wondering is do you remember where they played basketball on Ellis Island? Do you remember where you went to see the basketball?

**William:** They must have had a gym somewhere. Maybe they used the great hall. I don't know because I think I remember benches or something. I don't really recall. I can't, just too hazy. I just know I did it. I don't remember anything about it. I just know I did it.

**Paul:** Kevin, do you have any questions that you’d like to ask? I should say for the sake of the tape, Kevin Daley is running the equipment and if you have any questions.

**Kevin:** We came across one photograph in the collection that's labeled on the back... Because usually this is Fort Wood, the statue is called Fort Wood.

**William:** I remember it called Fort Wood. Okay, maybe.

**Kevin:** We also have a photograph with another name on the back. I think it was Fort Howard. Do you ever known...?

**William:** I have no recollection of either.

**Kevin:** Oh, okay.

**William:** Nothing there. Nothing. In fact, I'd show you where we had the tower [inaudible 00:47:21]. One thing I thought I just...

**Kevin:** This is 1941, in August 1941.

**William:** Yeah, there's the pier.

**Paul:** Yeah, here's the pier. We're looking at a photograph.

**William:** This is Governor's Island?

**Paul:** No, actually this is the.... This may be the pier here.

**William:** Right here. This is the pier.

**Kevin:** That's in the front.

**Paul:** We're pointing to the pier in the front of the Statue of Liberty.

**William:** Staten Island is down here somewhere.

**Paul:** Actually Governor's Island would be here almost across.

**William:** That's Jersey over there.

**Paul:** Here in the colonnade, this is where....

**William:** That's where we were.

**Kevin:** Oh, in the colonnade.

**Paul:** Yeah, where the columns are.

**William:** That is right down here.

**Kevin:** Which would now be called 5P in the modern pier.

**William:** And there's one more flight?

**Kevin:** 6P.

**William:** That's the top of the elevator?

**Kevin:** Yes. 6P is where you could go outside and walk all the way around the telescope.

**William:** No, we didn't go up there, we were in the colonnade and down here.

**Paul:** Now was there some kind of a structure built by the coast guard to facilitate your using this as a watch tower?

**William:** Inside. Out here we did have the blinker lights out here.

**Paul:** They were mounted outside?

**William:** Yeah, absolutely.

**Paul:** What kind of structure was built on the inside? You said there was an office area, what exactly did they do?

**William:** They've got a wooden structure just to keep some books, keep your gear in there, hang a coat or something.

**Paul:** You said there was a telephone in there?

**William:** Oh yeah, we had to have the telephone there.

**Paul:** What about heat?

**William:** Heat was in there.

**Paul:** On your four hour shift, did you get a break during that time?

**William:** The two of us, we did what we wanted. We were isolated. We did what we wanted. But with the break, we would just sit down. We sat down or whatever it is.

**Paul:** Do you remember what else may have been inside the base of the Statue of Liberty?

**William:** This year we came through here to the elevator, right?

**Kevin:** According to one other army person we interviewed, Charles Polanski, he said the visitors would go in the Sally court, which is in the front of Fort Wood and come up to a little structure in front of the pedestal and then walk into here. I guess this would be the same path you might have followed.

**William:** Right.

**Paul:** Just for fun, did you even climb up to the crown?

**William:** Yes, once and I never do it again. I said I'll never do it again and my wife made me do it when the kids were here. I said, "I remembered I wouldn't it again when I went to the crown because once I wanted to do it." I did go up to the crown and I say, "I'm not going to go up this thing again," and she made me go up that time and I says, "I knew I was right the first time." I knew I had that in my memory somewhere not to do it again.

**Paul:** Did you wander around the grounds anywhere else during that time?

**William:** No, we weren't allowed to. I know some of them did, I know some of the guys did because they told me they used to go out and shoot rats. I wasn’t there. I heard those stories, from the other guys-

**Paul:** They were shooting rats at the Statue of Liberty? Did you ever see any rats at the statue when you were there?

**William:** No. I saw the pigeons though. I remember the pigeons. I cleaned up after the pigeons because we were moving stuff in there and all in here we cleaned that whole....

**Paul:** That whole upper part of the...

**William:** It was all covered with guano.

**Kevin:** Did you ever hear of the story of a prison being in the base of the statue?

**William:** No.

**Paul:** Was there some kind of a brig for coast guardsmen, somewhere in New York harbor for coast guardsmen who had been particularly bad?

**William:** Yeah, I think it might have been on Ellis Island. I think it might have been on Ellis Island because I remember when I was getting discharged, like everyone one night I had to guard a brig. There was a whole bunch of us and one of my jobs was guarding... Am I right?

**Paul:** There was one at Ellis Island.

**William:** I did it, I was there about three days or four days getting processed and I did guard the brig. That was one of the jobs they gave me.

**Paul:** Well actually before we talk about Ellis Island, do you have any other questions about the Statue of Liberty, specifically Kevin, that you would like to ask Mr. Saretsky and then we'll get to the whole discharging experience?

**Kevin:** No, not at this point.

**Paul:** Alright. Well let's talk about... This is 1946 when you're being discharged, why are you being discharged?

**William:** I reached the points system. By being stationed in New York, they had a point system discharge, overseas time counted x amount and stateside time counted less, so actually I had more time than a lot of the guys being discharged. But my duties up until September 1945 were all stateside and they were getting like three points to my two points every month.

They used the point system so in 1946 when they started discharging, I was right at the bottom of the barrel, somewhere in the line to be discharged and they put me on a ship. Actually I went overseas in 1946, I was put on a troopship as a signalman doing the same duties but I worked on a troopship September 1945 till April 1946 when I got discharged, I was on this ship.

We ran in and out of New York harbor bringing troops back. I made a couple of trips to India, a trip to Puerto Rico. We brought troops back to Puerto Rico and the last trip I brought troops back from France. The next trip was going to Genoa, Italy and my points were right and they asked me, "Do you want to make one more trip?" I debated because I didn't want to go, but I said, "I better get out while the going's good." So I got out and that's how I got discharged.

**Paul:** What is that process? What did you go through to-?

**William:** Point system. It was a point system and the process was you went to the receiving station which was Ellis Island. I stayed there maybe a day or two and then I was sent to Brooklyn barracks which I was stationed at at one time because they broke up pier nine. They sent a lot of us to a place in Brooklyn called Brooklyn barracks, which was at the foot of Columbia Street in Brooklyn in Red Hook. We were in Brooklyn barracks I think the last there or four months after the war in Germany was over till Japan. I think I was in Brooklyn barracks.

In Brooklyn barracks, they put me on a ship. The ship they put me at Ellis Island. Ellis Island was the receiving station. I was there for a day or two and then they sent me to Brooklyn barracks where they did the entire process. You got your records and where you were going and they gave you the discharge money and they gave you your transportation money and whatever else there. They gave you the health examination.

I think Ellis Island was just mainly the receiving station, in and out while they were waiting for space. 20 guys came of the ship while we were at Ellis Island at that time and they were going all over the country. I just happened to be in my home district. That's what Ellis Island was. They shipped them all over the country.

**Paul:** What sticks out in your mind about those couple of days you spent at Ellis Island? You just told us they put you to guard the brig.

**William:** Yeah, they gave you something... All I remember was we were sitting around waiting most of the time, I guess. I did guard the brig though. I remember one day in my life I guarded the brig I'm pretty sure was at Ellis Island.

**Paul:** What about any of the physical details, like the room you were waiting in or wherever you slept that night?

**William:** I have no idea. No idea. I was in so many barracks. You go in and out...

**Paul:** They all look the same for the most part.

**William:** There was nothing distinctive about it. What is happening? There was nothing that I should remember about it.

**Paul:** When you say it was a receiving station at Ellis Island, what do you mean exactly by that?

**William:** A receiving station to me was a place you go before you go to your destination. It's a holding area, that's what receiving is. I remember the guy I went there with, he was another quartermaster. His name was John Bolotin. He came from Washington State.

**Paul:** What was his name?

**William:** John Bolotin.

**Paul:** Bolotin.

**William:** B-O-L-O-T-I-N.

**Paul:** Thank you.

**William:** He was a shipmate of mine and we got discharged at the same and we went to Ellis Island but I was going to Brooklyn barracks and he was going somewhere in the west coast. From Ellis Island they sent him all over the United States to wherever you came from, to your home district. You're discharged in your naval district, where you enlisted in or wherever you listed as your home area.

**Paul:** So it's like an organizational spot. Everybody went there and then they divvied up who was going to go where. Would you say most people probably in your situation were only there for a few days?

**William:** They had a cadre that run the base but most of us were just transits, just in and out. I guess the guys in the brig weren't so transit. Yeah, it was a transit area. That's all it was.

**Paul:** Tell me how when you look back on this experience of working in New York harbor and keeping watch in all these different places, how do you think of about that experience now 50 years later?

**William:** I enjoyed myself there. Well I was home too. They used to give us six hours of leave between watches every other day or something like that so I could go home. Whenever my friends were home, they were coming from overseas or something or they were in Arkansas or Tennessee and they came home for two days, I got to see them which was great being stationed there. In fact I had a good time. I enjoyed it.

**Paul:** Do you think the coast guard has shaped your life in any way, the rest of your life?

**William:** Probably. It was in my mature years, yeah. It was good years. I enjoyed it. I could go home whenever I wanted to. I could work six days on and two days off and then you had two nights off for short periods but if I wanted to go home, I could go home or if I wanted... Being in New York was great.

**Paul:** Mr. Saretsky, I want to thank you for letting us come out on short notice and ask you questions about...

**William:** I thought you might be interested in seeing one or two of these pictures.

**Paul:** Sure. We'll just sign off here and we'll go look. This is Paul Seacrest signing off with William Saretsky on Thursday, August 10th, 1995 in Yonkers, New York. Thank you.