**Paul:** Good morning. This is Paul Seacrest for the National Park Service. Today is Wednesday May 18th, 1994. I’m at the Ellis Island recording studio with two former Coast Guards men who were stationed here at Ellis Island. I’m here with Orville Williams, who was here between June and September of 1943 and I’m here with Chester [unclear 00:00:21] who was here from April of 1944 to August of 1945, and had the distinction of playing in the band here at Ellis Island. Chet why don’t you give me your birth date please?

**Chester:** May 20th 1925.

**Paul:** Happy birthday almost. Orville, what’s your birth date please?

**Orville:** September 6th 1920.

**Paul:** Orville, can you tell me where you were born and a little bit of your background?

**Orville:** They tell me I was born that date, September 6th in Virginia, the lower Northern Neck and in Northumberland County. My mother’s doctor was a [unclear 00:01:10]. His wife was a nurse and she named me. She suggested the name Orville and mother said, “That’s a pretty name and that’s what we’ll call it.” That’s where the name came from. Lower Northern Neck is a chest big bay in the Potomac River intersection.

**Paul:** Orville, can you tell me a little bit about your parent’s background please?

**Orville:** My mother did a little school teaching before she got married. My dad was a waterman; fisherman. That was his livelihood all his life. He was a fish boat captain. The steamer would stay probably a week, leave Reedville and come to Jersey and New York sailing for fish and transport them back to Reedville where they were processed for the oil, especially the oil, and then the body of the fish went into fish scrap which was made into dairy feeds and fertilizers.

He died at an early age; 62. Mother lived to be here about 88. She never re-married. I was one of five children; the third one in line. Oldest brother died quite a few years ago; blood clot. He broke his leg and been in hospital a couple weeks and doing fine and then a blood clot slipped and took his life.

Sister, just younger than I was, was undergoing treatment for cancer, taking chemotherapy. She had been in and had one series of treatment and went home between the treatments. At that time she developed phlebitis and when she went back to hospital she had a blood clot slip and we think that saved her from many years of suffering by taking her life at that time.

**Paul:** Chet may I ask you the same sorts of questions? Where were you born exactly?

**Chester:** I was born in Marysville, Pennsylvania and I was in music all the time. I played violin for a contest with [unclear 00:03:54]. He was a great violinist, played in the Eddie Cantor Show. In second grade I won the Loving Cup for violin and I wanted to be a great violinist like he was. All through high school I was active in the band in the orchestra, baseball and basketball.

**Paul:** While continuing your music and doing athletics?

**Chester:** Yes. Jack Torick, who was in one of the weekly logs, we decided we were going to join the Coast Guard. We joined before we graduated. We went to boot camp together at Manhattan Beach, we were assigned to a ship together, we were in the hospital for the same ailment together, then came to Ellis Island to be re-assigned, and we both heard our names over the PA system and we [unclear 00:05:07] our audition for the band. We both auditioned and both made the Ellis Island Band.

We were about 30 members and most of them before entering the service were with the big dance bands; Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey and so on. I was young, 17, I learnt more than I ever learnt when I went to college and became a music teacher from these men because they were such excellent musicians.

I was stationed here for that length of time and we used to play a lot of band rallies, Tars and Spars with Victor Mature and Cesar Romero. Every Sunday at 4 to 4:30 we would play on WNEW. We had national broadcast and occasionally, about once a month, we played in WOOR and that went nationally.

**Paul:** You might be interested in knowing that Cesar Romero, when he was in the military, was sick in the public health service hospital here at Ellis Island.

**Chester:** I played ping pong with Cesar, a real nice fellow.

**Paul:** When you were here?

**Chester:** Yes, and he was on his tour, he and Mature, with our band.

**Paul:** Can you back up just a little bit? I wanted a little bit of family background on you; your parents, a little bit about them.

**Chester:** My mother was musical; played piano. I don’t think there’s any tune that you could hum that she couldn’t play. My dad was a barber. My mother died at 54 my dad died at 68. I still miss them.

**Paul:** Your friend Jack, how do you spell his last name?

**Chester:** T-O-R-I-C-K. He’s been dead 25 years. He also became a music teacher in New Jersey.

**Paul:** Orville, Chet told us a little bit about how he got into the Coast Guard. Can you do the same for us please?

**Orville:** I was working in Richmond at [unclear 00:07:30] parts department and the manager, I think it was his sister that was on the draft board. When he told me about that and with that connection, I kept in touch with her as to when my number was coming up for the draft. I didn’t want the army by no means. Since I was familiar with the water, I said I’m going not in the Navy but I’m going to take the Coast Guard.

She told my number was about to come up and with that I went to Norfolk, Portsmouth. Lot of the young men from Reedville and that area were going in the Coast Guard at that time so I went down in that and I joined. I was assigned immediately to [unclear 00:08:24] harbor; patrol boat. I don’t understand; I did not have boot camp. I went right aboard onto the boat and one fellow I knew personally before that. All the boats in the area had people from Reedville, Kilmarnock, the town where I’m from.

We stayed there and then I was discharged in November. This was in May or June and discharge is on the 18th of November and re-enlisted the next day. Why? I never could find out. My discharge now gets enlisted November.

**Paul:** Of what year?

**Orville:** Of ‘42. I then signed up for Quartermaster Signal School. It was December 43 that I don’t know how many were here, 35, 40, in the class. Being the small town, Reedville fishing community and dad being a licensed steam boat captain for the Atlantic Ocean or Atlantic Seaboard, meaning to Florida, I wanted that experience. That’s the reason I accepted and took Coast Guard; because of his license that he always had on his dresser when he was at home.

**Paul:** Chet let me ask you, because this was your first Coast Guard station and you went into the Coast Guard and came into Ellis Island?

**Chester:** No, I went to sound school at the US Academy in London.

**Paul:** I was wondering if you can describe for me your first day here. What happened when you arrived here the very first day? What was the procedure to introduce you to the island?

**Chester:** We got off the ferry and I was confused. Torick was with me, the two of us as to… we saw these barracks and we were assigned two beds in the barracks and then we were waiting for assignment to a ship because we had been soundmen. Having a year off because of music we were sent to sound school.

**Paul:** What is sound school exactly?

**Chester:** That was if you were a sound man, and listen to the pings and learning the different pitches of what was a school of fish, what was a submarine and that type of thing. It was a very important job. If you didn’t report it correctly you could have been hit by a submarine missile so it was an important job.

**Paul:** Did you continue doing that work when you were here after school?

**Chester:** No. I was awaiting assignment then I heard over the PA system to report to I forget where it was anymore and then we were auditioned and got into the band.

**Paul:** Do you remember what you played for the audition?

**Chester:** Little bit of live Bumblebee and on the violin I played [unclear 00:12:32]. Both of us, Torick was trombone and violin and I was trumpet and violin so then we had added a string section to the group. Singer was Bob Norman, who was a former big band vocalist and we were both in awe with all the top musicians.

**Paul:** Was your function as the band to provide music for the Coast Guards men who were there?

**Chester:** For dances here. They would bring in ships and girls from USO and this group or that group. We had weekly dances, weekly logs and there was always a comment about the shark shenanigans which was the band. I mentioned a number of times that we were always together. They called me nip and they called Torick tuck; nip and tuck.

We played at numerous places. We played at Radio City, in front of Radio City where the statues are, we’d play there and we’ play at a lot of band rallies. Right before we came on in WNEW there used to be usually a name band, Louis Prima and Duke Ellington.

**Paul:** I’m interested in the fact that you were taken off the island and played it at various functions in New York.

**Chester:** We had what we called band men. They are the ones who would take the equipment off and then there were trucks to take our equipments each week for WNEW. Wherever we were playing they would set up the stands, everything ready, and then when we got there we were ready to play. Many a night I spent on the benches because the last ferry had left before we were able to get back.

**Paul:** Which was like a 10:30 ferry which was quite early.

**Chester:** 11. I believe it’s that time. We played quite a bit. The ship’s dances in the summer were cancelled because it was too hot.

**Paul:** Where did they have the dances here?

**Chester:** It was a large room. I can picture it and I have pictures here of it but I just…. From the location of things here…

**Paul:** Was there a stage in the room?

**Chester:** The band check was in the back facing the drill field. We used to play for drilling and also then trumpet players played to get everybody up in the morning; the rivalry. We used to bring out the prisoners with their head shaved and a big P in the back, and they would stand while we played taps.

**Paul:** Can you talk to me, and maybe both of you can join in on this, about these prisoners? Who were these prisoners?

**Chester:** These prisoners were our own Coast Guards men. They were [unclear 00:16:06] was one of the commands and one fellow threw it out. He was head shaven then they had to carry with their arms folded and had a big P on there. They were in a separate area and then they would come out for the cowards at night to bring down the cowards.

**Orville:** Would that be like seven times in the brig?

**Chester:** Yes.

**Paul:** Was there a brig on the island?

**Chester:** There must have actually been a brig on it. I was never in it though but they were there when we’d play because we, the trumpet players, had assignments that we were certain times, especially if it hit in that weekend, we never really had a weekend off because every Sunday all year long we played on Sunday afternoon. But then you would have that duty Friday or Saturday and Sunday so that after the broadcast you got back in the ferry and came back from play.

Every trumpet player had his certain weekends that we had to be here for those and so a lot of times we didn’t have any time off. During the day we would practise. We had two of our own composers and arrangers. One was [unclear 00:17:34] Zazmar who was also the director, played with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra; an excellent musician.

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

**Chester:** Z-A-Z-M-A-R. I have pictures here of him and the background on him; an excellent musician. We had our own arrangements. They were not the standard arrangements. They were made especially for the Ellis Island Band. I also have two scripts from WNEW broadcast where we would play [unclear 00:18:11] and then bring it down and they would announce every week they had some hero of some type on and he would be interviewed and then we would play numbers in between.

**Paul:** Orville, I want to ask you to describe for me signal master school. What was it that you learnt and what were you doing?

**Orville:** Semaphore.

**Paul:** That’s what you came here to do?

**Orville:** Sent here to learn semaphore and Morse code.

**Paul:** Can you explain to the listeners what semaphore is?

**Orville:** It’s holding two flags, one in each hand, and you have your positions that spell out the alphabet A through to Z. You can go through it very fast, as fast as you can spell a name; you just spell it out, letter by letter.

**Paul:** Still in use by the Coast Guard at this time?

**Orville:** Yes. You would spell out. There was no abbreviation. You didn’t abbreviate like a sonographer would abbreviate when you are talking to her because she didn’t have time to write every word.

**Chester:** This you also got in boot camp but not as intense.

**Paul:** You got the introduction in boot camp and you got the polishing here in the school?

**Orville:** Rightly so.

**Paul:** Can you describe to me what the process was? How did they teach you to do this?

**Orville:** They gave you instructions while you had your positions for each level. You just had to do it by practise. You made your A and you learnt to make the A, and then you learnt to make the B, and then the C and right on down and then you would spell out A-B-C or spell the word, T-H-E or whatever you wanted to spell. You just learnt to practise and you practised spelling your sentence.

**Paul:** Was there a classroom where you learnt this or did you do it outside?

**Orville:** You got classroom instructions yes, and then you did the afternoon on the far dock. One would get on one side and one on the other and you couldn’t hear each other and you had to talk to each other by using your semaphore flags.

**Chester:** That’s where we were practising. We practised all day long and he was practising too.

**Orville:** We were practising and learning to do it. In the classroom we had the Morse code and a little light. Somebody would use a Morse code and you would read it.

**Paul:** How was that done? Was that also done in a classroom or was there a light on a wall somewhere?

**Orville:** There was a light and he would take the light and spell out a paragraph; pick up a book anywhere, open it and give a paragraph and you had to write it out. Once you learn your dots and dashes, every letter had a dot, dash, or a combination of those on your Morse code and soon he graded you.

He would know, the instructor, how you were progressing by how many words did you get out of that paragraph? How many did you miss? Sometimes he’d be going faster than others. He started off slow of course and then progressively increased his speed.

**Paul:** This is war time; was the intention to get you educated enough so they could send you overseas?

**Orville:** To send you aboard ship wherever you may go.

**Paul:** What was harder? Semaphore or Morse code for you?

**Orville:** Both of them. I can’t answer your question because I don’t know. They were both hard but once you get it then it’s very easy. After you get it it just comes natural. We didn’t use semaphore signalling too much aboard ship because you’re too far away and the light was right there. You had big light and you could talk sometimes at night time. If you were around somewhere another ship you could talk to them 25 miles away; put your light on the cloud and the other who you’re talking to would read it off a cloud; ships not in sight of each other. You couldn’t see it straight line but you could talk to him by flashing off of a cloud.

**Paul:** How much time spent during the day was spent on classroom work?

**Orville:** That was 50 years ago you know. I don’t really know. I think the classroom basically was in the morning and then you had lunch and you had a little time off at that time. Maybe we had a couple of hours too in the afternoon classroom. I just can’t say. Then you’d go out, you were restricted though not restricted, but you had nowhere to go. You didn’t have libert, you didn’t go to Manhattan; only on weekends. We stayed here 24 hours a day 5 days a week.

**Paul:** If you didn’t have to play on the band.

**Orville:** I don’t recall there being a band here at that time but it could have been but I don’t remember one.

**Paul:** By chance, the fact that I have you two men together is interesting because it does show that even though the Coast Guard is a small group here on the island, that there are many different facets to the Coast Guard that didn’t necessarily interact. Orville let me ask you one more question. Can you describe where you stayed? What the dormitory looked like?

**Orville:** No, I cannot. I know it was a dormitory room. The bunks were two bunks high but how much time I spent there I can’t answer you. It was a large room.

**Chester:** It was a large room. We were all in this one room.

**Paul:** All the Coast Guards men stayed in one dormitory?

**Orville:** No, this is the class that I was in. We were in one room. The only ones in that room was this class.

**Paul:** Chet, you remember there being everybody in…?

**Chester:** I remember being everyone waiting for re-assignment.

**Paul:** Is that what Ellis Island was? Just a holding tank until you were…?

**Chester:** A receiving station; Ellis Island receiving station.

**Paul:** Or to learn something to then go on.

**Orville:** They had this class, Quartermaster Signalman School.

**Paul:** Chet can you describe for me the dormitory? Just the layout of it?

**Chester:** It was big and we had inspection every Saturday.

**Paul:** What did inspection entail?

**Chester:** They came around and looked around for clean laundry, everything had to be clean. They could drop a coin on there and that coin… and sometimes white glove inspections. So you made sure that your bed was in order. This was done weekly on a Saturday, every Saturday.

**Paul:** How many men would be staying in this one room?

**Chester:** I’d say hundreds in there. It was the biggest room on the island.

**Paul:** For you it was a smaller?

**Orville:** It wasn’t that big, no. Just a class and I don’t know how many were in the class; 25, 30. Our class was in that one room and that was all that was in there. Our instructor had other quarters. He was not in the barracks with us.

**Paul:** Do you remember the name of your instructor?

**Orville:** Instructor was Hebbel, H-E-B-B-E-L Junior and [unclear 00:27:36].

**Paul:** What do you remember about him as a person?

**Orville:** He was very nice. He was a first class quartermaster and then chief quartermaster was… can’t pick him up.

**Paul:** That’s alright. I was just wondering if I could get some sense of the various people that might have stuck out in your mind and certainly an instructor would have been someone that would have stuck out in your mind.

**Orville:** Chief instructor Crockett, C-R-O-C-K-E-T-T. He was very nice but Hebbel, he turned things over to Hebbel quite often and Hebbel was I think first class quartermaster. He was real good.

**Paul:** He was actually leading the classroom time?

**Orville:** Crockett was in charge. He was chief with hash marks.

**Paul:** How many people were in the semaphore class?

**Orville:** Looking at that picture I’d say about 30.

**Paul:** Chet, you obviously wore uniform of some sort. Can you describe it for me what it was like?

**Chester:** We made sure whenever we made public appearances at the [unclear 00:29:39] we always wore white leggings and they had to be spotless. We had hair inspection. Before you played you couldn’t have the hair sticking out very long and that one week in log would ensure that. We had a barber there who was a band boy for the band and he would cut the hair and make sure that it was the length they wanted it.

Also we wore white gloves and even though we were only about 30, everybody played. Unlike the band boy, one of them he was a drum major. They had a duty of some type whenever there was public appearances. They had their work to do; they were either that or they would play an extra set for symbols so that we didn’t have to take one on drummers because it was a small unit.

I remember playing for Governor Dewey around Fifth Avenue. We did quite a few parades and they were long parades. I have pictures at home that I look at every once in a while. Blowing the sound and we got all that few people.

**Paul:** So you were marching while you were playing?

**Chester:** Yes.

**Paul:** Did you practise marching here on the island?

**Chester:** Yes we did.

**Paul:** Where?

**Chester:** Right behind the bench shark there was this large [unclear 00:31:11] and we all took turns playing the bass drum while the drummers played the snare drums. They had the people who were stationed here out marching and then we’d have reviews and it would be in a regular dress uniforms for that. Otherwise we wore the blue shirts and the denim pants around and our hats.

**Paul:** Orville do you remember the use of the drill field at all? Were you ever involved having to go…?

**Orville:** No. We didn’t have drills and I don’t recall having Saturday morning inspections but maybe we did. We were kind of separate from all the rest of the island. We were just here for school.

**Paul:** To learn your stuff and go?

**Orville:** Yes, to learn our stuff and go. About three months we were here.

**Paul:** Let me ask both of you men, and I’ll start with Orville because we’re talking with him, what did you for fun? You went into New York probably upon occasion but what did you do? What was offered?

**Orville:** The first thing when your liberty started Saturday…

**Paul:** At what time?

**Orville:** Around noon or could have been one o’clock, I’m not positive, but catch a ferry and first place was the USO. At the USO they would give us discount tickets for hotels. You had to have a room for the night; that was the first thing. Then they give you discount tickets to various Broadway shows. I thoroughly enjoyed going to Broadway shows.

Then of course you’d stop off the bar room, get a couple of beers and go dancing at night at USO or different places, you meet different people and they’d invite you to, “Oh we’re going so and so tonight” and yes indeed, anybody invites you, you always said yes.

**Paul:** Were you in dress whites?

**Chester:** In dress white.

**Orville:** It was summertime and the dress blues were in the sea bag but we didn’t use those in the summertime. Everything was white.

**Paul:** Most of the Coast Guards men then would stay overnight when they had the weekend leave?

**Orville:** Sure, and come back Sunday night.

**Paul:** You had to arrive by a certain time?

**Orville:** You caught the last ferry.

**Paul:** So you basically had all day Sunday. You didn’t have to be back at like nine o’ clock?

**Orville:** No. You had all day Sunday. You had to be here Monday morning and you had to catch that last ferry. You caught 11, 11:30, whatever time it was to get back.

**Paul:** Were there entertainments of some sort offered on the island for those who chose not to leave the island? Actually you probably had to play for them.

**Chester:** Yes. We played dances.

**Orville:** I don’t recall any. [unclear 00:34:32], I came up with, his home was down near Philly and he went home all weekends, most every weekend.

**Paul:** Were there movies, Orville, here that you recall?

**Orville:** No. We weren’t exposed to it. I don’t recall seeing a movie here.

**Paul:** I’m wondering if even your weekend pass, because you were here with the signal masters school, that even you had a little more liberty than maybe just the general Joe who was here stationed. Is that possible?

**Orville:** We had from noon Saturday to midnight Sunday to do whatever you wanted to.

**Paul:** What about inviting people onto the island, could you do that?

**Orville:** I didn’t know anyone to invite so I wouldn’t. Maybe they could but I wouldn’t know because I have no people in this vicinity. I did have some cousins down in Jersey, Linden, but I didn’t go down to visit them while I was here.

**Paul:** Chet what do you remember about when you had a few free minutes? What did you do for entertainment the time that you were here?

**Chester:** I’d go into the city and get tickets to Grand Central Station a lot for the Paramount which have big bands and a lot of the theatres. We’d go to the movie and see the big bands, or go to the musicals or a show in Broadway. I remember one was May West. It was one of the worst shows I ever saw. We had real good seats because there weren’t too many people. It didn’t last too long.

**Paul:** Was the USO just as important in your experience as it was in Orville’s experience?

**Chester:** That was the first stop.

**Paul:** Can you describe for me what a night at the USO was like?

**Chester:** There was dancing; there were [unclear 00:37:06] here, girls there that you would dance with. They weren’t supposed to date any of them. There were refreshments. It was just to get to be with other people and sometimes they had special shows. I remember Martha Ray one time being at one of the shows and we played a number of big USOs in New York, the whole band.

**Paul:** I think it’s interesting that the USO is functioning to watch over the military too by offering you discount tickets to hotels and things just to keep you out of trouble as best they could. What if a Coast Guards man was picked up for drunkenness? What if there was some misconduct? What would happen?

**Chester:** The SPs they were around all the time. For me I was underage so I didn’t drink at all. Some of the other fellows in the band, after we played, may have had some but…

**Orville:** I didn’t have any problems with drinking but I enjoyed when we went to the bar rooms.

**Paul:** There was no drinking here on the island I assume.

**Orville:** No drinking here but we’d hit the bars and go from bar to bar and have a beer or highballs but we stayed reasonably straight. The SPs didn’t bother you unless you were completely out of line. We found that everywhere you would go. They were human beings just like everybody else.

**Chester:** They were in Times Square and all around the area.

**Orville:** Unless you really had gotten into trouble, they didn’t bother you too much.

**Paul:** Do either of you remember an instance where one of your fellow Coast Guards men got into a lot of trouble?

**Orville:** No.

**Paul:** If they did they would have ended up with their heads shaved out.

**Chester:** If you were in the band you wouldn’t have been in the band anymore, that’s for sure.

**Orville:** Sometimes a couple of them would help each other back to the ship or back to the base or wherever they were going, one leaning on the other, but the Snow Patrol didn’t bother them as long as they could keep moving.

**Paul:** I guess what I was driving at was as a form of punishment, I was wondering if the Coast Guards men would then be forced to do some kind of maintenance work on the island. I’m just wondering what the punishments were.

**Chad:** They had to work to do. We’d see them out repairing things and that type but there was always guards. Even though you’re on the island they couldn’t have got off. They were always separated from the general people who were on the island.

**Paul:** Did either of you gentlemen ever have any experience with coming into this building, the immigration building, where the detainees would have been or any ever seen detainees or any of that kind?

**Chad:** We did not come in here at all.

**Orville:** Didn’t come here and didn’t talk with the immigrants.

**Paul:** Did you see?

**Orville:** We could see them but they were at the fence asking you to come give them a cigarette or do something, but we stayed away from them. We were told don’t try to socialize with the ones on the other side of the fence.

**Chester:** That’s off limits.

**Orville:** That’s off limits. You probably can’t understand their language. They from various countries everywhere and they are here for a purpose just like you are here to do one thing and you do your thing, let them do their thing.

**Paul:** But there was an exterior part of the island that was fenced that you were on one side and they were on the other.

**Chester:** But we had our guards who would patrol across the island on the Coast Guard side.

**Paul:** So there was watch duty here on the island?

**Chester:** Yes. One man who was with us he had a lot of that.

**Orville:** He was in the guard unit.

**Paul:** But neither of you had to do that?

**Chester:** No.

**Paul:** Who were they guarding against?

**Chester:** I’d say I don’t know who wanted to come on because we were in the service already. It was more or less if anybody wanted to try and get off.

**Orville:** And you couldn’t get off unless you got the ferry.

**Chester:** They always checked real well your identification and you pass before you left and before you…

**Orville:** You had to turn it in when you came in and then you had to pick it up to go back out and leave.

**Paul:** So there were check points on either side before you got on the ferry?

**Chester:** But the ferry was always full. I don’t remember it not being full.

**Orville:** Yes, a lot of people rode in the ferry.

**Paul:** Chet can you describe for me what the ferry looked like?

**Chester:** I remember it was huge. It was a big ferry and we came in right to the dock out here and then everybody tried to scramble to get off, wait to get off but going they all wanted to get on there quickly so it was the opposite.

**Paul:** When you got off the ferry did you have to go into the ferry building before you could go to wherever it was you were going?

**Orville:** You went through the building.

**Chester:** They took your pass, it still showed your identification, because anybody could have had that sailor suit, and your picture was on there and they looked at you and they took their time, and then you went back to your business where you were going to go.

**Paul:** Of course being a war time everyone is even more sensitive.

**Orville:** If I recall that ferry, you said it was large. It seemed like to me, it could hold just a couple of vehicles.

**Chester:** I don’t remember vehicles.

**Orville:** I don’t remember vehicles ever being on it but it could have transported vehicles. There were some vehicles here on the island.

**Chester:** But there weren’t enough seats for everyone. I remember you had to stand.

**Orville:** You did a lot of standing but maybe I’m thinking about another ferry.

**Paul:** You mentioned vehicles on the island. What do you recall about them?

**Chester:** It seem like there were like a foreign vehicle for home dirt, or trash or garbage. They would come on to pick up trash to take it back.

**Orville:** I don’t remember any military vehicles.

**Paul:** Do you remember any vehicles at all? Any kind of motorcycle?

**Chester:** With the trash they didn’t bury it here. They had to take it back and it seems like to me that ferry could carry a truck or two.

**Paul:** Where was the ferry landing in Battery Park? Do you remember where it was exactly?

**Orville:** At the end of Manhattan, I don’t know…

**Paul:** Now there’s a large Coast Guard building which would have been built after your tenure in the Coast Guard. I’m just wondering, it’s down by the Staten Island Ferry, if it was in that spot then.

**Orville:** I couldn’t tell you; I don’t know.

**Paul:** Did either of you gentlemen have interaction with the public health service hospital at all?

**Orville:** No.

**Paul:** Do you recall any instance where either you or one of your colleagues needed medical attention?

**Orville:** No. As far as I know, no one in our class had to drop out or leave because of sickness or injury.

**Paul:** I assume you prior had to undergo some kind of a physical examination either before you got here or once you got here.

**Orville:** I don’t recall any.

**Paul:** Do you recall?

**Chester:** You had to have physicals, especially when I was in station here and more or less permanent.

**Paul:** Because you were here for a much longer time so I suppose it would make sense. Neither of you ever went over to the hospital?

**Chester:** I was over then for that.

**Paul:** What do you remember about that experience?

**Chester:** I remember I had a tooth fixed and I have a bridge, and it’s the same one, the original that was done here in the island. The dentists that I’ve been to they marvel the way this was done.

**Paul:** Very interesting; I interviewed a dentist who was here in the 1940s. I wonder if he’s the same man. He’s a real character.

**Chester:** They do; they say what a fine job was done.

**Paul:** Can you remember any of the specifics of the experience? What the room looked like, what the equipment looked like.

**Chester:** I know it was very clean. I remember being apprehensive about having it done and he assured me that this would be a good job and it was because every dentist I’ve gone to have mentioned about this.

**Paul:** That was your only experience over at the public health service area. You were here in the summer. How did you celebrate Fourth of July here? Do you remember? Was there a celebration?

**Orville:** No answer. I don’t remember it.

**Paul:** Were you ever allowed to go over to the Statue of Liberty for any reason or did you go over?

**Orville:** No, I never went over. I could have, go and catch the ferry to it, but I never did. It was right here in sight. I could see the flame every night, just walk outside, but I never went over to the Statue of Liberty.

**Paul:** Chet what about the holidays here? For instance, you were here at a Christmas time, what did they provide for the Coast Guards that you can recall?

**Chester:** If you had the time off, I didn’t one year. I had to here for the taps and the rivalry. That was the reason I had to be here but we played a lot in the summer; Memorial Day, and Fourth of July we had parades and we’d play at various functions. That’s one time we played at Radio City.

**Paul:** But anything here on the island that you can recall that was done as a special treat for the Coast Guards men; either a Christmas party or…

**Chester:** They had special dinner and sometimes they had the dance but not on Christmas day, not on the day itself. During the summer we didn’t have any dances because it was too hot. That’s in the logs here, the weekly log that they had out. They would be resumed again in September because of the heat. There was no air-conditioning. It got hot when you had a big group in there.

**Paul:** When you played for a dance, who came? Were civilians from New York invited to come out to this dance?

**Chester:** No. It was the people who were stationed here plus they brought in the young women.

**Paul:** Where did these women come from? Who were they?

**Chester:** From USOs, church groups, groups of that type. They would come in and I remember we had here one of the Miss Americas. They had different celebrities come in and perform. We would play for some of them and some they had their own band and they did it free of gratis for the troops because here is where a lot of them went into combat, went onto ships, and they left from here for Europe or the East, South.

**Paul:** So this was like the last point before you were shipped out at that time.

**Chester:** That’s where a lot of them left; right from here.

**Orville:** When our class was over of course I went back to Norfolk as well as [unclear 00:51:59] and we were assigned ships. We probably had the orders when we left here what ship we were going on. I didn’t know until I got to Norfolk.

**Paul:** Was there like a little graduation for your class? How did the experience end here at Ellis Island for you?

**Orville:** There was some little exercise and I think some of them received their rating for signalman or quartermaster third class. We were told just a few days before they cut the number that could not graduate but would increase from seaman, whatever you were rated; most of us were seamen, striking quartermaster and second one. There was only about 30% that could or could not; I don’t know which way it went. I went out as a striker. I was still on seaman first class.

**Chester:** Is that $66 a month?

**Orville:** No, 54. Though we went out 66 a month.

**Chester:** 66 and then you went to 78 when you got the strike.

**Orville:** Yes, 78 when you got a major strike.

**Chester:** You really run the way.

**Orville:** Apprenticing was 50, and then 54, and then 66 and then to 78.

**Paul:** How did they pay you? Did they pay you in check?

**Orville:** Aboard ship we’d do it cash.

**Paul:** What about here on the island? Do you remember?

**Chester:** I think we had a paymaster and you went to the paymaster’s office and he wrote $66 to you and you signed off.

**Paul:** Was there a store or something here in the island where you could buy gum or something?

**Chester:** Yes. You’d buy candy bars and chewing gum right near the mess hall.

**Paul:** You could buy candy and cigarettes?

**Chester:** Right. I didn’t smoke but I resented that I had to pick up the butts. We used to have that duty once in a while. I used to resent that.

**Paul:** You mentioned the mess hall and we haven’t even talked about food. What do you remember about food at Ellis Island? I’ll start with Orville. What do you remember about eating here?

**Orville:** I assume it was alright; I survived it, but I really don’t remember. The Coast Guard always fed well, always had a dry, clean place to sleep; I didn’t have to dig a fox hole ever.

**Paul:** It was a comfortable tenure when you were here.

**Orville:** It was a very nice experience; four years of good, healthy living. Food was always good so I had no complaints about the food.

**Paul:** Chet what do you remember about the food and where you were fed and the kinds of things you were fed?

**Chester:** I thought it was good food. You could get as much as you wanted. If you wanted more you could just ask for more.

**Paul:** Who served you the food? Fellow Coast Guards men or was there a staff?

**Chester:** No, fellow Coastguards men. You went through in line as you did on the ship and they had the cooks.

**Paul:** Men are serving you; you’re not coming in contact with any female employees?

**Chester:** No. You did not have real choices. It was this is spaghetti and this is it.

**Orville:** Before I came here I was aboard this 50 footer. It was five of us and I took the job as being cook. I don’t know why but I ordered the food. There was a store up and they delivered it and we paid the bill at the end of the moth. We get our check and [unclear 00:55:49] and we’d pay the grocery store bill. Tonight we’ll have pork chops; okay, order pork chops. Next night we’ll have steak or whatever we’re going to have.

**Paul:** You’re a man of many talents.

**Orville:** I did the cooking there for a while.

**Paul:** Chad, in the few remaining minutes, Orville’s told me about how he got off the island. Can you tell me a little bit the same please?

**Chester:** I was young and I thought I wanted to help win the war so I asked for a transfer onto a ship.

**Paul:** And you’d been here a year and some odd months at that point?

**Chester:** Yes.

**Paul:** Was it sad to leave the island in a way? It had been your home for some while.

**Chester:** It was but as I said I was young; I wanted to see some of the world so I went on the General Hugh L. Scott, the transport.

**Paul:** U.L Scott? is that the name of the ship?

**Chester:** Hugh, H-U-G-H. We carried 5,000 troops. It was 500 crew on it and we go to Europe. We took troops to India, South Pacific, and when the days of war ended I was in Naples. We were going to take members of the army over to the Pacific because the war had been over in Europe and everything ended. We were so surprised. We went to India, Karachi, Calcutta, I was in the South Pacific, I was in Europe so I did get to see quite a bit of the world.

I was also with the chaplains since they knew I played, I had my trumpet and violin and I used to play for the church services. I played at all three; Protestant, Catholic, and Jewish. I’d never seen a Jewish service; I was quite amazed and got to know it.

After the service I corresponded with two of the chaplains so every Sunday I used to have a musical solo at one of the service and then the Jewish, of course they have theirs on a different day, I used to play either before or after with that one.

**Paul:** I want to thank you both. This has been very interesting and it was a good combination; two very different sides of the same story. This is Paul Seacrest signing off with Orville Williams and Chet [unclear 00:58:48] on Wednesday, May 18th 1994 here at the Ellis Island Museum. Gentlemen, thank you.

**Orville:** It’s been a pleasure.