**Janet:** This is Janet Levine for the National Park Service. It’s April 7th 1995. I have the pleasure of being here today with William Carroll, C-A-R-R-O-L-L Warren who is here visiting from California.

Mr. Warren was in the Coast Guard, he volunteered on November 22nd 1940 in Seattle, Washington for the Coast Guards. He was stationed here at Ellis Island from January 7th 1941 to July of 1941 at which time he was transferred to the Battery, a captain of the port office.

It’s a pleasure to talk with you. I’m very happy that you hopped in by and somebody discovered that you had been stationed here and we could have this interview. Let’s start at the beginning, if you would give your birth date.

**William:** Born March 4th 1918 San Diego, California.

**Janet:** Did you live in San Diego?

**William:** I lived there for one year after World War 1 and my parents moved to Island Park in a suburb of Los Angeles. At the age of eight, my family moved to Beverly Hills, California which was in the west end. I lived there all during my third grade until finishing high school in 1937 in Beverly Hills High School.

I worked for the US post office in Beverly Hills for three years after graduation. At the time the draft came into being and I had no intentions of going in the army. I took off for Seattle Washington because I knew people up there.

At that time the Coast Guard had just two recruiting stations, Salt Lake City, Seattle Washington and I didn’t know anybody in Salt Lake City. I was in Seattle Washington for 10 days when I joined up and they sent us to port towns in Washington for 10 weeks of boot camp.

**Janet:** Just to follow in chronology, why did you want to be in the coast guard?

**William:** I went to the Navy first, they said it was six years and I was 22 and a half years old and that’s a long time. Somebody told me about the Coast Guard and it was a three year hitch. I joined up with the Coast Guard for three years, but I did five years and five days.

**Janet:** You were sent to boot camp, when you think of boot camp, what is it that stands out in your mind about it?

**William:** That was my first trip away, I had never been out of California. It was up at Port Townsend, Washington which is on the Strait of Juan de Fuca coming into Puget Sound. It was cold, it was rainy and I was homesick.

At the end of six weeks of training, all of a sudden, they said, “You are all going to New York.” They put us on a train, nothing like the army experience, we all had our own bunks or our state rooms. The train came cross country to Spokane, Minneapolis, Chicago, New York City.

The day we arrived here which was the seventh day of January was one of the most beautiful days I think I’ve ever seen in my life. It had snowed heavily the night before and everything was pure white.

The train brought us into Jersey City, then a tugboat to Hudson and I think the other one was the resolute, picked us all up, 99 of us, and brought us over here. I was enthralled with the beauty of the snow, not ever having been in it before. The boys from the Midwest and East said “Wait till you see it the next day.”

Because everything at that time were all coal burners, the trains, the boats. When we arrived here we had about one month that they didn’t know what to do with us. Out on the, what would I call that? The north side of the island?

**Janet:** Facing Manhattan? Yeah.

**William:** They had boat davits out there and a playing field. We’d go out there in the cold weather just for something to do, we played softball. All we had was one softball and whoever hit it over the fence in the water had to go get it.

**Janet:** Did people have to actually …

**William:** I did that once. Because we’re in dungarees, immediately we would come back in, take a shower and then go to sick bay. A doctor would clean out your nose, your ears, because I think all the sewage went right into the East River and Hudson River at that time.

**Janet:** There were what? About 100 of you?

**William:** Us 100 from Seattle, there was lots of people here from all over. It became a receiving station and this is where they brought all the surf men that were coming in from the West Coast. They were eventually sent down to North Carolina. That way through train our arch rivals the Navy, because the surf men were par excellence.

What we did as time went on, we stood guard duty on British ships at Gravesend Bay while they loaded ammunition, that was the ammunition school they sent us to.

Then we later went aboard the Normandy, which was a highly secret operation. We were sitting alongside the Normandy, I think it was up around near pier 83, Sunday afternoon.

Who should come on the air but Mr. [inaudible 00:06:51] and sent the Coast Guard was seen in Normandy. The Normandy was in good shape till the Navy took it over and then you know what happened.

**Janet:** All the time you were living at Ellis Island?

**William:** We were in the barracks.

**Janet:** What were they like?

**William:** The barracks was over in the old building …

**Janet:** Kitchen laundry building.

**William:** Do you know where the old laundry is?

**Janet:** Mm-hmm (affirmative).

**William:** Back of that as you went down that aisle in around, our mess hall was there in the barrack. After standing guard duty in snow for a while, I did something that you’re always told not to do, I volunteered.

I said, this was no place for a California boy to be doing this. When a yeoman came through one day and says, “Does anybody know how to type?” I put up my hand. He says, “Come with me and get your gear.”

I had a personalized room of my own up there by the administration building. My job was nothing to do all day but make up the liberty list. I did that all through June or July when I was transferred over to work in the captain of the port office at the Battery.

While stationed in the Battery I met somebody that was going to San Francisco and they needed somebody to drive out a panel track. They assigned me the job. In late October I drove this panel track to San Francisco.

**Janet:** Let’s go back first to Ellis Island, tell me what your duties were. The first month nobody knew what to do with you?

**William:** We just played.

**Janet:** Then what happened?

**William:** As they say then we started doing the guard duty. Later we ceased went out and did guard duty on Danish ships that we were all tied up at Gravesend Bay.

After that, then we ceased, which is the picture on the front of the New York Daily news in 1941, that’s when we ceased all the Italian ships which had been scuttled over on New Jersey shore. That was all done, when I got off of all that duty, when they sent me into the office.

**Janet:** Is there any more that you could say for posterity about the enemy aliens and what the Coast Guard’s mission was in relation to them?

**William:** That was just that one time that we had brought in all those, would say were considered enemy aliens. They were all shipped to the Midwest in a POW camp on May 30th 1941. We didn’t have to do anything with them while they were on the island here.

**Janet:** Are there any experiences that you can think of to relate as far as your own personal experience in doing that in …

**William:** It was just curiosity more than anything else that we didn’t have to get involved with them, except when we were out there when they were loading them on tugboats.

The islands when we arrived here were very bleak. As I can still see on the old building there is still the ivy plant on the building. When spring came it became an enjoyable place to be because everything was nice and green.

**Janet:** Did you go off from Ellis Island very often?

**William:** We took every chance we could get. I was very fortunate, I had an aunt who lived at 55th in Park Avenue. They used to kid me as the only one they knew was making $21 a month and living on Park Avenue.

I would stay up there when I didn’t have to come back. I’d come in on the morning and one morning I missed, that’s the only time I was reprimanded in the service. I missed the last boat at eight o’clock, the ferry boat into the island.

**Janet:** I know the feeling. What about the Coast Guard, how did you come to feel about being in the Coast Guard?

**William:** Coast Guard I enjoyed very much. I traveled the entire world. I spent almost a year in New York City here and two years in San Francisco. I was over the entire South Pacific, Australia, New Guinea, the Philippines.

In 1945 we left the Philippines in June came to New York in July. It was like a cruise because coming through the canal, once we cleared, the European war was over. We could smoke on deck and keep the port holes open.

We went to Leghorn in Italy, which is just south of Pisa, to pick up Fifth Army Troops to take them back for the Japanese invasion. The war ended while we were there. We took those troops into Boston.

Then from Boston we went to Kolkata, India and picked up Army Air Corps people and brought them back to New York in October of 1945.

When we were tied up at Hoboken I was regular service. I was approximately the 12th of November, which gave me 10 days of my enlistment left and I asked for 10 days leave en route which the personnel officer on the ship would not give to me.

He transferred me to the Third Naval District. I got in there and I asked for 10 days and they wanted to know who that I thought I was. A lot of people want out, being a yeoman, I could type and that’s what they wanted to discharge people. They transferred me to Ellis Island.

If my memory serves me correct I remember an officer I had in San Francisco that he was in Third Naval District. His name was Commander [Sollenburger 00:13:43], he was in the pay office. I went up to see him and he remembered me. He had given me my first promotion in the service as a petty officer.

I told him my problems. I wanted to go home because in the meantime I was married, I had a child. He said, “You know how it is, between personnel and paying supply.” I said, “Tell me.” He did get my transfer killed, and I got my 10 days leave.

I stayed in New York till the 22nd of November, which at that time I came into Church Street the operation center and I said, “What do I have to do to get out here?” He said, “Do you know anybody?” I said, “Yes.” From Church Street separation center they sent me to Brooklyn for discharge. I was discharged November 27th 1945.

**Janet:** Your rank at that time?

**William:** I was First Class Yeoman, First Class Petty Officer.

**Janet:** What was going on at Ellis Island in 1945 when you were re …

**William:** It was receiving station again, bringing men through from other places.

**Janet:** These are servicemen who were wounded?

**William:** On their way home, not necessarily …

**Janet:** Not necessarily wounded?

**William:** Continually where men would come in from overseas or come in from the West Coast. There they would be assigned out to other places.

**Janet:** I meant to ask you earlier, who was the commander of your unit when you were stationed at Ellis Island?

**William:** I wish I could remember his name, he was a Lieutenant, senior grade, the C.O. He should have been in a much higher rank, but he had had a drinking problem and he had been a flier. His father had been the Commandant of the Coast Guard in Washington DC at one time, which I guess saved his career.

He was out of line at promotion at the present time then. He lived in Staten Island with his family. He was a wonderful man, he was great to all of us, but I don’t remember his name. That’s 54 years ago.

**Janet:** That’s okay. Was there other people that you were friendly with that you kept some connection with afterwards?

**William:** Not when I was stationed here. One man, yes I did, his name was, he was from Long Beach California and I met him the day we signed in the service. His name Sid Paulsen, P-A-U-L-S-E-N. We have to call him [inaudible 00:16:39]. His family were all sea going people.

After the coast guard he went in the Merchant Marine. Then Paulsen made first class and he went through the Normandy invasion on the European side, where I was in the pacific.

We kept in touch until he died 25 years ago. He later became a captain in the Naval Reserve and he was in charge of the naval missile tracking ships. That is the only individual that I ever kept in contact with.

**Janet:** At this point in your life when you look back on your Coast Guard career, how do you view it with hindsight?

**William:** I’m very proud that I was in it. People always called us shallow water sailors, but we did as much as any navy sailor ever did. I have a group, I live in a retirement village, more or less retirement, and there’s about 15 of us that were in the Coast Guard.

When the boys all start reminiscing about World War 2 with the Marines, the Army or the Air Corps, we pretty well stand up and hold our own.

**Janet:** How about when you got out, just briefly what career did you have?

**William:** I was discharged here in Brooklyn. I immediately took the subway, the aisle I guess it was, from south ferry up to Grand Central Station. Where I’m staying right above that right now, the Grand Hyatt.

I went over to buy a ticket and the lady says, “You’ll have to get in the other line.” I said, “Why?” “This is for service men,” she said, “I see you were discharged.” I said, “I’ve been out one hour.” She finally did sell me the service man ticket.

I went home, picked up my wife and child in San Francisco where she was staying with her mother. Went home to Beverly Hills, lived with my parents for almost a year, because of the housing situation.

I went to work, at that particular time, what they called worked in the office of the Biltmore garage in downtown Los Angeles. Then I went back to school at night at UCLA and that lasted about a year with another child on the way.

I finally went into retail sales in 1951 with the Broadway department store and became a buyer with them. Eventually wound up as a store manager. I retired at 63 in 1981. I had a wonderful career.

**Janet:** What is your wife’s name?

**William:** My wife’s name is Berthile, its B-E-R-T-H-I-L-E, her middle name is Eugenie. Her last name was Donavan.

**Janet:** How do you spell Eugenie

**William:** E-U-G-E-N-I-E. The French themselves do not pronounce it that way, but her mother was all French, her father was all Irish. She’s a San Francisco girl.

**Janet:** How about your children, what are their names?

**William:** I have Robert who lives with me, he’s my youngest child. My oldest child Sandy, my middle child Judy, as I say Bob is my youngest. Their ages are 46, 48 and 50.

**Janet:** How does it feel to you coming back to Ellis Island today?

**William:** Very humble. It gives me a funny feeling, I’m a very sentimental person to begin with. I have a hard time at weddings with my grandchildren and even when my kids got married. This place was my first station, out of boot camp.

I’ve talked about it for years, for Christmas, my son and daughter-in-law put this trip together for us. We’re their guests on the whole trip.

**Janet:** That’s beautiful, what a beautiful gift.

**William:** He says, “I knew dad you wanted and I heard you say you didn’t want to go back by yourselves.” He put it all together and we’ve been having a ball.

**Janet:** I think we’ll pause here and we’ll just pause for a second. We are resuming now, David [Cussels 00:21:52] who was an Ex-coast Guard stationed at Ellis Island and who’s been listening to this came in and suggested a few things that we might go back to. One was the actual commander who was here, it seems like he was the son …

**William:** Son of the Coast Guard Commandant.

**Janet:** What was his name?

**William:** I don’t remember his first name, it was Waesche.

**Janet:** How do you spell? W-A …

**William:** It would probably be W-A-E-S-C-H-E. I think that was, being his father was the commandant, that saved his career.

**Janet:** You said he was a very nice person.

**William:** Wonderful man.

**Janet:** Do you remember any experiences in particular where you had any dealings with him while you were here?

**William:** Yes, he gave me a captain’s mast that time I was late getting back and that was the only reprimand.

**Janet:** What does that mean, a captain’s mast?

**William:** That’s the least you can get, then you go from -I forget what the other one is, then a court martial. Captain’s mast is just put in to your personal file for a minor infraction. He was a very understanding individual.

**Janet:** How about the ferry ship and the loading and unloading of individuals that you were involved …

**William:** Most of the people that were riding the ferry ship were employees, US Public Health Service. The hospital was staffed by US Public Health Service. Then there was the Merchant Marine people that came in there for hospitalization.

The employees and of course all of the service men that were stationed on the island. I contracted German measles about a month after I got here. I spent five days over there in the hospital.

**Janet:** What was that like, your hospital experience?

**William:** It was nice, it was very [ostier 00:23:51]. As I said, a lot of people worked on the Island and were back and forth. Now the commanding officer, he lived on Staten Island. I ran a few things for him, that was one of my first experiences between a listed man, commissioned officer and his family. They were very nice to me.

**Janet:** Were their staff living on the hospital islands that you had any contact with?

**William:** That I don’t remember, but looking at all those houses out there, they must have.

**Janet:** I wondered if you as a coast guard had any …

**William:** We never went over there, we had to stay on the north side of the island.

**Janet:** How about the food, the dining facilities?

**William:** It was one large mess hall and alongside of it was all our bunks. That’s when you were assigned to the barracks there, as I told you previously, when I was transferred up to the office I got a private room. That the mess hall and the galley, the kitchen was a large place right down next to it, with communal showers next to that.

I was only assigned duty there once, very luckily. I put all the potatoes into the peeling machine, we didn’t have to do it by hand. I made little [inaudible 00:25:21] out of them. I didn’t have to take the eyes out, and that’s the last time he ever assigned me to mess duty.

**Janet:** Is there anything else you could think of, experiences regarding the food or the … ?

**William:** Overall we ate good, we never had any complaints. That was one of the main reasons I was either going in the Navy or going in the Coast Guard, because you had clean sheets, good food, and it was most of the time, warm barracks. You weren’t in the mud or anything else.

**Janet:** How is this phase of your life?

**William:** I have been retired now 14 years. I have traveled to Hong Kong, I had a daughter and my son-in-law living there for two years. We spent several months there and had a ball.

We have taken three cruises, the Caribbean through the canal. We’ve taken the cruises down of Mexico. I used to live, where I retired from was Ventura, California south of Santa Barbara. We thought we would never live there, because I’d always lived near the water.

We met people that had a place near Palm Springs, but not in the hot weather, it’s a little village called Cherry Valley, incorporated, we have one traffic signal. It’s horse country and orchards.

In the 14 years I’ve lived in the area it’s only grown about 3,000 people. I live in a mobile home village, which I thought I would never do but we enjoy it. I live on the third way ferry way of the golf course, I have my own golf cart. When I want to play golf I just get in my golf cart and go down, it costs me nothing.

**Janet:** I want to say thank you so much for a most interesting story.

**William:** It’s my pleasure.

**Janet:** I’m so happy that we were able to see you today. Now this will be a part of the archives, the Oral History collection of Ellis Island.

**William:** I took pictures of the board out there, because there’s a friend of mine who came through here in 1928 from France, his name is Paul Lare. His listed out there on the plack 249, I took a picture of it so I take back to him.

**Janet:** This is Janet Levine, it’s April 7th 1995. I’m here with William Warren. He was a Coast Guard stationed here for the first seven months of 1941, thank you.