

EI-475

CHESTER (CHET) ACALEY AND ORVILLE WILLIAMS

BIRTHDATE: MAY 20, 1925 AND SEPTEMBER 6, 1920

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INTERVIEWER: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR.

RECORDING ENGINEER: KEVIN DALEY

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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: JOHN MURIELLO, 3/1996

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COAST GUARDS AT ELLIS ISLAND

ACALEY: 1944-1945

WILLIAMS: 1943

SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Wednesday, May 18th, 1994. I'm at the Ellis Island Recording Studio with two former Coast Guardsmen 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 Acaley who was here from April of 1944 to August of 1945, and had the distinction of playing in the band here at Ellis Island. Anyway, gentlemen, welcome. Can we begin, Chet, why don't you give me your birth date, please.

ACALEY: May 20th, 1925.

SIGRIST: Well, happy birthday, almost.

ACALEY: Thank you.

SIGRIST: Orville?

WILLIAMS: Yes?

SIGRIST: What's your birth date, please?

WILLIAMS: September the 6th, 1920.

SIGRIST: And Orville, can you just tell me where you were born and a little bit about your background?

WILLIAMS: Yes. 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 Dr. Hudnell, and 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 him. So that's where the name came from. Lower northern neck is Chesapeake Bay and Potomac River. Intersection.

SIGRIST: Chet, can I, not Chet, Orville, while I'm still talking to you, can you tell me a little bit about

your parent's background, please?

WILLIAMS: My mother did a little school teaching before she was married. My dad was a waterman, fisherman, and that was his livelihood all his life. He was a, a fish boat captain. The steamer would stay out probably a week, leave Reedville and come to Jersey and New York Sound for fish, and transport them back to Reedville where they were processed for the, the oil, especially the oil. And then the body of the fish went into fish scrap which was made into dairy feeds and fertilizers, things like of that sort. But he died early age, sixty-two. My mother lived to be about eighty-eight. She never remarried. It was, I was one of five children, third one in line. Oldest brother died some, quite a few years ago. Blood clot. Broke his leg and been in the hospital couple weeks, and doing fine, and then blood clot slipped and took his life. A sister just younger than I was was undergoing treatment for cancer, taking a cure, chemotherapy. And she had been in and had one series of treatments and went home between the treatments, and at that time she developed phlebitis. And when she went back to the 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.

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

ACALEY: I was born in Minersville, Pennsylvania. And I was in music all the time. I played violin for a contest with Rubinoff. I don't know if you remember Rubinoff. He was a great violinist. Played on the Eddie Canter Show. And...

SIGRIST: You might want to put your papers down, because it'll pick, it'll pick it up on the mic.

ACALEY: In second grade, second grade I won the Loving Cup for Violin, and I wanted to be a great violinist like he was. And then all through high school I was active in the band and the orchestra, baseball and basketball. And...

SIGRIST: While continuing your music and doing the athletics?

ACALEY: Yes. And then Jack Torick who is in one of the weekly

logs, we decided we were going to join the Coast Guard. And we joined before we graduated. We went to boot camp together at Manhattan Beach. We were assigned to a, a ship together, we were in the hospital for the same ailment together, we then came to Ellis Island to be reassigned, and we both heard our names over the P.A. system and we were asked to audition for the band. So we both auditioned and both made the Ellis Island Band. And there were about thirty members. Most of them were, before entering the service, were with the big dance bands. Tommy Dorsey, Jimmy Dorsey and so on. I was young, seventeen. I learned more than I ever learned when I went to college and became a music teacher, from these men because they were such excellent musicians. And I was stioned here for that length of time. And we used to play a lot of bond rallies, Tars and Spars, we were wih Victor Mature and Caesar Romero. And every Sunday at four to four-thirty we would play on WNEW. Every Sunday. And then we had national broadcasts, and occasionally, about once a month we played in WOR, and that went nationally.

SIGRIST: You might interested in knowing this. Caesar

Romero, when he was in the, in the military was sick in the, in the public health service hospital here at Ellis Island.

ACALEY: Yeah. I played ping pong with Caesar. A real nice fellow.

SIGRIST: When he, when you were here?

ACALEY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Yeah?

ACALEY: And he was on his tour, he and Mature, with our band.

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

ACALEY: Well, my mother was musical, played piano. I don't think there's any tune that she could hum that you couldn't play. My dad was a barber. My mother died at fifty-four and my dad died at sixty-eight. I still miss them.

SIGRIST: And your friend Jack, how do you spell his last name?

ACALEY: T-O-R-I-C-K. He's been dead twenty, twenty-five years. He also became a music teacher in New Jersey.

SIGRIST: That's interesting. Orville, Chet told us a little bit about how he got into the Coast Guard. Can you do the same for us, please.

WILLIAMS: Yes. I was working in Richmond at General Motors parts department, and the manager, I think it was his sister that was on the draft board. And so 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. And I didn't want the army by no means. And 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. And she told me my number was about to come up. And with that I went to Norfolk, Portsmouth. And a lot of the men, young men from Reedville, that area, were going in the Coast Guard at that time, so I went down, and that's when I joined. And I was assigned immediately to a fifty foot harbor patrol

boat. And I don't understand, I didn't get, did not have boot camp. Went right aboard the boat. And a couple of, one fellow I knew personally before that, and all the boats in the area were, had people from Reedville, Kilmarnock, the town where I was from. And so we stayed there. And then I was discharged in November. This was in May or June, and discharged on the 18th I think of November, and reenlisted the next day. Why I never could find out. I don't know. But anyway my discharge now gives enlisted November.

SIGRIST: What year?

WILLIAMS: '42.

SIGRIST: '42.

WILLIAMS: And so I then signed up for this quarter master signaling school. And it was the summer of '43 that I don't know how many were here, thirty-five, forty, in the class. And being the, the small town, Reedville, a fishing community, Dad being a, a licensed steamboat captain for the Atlantic Ocean, Atlantic Seaboard, Maine to Florida, I, I wanted that experience. So

that's the reason I accepted, took the Coast Guard, really, because of his license that he always had on his dresser when he was at home.

SIGRIST: Chet, let me ask you, because this was your first Coast Guard station, I mean, you, you went into the Coast Guard and came to, to Ellis Island? Am I to understand that correctly?

ACALEY: No, I went to sound school at the Academy, U.S....

SIGRIST: I see, and then from there...

ACALEY: Academy in New London.

SIGRIST: ...came here.

ACALEY: Yeah. I was assigned at...

SIGRIST: I was wondering if you can describe for me your first day here. What, what happened when you arrived here the very first day? What was the procedure to, to introduce you to the island and that sort of thing?

ACALEY: Well (chuckle), we got off the ferry and I was sort of confused. Torick was with me, the two of us, as to, we saw these barracks, and we were assigned to, to beds in the barracks. And then we were waiting for assignment to a ship because we had been soundmen. Having a year of, because of music, we were sent to sound school.

SIGRIST: What is sound school exactly?

ACALEY: That was, 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 thing. It was a very important job. If you didn't report it correctly you could have been hit by a, a submarine missile. So it was an important job.

SIGRIST: Did you continue doing that work when you were here...

ACALEY: No.

SIGRIST: ...after school? No.

ACALEY: No. I was awaiting assignment. And then I heard

about the, over the P.A. system to report to, I forget where it was anymore, and, and then we were auditioned, got into the band.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what you played for the audition?

ACALEY: A little bit of "Flight of the Bumblebee," I remember that. And I played, on the violin I played "Czardas." And then both of us, Torick was trombone, and I was trumpet and violin, and he was trombone and violin. So then we had added a string section to the group. The singer was Bob Norman who was a former big band vocalist and that was it. We were both in awe with all the musicians, the top musicians.

SIGRIST: Was your function as the band to provide music for the Coast Guardsmen who were here...

ACALEY: For, for dances here. They would bring in ships and, and girls from U.S.O., and from this group or that group, and we had weekly dances. We had weekly logs that I have a number of copies here. There was always a column in about the Shack Shenanigans, which was the band. And I mentioned a number of times in there, we

were always together. They called me "Nip" and they called Torick "Tuck." Nip and Tuck. And it's mentioned in these. (referring to 1940's Ellis Island Coast Guard newsletters) Then we played numerous parades. We played at Radio City. In front of Radio City, you know, where the statues and so on are. We played there, and we played a lot of bond rallies. And with, right before we came on in WNEW there used to be usually a name band. Louis Prima was quite a bit. So we got to know them. Duke Ellington.

SIGRIST: I'm, I'm interested in the fact that you were taken off the island and, and played at, at various functions...

ACALEY: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: ...in New York that sort of thing.

ACALEY: Yeah. We had what we called bandmen. They were the ones who would take the equipment off. And then there were trucks to take our equipment in each week for WNEW or wherever we were playing. They would set up the stands, have 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.

SIGRIST: I'm sure it was like a ten-thirty ferry or something.
It was quite...

ACALEY: Generally it was eleven, actually.

SIGRIST: Eleven.

ACALEY: I believe at that time. But we played quite, quite a bit. The ship's dances in the summer were, were canceled because it was too hot were we had to dance.

SIGRIST: Where did they have the dances here?

ACALEY: There was a large room off of a, I can picture it, and I have pictures here of it, but I just, from the location of things here...

SIGRIST: Was there a stage in the room, or...

ACALEY: ...I knew where I was from the, the band shack was in

the back and facing the drill field. And we used to play for drilling, and also then the trumpet players played for, to get everybody up in the morning in reveille. And then they used to bring out the prisoners with their head's shaved and a big "P" in the back, and they would stand while we played taps.

SIGRIST: Can you talk to me, and maybe both of you can join on this, about the prisoners? Who were these prisoners? No? Chet, do you know...

ACALEY: They were our own, these prisoners were our own Coast Guardsmen. And they were smart a alecs like when, "throw out your oars" was one of the commands, and they, one fellow threw it out. Now he was head shaven, and they had to carry with their arms folded and had a big "P" on. And they were, they were separated (unintelligible) and would come out for the colors at night, to bring down the colors.

WILLIAMS: Would that be like serving time in the brig?

ACALEY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was there a brig on the island?

ACALEY: That's the same thing.

WILLIAMS: That was, that was the brig.

SIGRIST: Was there an actual jail on the island?

ACALEY: ...there must have actually been, you know...

WILLIAMS: Yeah.

ACALEY: ...a brig on it. I was never in it. (they laugh)
But they were there when we played, because we, the trumpet players had assignments that we were, certain times that, especially if it hit on that weekend. We never 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 on the ferry and came back and played. And every trumpet player had his certain weekends, you know, that we, we had to be here for those things. So a lot of times you didn't have any time off.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Sounds like...

ACALEY: A there was a lot of...

SIGRIST: ...you had been pretty busy.

ACALEY: ...day, during the day we would practice. We had two of our own composers and arrangers. One was Arty Zazmar who was also the director, played with the Metropolitan Opera Orchestra and an excellent musician

SIGRIST: Can you spell Zazmar, please?

ACALEY: Z-A-Z-M-A-R. I have pictures here of him. And a background on him. And an excellent musician. But we had our own arrangements. They were not the standard arrangements. They were made especially for the Ellis Island band. I also had the scripts, two scripts from WNEW broadcasts, and where we would play (bum bum ba baba ba bum --he sings a theme), and then bring it down, and they would announce, every week they had some hero of some type on. And they would, he would be interviewed. And then we would play numbers in

between...

SIGRIST: Ah. That's really interesting.

ACALEY: ...for a half hour.

SIGRIST: We'll have to take a look at those...

ACALEY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...after the interview's over. Orville, I want to ask you to describe for me signal master school. What was it that you learned, and what, what were you doing?

WILLIAMS: Oh. Semaphore.

SIGRIST: And that's what you came here to do...

WILLIAMS: That's what...

SIGRIST: ...this is what they sent you here...

WILLIAMS: ...sent here to learn semaphore and Morse Code.

SIGRIST: Can you explain to the listeners what semaphore is?

WILLIAMS: It's holding two flags, one in each hand. And you have your positions that spell out the alphabet, A through Z. And you can go through it very fast, just as fast as you can spell a, a name, you just spell it out letter by letter.

SIGRIST: And it's still in use by the Coast Guard at this time?

WILLIAMS: Yes. And you would spell out, you, there was no abbreviation. You didn't abbreviate like a, a stenographer would abbreviate when you were talking to her, because she didn't have time to write it all, every word. But it...

ACALEY: This you also got in boot camp.

SIGRIST: You're talk...

ACALEY: But not, not as intense.

SIGRIST: You sort of got the introduction in boot camp, and then you got the...

WILLIAMS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...the polishing here in the school.

WILLIAMS: Yes. Probably so. Probably so.

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

WILLIAMS: They gave you instructions what, well, you had your, your positions for each letter. And you just had to do it by practice. You made your A, and you learned to make the A. And then you learned 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. And you just learned to practice, practice spelling your sentence.

SIGRIST: Was there a classroom where you learned this, or did you do it outside?

WILLIAMS: You, you got in, classroom instructions, yes. And then you did, the afternoons get out on the ferry

dock. And one would get on one side and one on the other, and you couldn't hear each other, and you had to talk, you talked to each other by using your semaphore flags.

ACALEY: That's while we were practicing. We practiced all day long. And he was practicing, too.

WILLIAMS: We were practicing, learning to, to do it. And then in the classroom you, we had the Morse Code and a little light. And somebody would use the Morse Code and you would read it.

SIGRIST: Now how, how was that done? Was that also done in a classroom? Was there a light on the wall somewhere?

WILLIAMS: There was a light, yes. And he would take, take the light and, and spell out a paragraph. Pick up a book anywhere, open it, and give a paragraph. And you had to write it, write it out. And then once you learned your dots and dashes -- every, every letter had a dot, dash or combination of those, your Morse Code, and then soon he graded you. He, he would know, the instructor, how you were progressing by how many let,

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 progressed, increased his speed, because...

SIGRIST: Well, and of course, this is war time. Was the intention to get you educated enough so that could send you overseas?

WILLIAMS: To, to send you aboard ship wherever you may go. That's correct. That you...

SIGRIST: What was harder, semaphore or Morse Code for you?

WILLIAMS: Both of them.

SIGRIST: It's tricky. You have to think of a lot...

WILLIAMS: Both of them. I, 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. And we didn't use the semaphore signalling too much aboard ship, because you were too far away, the light was right there, you had big

lights. And you could talk, sometimes at night time if you were around somewhere another ship you could talk to him twenty-five miles away. Put your light on the cloud. And, and he, the other who you were talking to would read it off of the cloud. The ship's not in sight of each other. You couldn't see it straight line, but you could, you could talk to him by flashing off of a cloud.

SIGRIST: How much time spent during the day was spent on classroom work.

WILLIAMS: Gee, that was fifty years ago, you know.

SIGRIST: Oh, you'll remember.

WILLIAMS: (he laughs) I don't really know, but...

SIGRIST: Well, was it half your day, was it like one full day...

WILLIAMS: It was, it was, 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,

hour or two in the afternoon, classroom. I, I just can't say. And then you'd go out and, you were restricted, not restricted, but you had nowhere to go. You didn't have liberty. You didn't go to Manhattan. Only on weekends. We stayed here twenty-four hours a day, five days a week.

SIGRIST: If you didn't have to play in the band.

WILLIAMS: If you didn't...(they laugh)...well, I don't recall there being a band here at that time, but it could have been, but I don't remember one.

SIGRIST: Well, I think that...

ACALEY: He was different.

WILLIAMS: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...by chance, you know, the fact that I have you two men together today is interesting, because it goes to 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.

ACALEY: That's right.

SIGRIST: Orville, let me ask you one more question. Can you describe where you stayed, what, what the dormitory looked like...

WILLIAMS: No. I cannot.

SIGRIST: No.

WILLIAMS: I know it was a dormitory room. The bunks were two, two bunks high. But how much time I spent there I, I can't answer you. I don't...

ACALEY: It was a large room.

WILLIAMS: It was a large room...

ACALEY: A large room.

WILLIAMS: We were all in this one room.

ACALEY: One room.

SIGRIST: All the Coast Guardsmen stayed in one dormitory room?

ACALEY: No.

WILLIAMS: No. This is the class that I was in.

SIGRIST: This...

WILLIAMS: We were in one room. That was the only ones in that room was this class. And...

SIGRIST: And Chet, you remember there being everybody in...

ACALEY: I remember being, everyone waiting for reassignment, war assignment.

SIGRIST: Is that what Ellis Island really was, sort of just a holding tank until you were...

ACALEY: It was the receiving, receiving station. Ellis Island Receiving Station.

SIGRIST: Or to learn something...

WILLIAMS: They had this...

SIGRIST: ...to then go on...

WILLIAMS: They had this class, quarter master signalman school.

SIGRIST: Chet, can you describe for me the dormitory, just sort of maybe the layout of it and, and...

ACALEY: Oh, it was big, and we had inspection every Saturday...

SIGRIST: What did inspection entail?

ACALEY: They came around, looked for your, looked for clean laundry. Everything had to be clean and...

WILLIAMS: In place.

ACALEY: ...you had to be, they could drop a coin on there and that, coin, and, and sometimes white glove inspections. So you made sure that your bed was in

order.

SIGRIST: How...

ACALEY: This was done weekly on a Saturday. Every Saturday.

SIGRIST: And how many men would be staying in this one room do you think?

ACALEY: Oh, I'd say hundreds in that. It was the biggest room on the island.

SIGRIST: And for you it was a smaller room that you were...

WILLIAMS: It wasn't that big. No. Just the class, and I don't know how many was in the class. Twenty-five, thirty. And our class was in that one room. And that was all that was in that, in there.

ACALEY: That was separate from...

WILLIAMS: Our instructor...

ACALEY: ...the main barracks.

WILLIAMS: Our instructor was, had other quarters. He was not in the barracks with us.

SIGRIST: Do you remember the name of the, of your instructor? Going to look it up on the...

WILLIAMS: The instructor was, just a second. I'll see if I can find him here. (he looks over a photograph) Hebbel. H-E-B-B-E-L, Junior. Initials C.E.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about him as a person?

WILLIAMS: He was very nice. He was a first class, I don't know whether he was a signalman or quarter master. I believe he was quarter master. And then chief quarter master was, oh, if I can his name.

SIGRIST: Mr. Williams is looking on a photograph, I'm just going to say for the sake of the tape. (Mr. Williams laughs) (pause)

WILLIAMS: Oh, I can't pick him up.

SIGRIST: Well, that's all right. 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...

WILLIAMS: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...would have been someone that would have stuck out in your mind.

WILLIAMS: Well, I should, should be able to give it to, and I'll see it here in a minute, but I can't, Chief Instructor Crockett. C-R-O-C-K-E-T-T. And he was, he was very nice. But Hebbel, he turned things over to Hebbel quite often. And Hebbel was I think first class quarter master. And he was, he was real good.

SIGRIST: And eh was actually leading the classroom time?

WILLIAMS: But Crockett in charge. And he was chief with hash marks.

SIGRIST: How, how many people were in the, this, the semaphore class, do you think?

WILLIAMS: I, I...

SIGRIST: Thirty did you say?

WILLIAMS: Just looking at, looking at that picture I'd say about
thirty.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: But...

SIGRIST: We're going to pause just for a second so that Kevin
can flip over all the tapes. And then we'll begin on
side two, and I have lots more questions to ask you,
so hang on just a second.

WILLIAMS: Okay.

END OF SIDE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO

SIGRIST: All right. We're beginning side two with Orville Williams and Chet Acaley. Chet, you obviously wore a uniform of some sort.

ACALEY: That's right.

SIGRIST: And could you describe it for me, what it was like?

ACALEY: Well, we made sure whenever we made public appearances that the hat was squared. We always wore leggings, the white leggings, and they had to be spotless. We had hair inspection before we played. You couldn't have hair sticking out real long. And that one week, that horrible show (chuckles) show that, we had a barber there who was a band boy for the band, and he would cut the, cut the hair, make sure that it was the length they wanted it. And also we wore white gloves, and even though we were only around thirty everybody played. They really, and like the band boy, one of them, he was the drum major. He would, they all a duty of some type whenever it was public appearances. And they had their work to do. They were either the vet, or they would play an extra set of, for cymbals,

so that we didn't have to take one of the drummers, because it was a small unit. I remember playing for Governor Dewey down on Fifth Avenue. We did quite a few parades. And they were, they were long parades. I have pictures at home that I look at every once in a (laughs) while, and think, boy the sound that we got out of that few people.

SIGRIST: So you were marching while you playing?

ACALEY: Oh, yeah, we, oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you, did you practice marching here on the island?

ACALEY: Yes, we did.

SIGRIST: Where, where was, what was the marching band...

ACALEY: Right behind the band shack there was this large drill field. And we all took turns playing the bass drum while the drummers played the snare drums. And they had, the people who were stationed here out marching. And then we'd have, occasionally we'd have reviews. And they would be in their regular dress uniforms for

that. Otherwise we wore the blue shirts and the denim pants around, and our hats.

SIGRIST: Orville, do you, do you remember the use of the drill field at all? Were you ever involved...

WILLIAMS: No.

SIGRIST: ...having to go...

WILLIAMS: No, we...

SIGRIST: ...because there really...

WILLIAMS: ...we didn't have drills.

SIGRIST: You didn't have any kind of...

WILLIAMS: No. No drills. And I don't recall that we have, having Saturday morning inspections. But maybe we did. We were kind of different...

SIGRIST: Separate?

WILLIAMS: ...separate from all the rest of the island. We were just here for...

ACALEY: School.

WILLIAMS: ...classroom, school.

SIGRIST: To learn your stuff and go.

WILLIAMS: Yeah. Learn our stuff and go, and, about three months we were here.

SIGRIST: Let me ask both of you men, and I'll start with Orville since we're talking with him, what did you do for fun? Now, you went into New York probably upon occasion. But what did you do? What was, what was offered...

WILLIAMS: Well, the first thing, when, when your liberty started Saturday, around...

SIGRIST: At what time?

WILLIAMS: ...around noon, or could have been one o'clock. I'm

not positive. But the, catch the ferry, and the first place was the U.S.O. At the U.S.O. they would give us discount tickets for hotels. You had to have a room for the night. That was the first thing. And then they'd give you discount tickets, tickets to various Broadway shows. I thoroughly enjoyed going to Broadway shows. And then, of course, you'd stop off at the bar room, get a couple of beers, and go dancing at night, U.S.O. or different places. You'd meet different people and they'd invite you to, "Oh, we're going so and so tonight." "Yes, indeed." Anybody invite you, you always said yes.

SIGRIST: Now were you in, in dress whites or some kind of...

WILLIAMS: In, in, in our whites.

ACALEY: In dress...

WILLIAMS: Dress whites, yes. It was summertime. And I guess the dress blues were in the, in the seabag, but we didn't use those in the summertime.

SIGRIST: So...

WILLIAMS: Everything was white.

SIGRIST: ...most of the Coast Guardsmen then would stay overnight when they had weekend leave.

WILLIAMS: Saturday night. And come back Sunday night.

SIGRIST: And when you, you had to arrive by a certain time?

WILLIAMS: Well, you caught the last ferry.

SIGRIST: Oh, so you basically had all day Sunday...

WILLIAMS: All day Sunday.

SIGRIST: ...you didn't have be back at like five o'clock or something.

WILLIAMS: No. No, we had all day Sunday. You had to be here Monday morning, and you had to catch that last ferry. You caught, eleven, eleven-thirty, whatever time it was, to get back.

SIGRIST: Now 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.
(he laughs)

ACALEY: Yeah, we played dances, and...

WILLIAMS: I don't recall any.

SIGRIST: You don't recall...

WILLIAMS: I don't recall any. Our class, everybody, now Bob Owles that I came up with, his home was down near Philly [sic], and he went home on weekends, most every weekend. And I'll go into that later.

SIGRIST: Were there movies, Orville, here that you recall or...

WILLIAMS: No.

SIGRIST: ...anything like that.

WILLIAMS: Not that I know.

ACALEY: Yes.

WILLIAMS: Maybe, not, we weren't exposed to it. I don't recall seeing a movie here.

SIGRIST: I'm wondering if, 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?

WILLIAMS: Oh...

SIGRIST: Since it seems that you were somewhat separated...

WILLIAMS: We, we, we had from, from noon, say noon Saturday until midnight Sunday...

SIGRIST: Do what you want?

WILLIAMS: ...go anywhere, do whatever you wanted to.

SIGRIST: What about inviting people on to the island? Could you do that?

WILLIAMS: Well, I didn't know anyone to invite.

SIGRIST: I see.

WILLIAMS: So I wouldn't. Maybe they couldn't, but I wouldn't know, because I have no people in this vicinity.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: Now I did have some cousins down in Jersey. Linden. But I didn't go down to visit them while I was here that I recall.

SIGRIST: Chet, what do you remember about, about when you had a few free minutes, what did you do for entertainment in the time that you were here?

ACALEY: Well, I'd go in, into the city and get tickets at Grand Central Station a lot, for the Paramount, which had big bands, and a lot of the theatres. Strand, they all had big bands. We'd go to the, go to the movie and see the big bands, or go to musicals, or a show on Broadway. I remember one was Mae West. It was one of the worst shows I ever saw. (they laugh)

And we had real good seats because there weren't too many people, you know. Didn't last too long. But that type of the thing. And then U.S.O.

SIGRIST: Was the U.S.O. just as important...

ACALEY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...in your experience as it, as it was in Orville's experience.

WILLIAMS: That was the first stop.

SIGRIST: Can you both, and you both can chime in with, can you describe for me what, what a night at the U.S.O. was like?

ACALEY: Well, it was dancing. There were volunteer girls there that we would dance with. They weren't supposed to, I don't think, date any of them.

WILLIAMS: Hmm-hmm.

ACALEY: And there were refreshments. And it was just to get,

to be with other people. And sometimes there's special shows, you know. They had, I remember Martha Raye one time being at one of the shows. And we played a number of big U.S.O.'s in, in New York. The whole band. The dance band played for that.

SIGRIST: I think it's interesting that the U.S.O. is sort of functioning to watch over the military, too, by offering you discount tickets to hotels and things, to kind of keep you out of trouble as best they could. That's an interesting part of all this. What, what if a sailor was picked up for drunkenness. A sailor or Coast Guardsman, someone in New York. What if there was some misconduct? What, what would happen?

WILLIAMS: I don't know. I don't know.

ACALEY: Well, there were the S.P.'s. They were around...

WILLIAMS: S.P's were everywhere.

ACALEY: ...all the time. And for me I was un, underage, so I didn't drink at all. Some of the other fellows in the band after, you know, we played may have some, but

my...

WILLIAMS: I didn't have any problem with drinking. But I enjoyed, went to the bar rooms, but...

SIGRIST: There was no drinking here on the island, I assume.

WILLIAMS: Oh, no. No.

ACALEY: No.

WILLIAMS: No drinking here. But we, we hit the bars and go from bar to bar...

ACALEY: Coca-cola. That was it. (he laughs)

WILLIAMS: ...and, and have, have a beer, highballs, but always stayed reasonably straight. And the S.P.'s didn't bother, bother you unless you were completely out of line. That, we found that everywhere you would go. They were, they were human beings just like everybody else.

ACALEY: They were at Times Square and...

WILLIAMS: And...

ACALEY: ...all around the area.

WILLIAMS: ...unless you were really about to get into trouble,
or had gotten into trouble they didn't bother you too,
too much.

SIGRIST: Do either of you remember an instance where one of
your fellow Coast Guardsmen got into a lot of trouble?

ACALEY: Hmm-mm.

WILLIAMS: No.

SIGRIST: No.

WILLIAMS: No. No.

SIGRIST: If they did they would have ended with their head's
shaved out...

ACALEY: If you were in the band you wouldn't have been in the

band anymore. That's for sure.

WILLIAMS: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...on the drill field.

WILLIAMS: Sometimes a couple of them would help each other back to the ship or back to base wherever they were going, one leaning on the other. But the shore patrol didn't, didn't bother them as long as they could keep moving.

SIGRIST: I guess what I was driving at was if as a forms of, as a form of punishment, I was wondering if the Coast Guardsmen would be forced to do some kind of maintenance work on the island or, you know, some kind, I'm just wondering what the punishments were.

ACALEY: They had, they had work to do. Like they, we'd see them out repairing things, and that type. But there was always guards. Even though you were on the island and couldn't have got off, they were, they were always separated from...

WILLIAMS: Hmm-hmm.

ACALEY: ...separated from the general people who were on the island.

SIGRIST: Did either of you gentlemen have any experience with coming into this building, the immigration building, the main building, where, where people, the detainees would have been, or any, or seen detainees, or any of that kind of...

ACALEY: We did not...

WILLIAMS: No.

ACALEY: ...come in here at all.

WILLIAMS: Did, didn't come in and...

ACALEY: No.

WILLIAMS: ...didn't, didn't discuss, talk with the immigrants.

SIGRIST: Did you see, I mean, could you...

WILLIAMS: We could see them, but we didn't go, 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. You probably...

ACALEY: That's off limits.

WILLIAMS: That's off limits. You probably can't understand them, their language, their, their various countries everywhere. And they're here for a purpose just like you're here to do one thing. And you do your thing, let them do their thing.

SIGRIST: But there was, there was an exterior part of the island that was fenced that...

WILLIAMS: That's correct.

SIGRIST: ...you were one side and they were on the other?

WILLIAMS: And they were on the other. That's correct.

ACALEY: But we had our guards who would patrol around the island on the Coast Guard side.

SIGRIST: Oh, so there was...

ACALEY: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...watch duty here on the island?

WILLIAMS: Oh, yes. Yes.

ACALEY: One man that's with us, he had a, a lot of that. He was more or less one of, that was...

WILLIAMS: He was, he was in the guard duty unit.

ACALEY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: But neither of you had to, to do that?

ACALEY: No.

WILLIAMS: No.

SIGRIST: What were they guarding against?

WILLIAMS: (he laughs) Who knows?

ACALEY: Well, a I said I don't know who wanted to come on, because we were in the service already. It was more or less, I guess if anyone wanted to try and get off.

WILLIAMS: And you couldn't get off unless you caught the ferry.
(he laughs)

ACALEY: Yeah. And they always checked real, real well your identification and your pass.

WILLIAMS: Your I.D. card.

ACALEY: And your pass before you left and before you...

WILLIAMS: Well, you turned, turned it in when you came in...

ACALEY: Turned it in. Right.

WILLIAMS: ...and then you had to pick it up in order to go back out.

SIGRIST: So there were checkpoints on either side...

ACALEY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...before you got on the ferry?

ACALEY: But the ferries were all, and the ferry was always full.

WILLIAMS: Yeah.

ACALEY: I don't remember it...

WILLIAMS: Yeah, it was always...

ACALEY: ...not being...

WILLIAMS: ...a lot of people riding the ferry.

SIGRIST: Can you, can you describe for me, I'll ask Chet, can you describe for me what the ferry looked like?

ACALEY: All I remember it was huge. (he laughs) It was a

big, big ferry, and we came in, right to this, 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. (he laughs) So it was just the opposite, but that's what I remember.

SIGRIST: Now 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...

ACALEY: Yes.

SIGRIST: ...or just...

ACALEY: No.

WILLIAMS: You went through the building. You went through the building.

ACALEY: No, you had to, they took your pass, you still showed your identification, because anybody could have had that sailor suit. So you still showed you, and your picture was on there, and they looked at you, and they took their time. And then you went about your

business where you were, where you were going.

SIGRIST: Well, of course, being war, you know, wartime everyone is even...

ACALEY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...more sensitive to the...

WILLIAMS: If, if I recall that ferry, you said it was large. I think it seemed like to me it could hold just a couple of vehicles. I don't know. Can you guess...

ACALEY: I don't remember vehicles.

WILLIAMS: No, I don't remember vehicles ever being on it, but it was, could have transported vehicles, because there were some vehicles here on the island.

ACALEY: But there weren't enough seats for everyone. I remember you had to stand.

WILLIAMS: Yeah. You, you did a lot of standing.

ACALEY: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: But I think it was, if I recall, maybe I'm thinking of another ferry, but...

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

WILLIAMS: I don't know. It seemed like there were.

SIGRIST: That an important question.

WILLIAMS: Like a, like a farm vehicle, or, or for hauling dirt or trash or garbage or, something like that.

ACALEY: I don't remember...

WILLIAMS: They would come, come aboard, come, come on to pick up trash, to get, take it back.

ACALEY: I don't remember any military vehicle.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any vehicles at all, any, any kind of vehicle, a motorcycle or...

WILLIAMS: Well, what would they do with the, with the trash, garbage? They had to, they didn't bury it here.

ACALEY: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: They had to take it, I would say they had to take it back. And seemed like to me that ferry could carry a truck or two.

SIGRIST: Where did, where was the ferry landing in Battery Park. Do you remember where, where it was exactly?

WILLIAMS: At the end, end of Manhattan. I don't know...

SIGRIST: Because there's a, now there's a large Coast Guard building which would have been built, of course, after your tenure in the Coast Guard. I'm just wondering, it's down by the Staten Island Ferry, if that's, if it was in that spot then.

WILLIAMS: I couldn't tell you. I don't know.

ACALEY: I don't believe (unintelligible)

SIGRIST: What about, did either of you gentlemen have any interaction with the public health service hospital at all?

WILLIAMS: No.

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

WILLIAMS: No.

SIGRIST: No? Chet?

ACALEY: No.

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

SIGRIST: I assume you probably had to undergo some kind of physical examination...

ACALEY: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: ...either before you got here or once you got here?

WILLIAMS: I don't recall any.

SIGRIST: Do you recall...

ACALEY: Yeah, we had physicals, especially when I was, been stationed here more or less permanent...

SIGRIST: Well, because you were here, for a much longer time...

ACALEY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...so I suppose it would make sense that, but, so neither of you ever went over to the hospital...

ACALEY: I was over then for that.

SIGRIST: What do you remember about that experience?

ACALEY: I remember I had a tooth fixed, and I had a bridge, and it's the same one, the original. And it was done here on the island. And they, the dentist that I had

been to, they couldn't, they marvel at the way this, this was done.

SIGRIST: It's sort of interesting, I've interviewed one of the dentists who was here in the 1940's. I wonder if it was the same man. (he laughs) He's a real character.

ACALEY: But, they do. They said what a fine job was done on it.

SIGRIST: Can you remember any of the specifics of the experience? What the room looked like...

ACALEY: I know it was...

SIGRIST: ...what the equipment looked like?

ACALEY: ...very clean. 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.

SIGRIST: My goodness, a fifty year old bridge that's still going strong.

ACALEY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: That's great. The original Ellis Island bridge.
(they laugh)

ACALEY: Yeah. That's pretty good.

SIGRIST: But that was your only experience over in the public health service area?

ACALEY: That's the only experience.

SIGRIST: Well, let's see. You, you were here in the summer. How did you celebrate the Fourth of July, do you remember? Was there a celebration?

WILLIAMS: I, I can't, no answer. I can't...

SIGRIST: Were...

WILLIAMS: ...I don't remember it.

SIGRIST: Were you ever allowed to go over to the Statue of

Liberty for any reason? Or did you go over, I should...

WILLIAMS: No, I never went over. I could have by going, catching the ferry to it, but I never did.

SIGRIST: It was...

WILLIAMS: We were right here in sight.

SIGRIST: Yeah, right. Stones throw away.

WILLIAMS: Right here is sight. I could see, see the flame every night. Just walk outside. But I never went over to the Statue of Liberty.

SIGRIST: Chet, what about holidays here. Did the Coast Guard, for instance, you were here at a Christmas time. You know, what, what did they, what did they provide for the Coast Guards that you can recall.

ACALEY: Well, if you had, had the time off. I didn't one year. And I had to be here for the, the taps and the reveille. 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 played at various functions. That's one time we played at Radio City.

SIGRIST: But anything that here on the island that you can recall that was done as a special treat for the Coast Guards, I mean, either a Christmas party or...

ACALEY: Well, they had, they had special dinner. And sometimes they had the part, the dance, and they come over, but not on Christmas day. Not on the day itself. And during the summer we didn't have any dances because it was too, 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.

SIGRIST: Right. (they laugh)

ACALEY: It got pretty hot when you had a big group in there.

SIGRIST: When you, when you played for a dance, who came? Were civilians from New York invited to come out to this dance, or...

ACALEY: No, it was, it was people who were stationed here, plus they brought in the women. Young women.

SIGRIST: And where these women come from? Who were they?

ACALEY: From U.S.O.'s, church groups, groups of that type. They would come in. And I remember we had Miss America. I have here, one of the Miss Americas was here. And they had different celebrities come in and perform.

SIGRIST: This was, you were mentioning Martha Raye before...

ACALEY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: ...that you remember.

ACALEY: And we would play for some of them, and some they had their own band, their own group to play. And they did it free of gratis [sic] for the, 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.

SIGRIST: I see. So this is like the last point before you were shipped out at that time.

ACALEY: Of the island, yeah. That's where a lot of them left, right from here.

WILLIAMS: Well, when I, when I, class was over, of course, I went back to Norfolk as well as Bob Iles [Oral History Project interviewee]. And we were assigned to ships. We probably had, had the orders when we left here, what ship we were going on. I didn't know it till we got to Norfolk.

SIGRIST: What kind of, was there like a little graduation for you class? How did the experience end here at Ellis Island for you, Orville?

WILLIAMS: (he laughs) That was before my day, you know. That was fifty years ago.

SIGRIST: Well, I, I mean, do you, do you remember...

WILLIAMS: I don't remember any, there was some little exercise

and some, I, I think some of the received their rating for signalman, quarter master, third class. We were told just a few days they had cut, cut the number that could, not graduate but could increase in, from seaman, your, your, whatever you were rated, most of us were seaman, striking for signalman and quarter master. There was only about, I think somewhere I have in my mind thirty percent that could or could not. I don't, I don't know which way it went. So I went out as a striker. I was still a seaman first class.

ACALEY: Was that sixty-six dollars a month or...

WILLIAMS: No, fifty-four.

ACALEY: Fifty-four it was.

WILLIAMS: Oh, no. Sixty-six. Sixty-six a month.

ACALEY: Sixty-six, and then you went to seventy-eight when you got up to striker.

WILLIAMS: Yeah, seventy-eight when you got a, made it to

striker.

ACALEY: You really were on the way. (he laughs)

WILLIAMS: Oh. Seaman was...

ACALEY: I was a (unintelligible)

WILLIAMS: ...was apprenticing was fifty, they fifty-four, then sixty-six and then seventy-eight.

ACALEY: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: And...

SIGRIST: How did they pay you? Did they pay you in check or, how, do you remember?

WILLIAMS: You drew it aboard, aboard ship, we drew it in money, cash. If you wanted...

SIGRIST: What about here on the island, do you remember?

WILLIAMS: I don't remember. I think we had a paymaster, and you

went to the paymaster's quarters, room, wherever,
office.

ACALEY: On the island here.

WILLIAMS: Yeah, and he counted out sixty-six dollars to you.

SIGRIST: Which...

ACALEY: And you signed...

SIGRIST: Which reminds me, was there a store or something here
on the island where you could buy...

WILLIAMS: Oh, yeah.

SIGRIST: ...gum or something...

WILLIAMS: You could buy a candy bar...

ACALEY: Gum...

WILLIAMS: ...chewing gum, and, and...

SIGRIST: Do you remember where it was?

ACALEY: Right near the mess hall. Right, right near the mess hall.

WILLIAMS: Yeah, right close to the mess hall.

SIGRIST: And you could buy candy and cigarettes and...

WILLIAMS: Yes, right. Those things.

ACALEY: I didn't smoke. I resented that I had to pick up...

WILLIAMS: Butts. (he laughs)

ACALEY: ...the butts. We used to have duty once in while.
(he laughs) I used to resent that to, you had to do that.

SIGRIST: You mentioned the mess hall, and you know, we haven't even talked about food. What, what do you remember about food on Ellis Island. I'll start with Orville. What do you remember about eating here?

WILLIAMS: I, I assumed it was all right. I survived it. (he laughs) But I really don't, don't remember. I'll say this, and I've told, said it many time. The Coast Guard fed well. Always had a dry, clean place to sleep. And I didn't have to dig a fox hole ever.

SIGRIST: It was comfortable tenure when you were here?

WILLIAMS: It was a comf, it was a very nice experience. Four years of good, healthy living. Food was always good, and so I had no complaints about the food.

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

ACALEY: Well...

SIGRIST: It's an important question.

ACALEY: ...it was good. I thought it was good food. You could get as much as you wanted...

WILLIAMS: Always.

ACALEY: ...if you wanted more you could just ask for more.

SIGRIST: Who served you the food, fellow Coast Guardsmen, or were, was there a staff?

WILLIAMS: Yes.

ACALEY: Yeah.

WILLIAMS: No.

ACALEY: Oh, yeah. No, it was fellow Coast Guardsmen. You went through a line as you did on the ship, and they had the, the cooks...

SIGRIST: So men are serving you also then.

ACALEY: Right.

SIGRIST: You're not coming in contact with any female employees...

WILLIAMS: No.

ACALEY: No. You did not have choices.

WILLIAMS: No, no.

ACALEY: Real choices. It was, this is spaghetti and this is it.

WILLIAMS: Well, before I came here I was aboard this fifty footer. There was five of us. And I took the job of being cook. I don't know why but (Mr. Acaley laughs), and it was, I ordered the food, and there was a store up, they delivered it, and we paid the bill at the end of the month. We'd get our check and rations and allowance for it, and we'd pay the grocery store bill. Tonight we'd have pork chops. Okay, I'll order pork chops. And the next night we'll have steak, or whatever we're going to have. And...

SIGRIST: You're a man of many talents. (he laughs)

WILLIAMS: I, I did the cooking there for a while.

SIGRIST: Chet, just in our few remaining minutes, can you tell

me, Orville's told me a little bit about how he got off the island. Can you tell me a little bit the same, please.

ACALEY: Well, I was young, and I thought I wanted to help win the war. So I asked for a transfer onto a ship.

SIGRIST: And you'd been here for a year and some odd months at that point.

ACALEY: Yes.

SIGRIST: Was it, was it sad to leave the island in a way? It had been your home for some...

ACALEY: In a way it had, it was, but I was, as I said I was young, I wanted to see some of the world. So I went on the General Hugh L. Scott. A transport.

SIGRIST: U period, L period, Scott? Is that the name of a, the ship?

ACALEY: Hmm-hmm. Hugh, H-U-G-H.

SIGRIST: Oh, Hugh, Hugh, like the man's name.

ACALEY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Oh, I see.

ACALEY: And we carried five thousand troops. It was five hundred crew on it. And we go to Europe, and we took troops to India, that area, the south Pacific. And when the day the war ended I was in Naples. And we were going to take members of the army over to the Pacific, because the war had been over in Europe and everything ended. And 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.

SIGRIST: Wow.

ACALEY: Then 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, really I had all three. Protestant, Catholic and, and Jewish. And I'd never seen a Jewish service. I was quite amazed,

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

SIGRIST: Interesting way of spending the war.

ACALEY: Yeah.

SIGRIST: We need to end now. We're out of time, but I want to thank you both. This has a been very interesting. And it was a good combination. Two very different sides of, of the same story. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Orville Williams and Chet Acaley on Wednesday, May 18th, 1994 here at the Ellis Island Museum. Gentlemen, thank you.

WILLIAMS: It's been a pleasure.

END OF INTERVIEW