EI-547
JOHN WILL
BIRTHDATE: JANUARY 20, 1917
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INTERVIEWER: ELYSA MATSEN
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TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: ADRIA HARRIS, JONATHAN HAMILTON, CAROLYN LEE
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SCOTLAND, 1924
AGE: 7

SHIP: BALTIC
PORT: LIVERPOOL
RESIDENCES:

- **SCOTLAND: COOPER FYFE**
- **THE US: CALIFORNIA**

MATSEN: Good morning. This is Elysa Matsen for the National Park Service. Today is September 16, 1994, and I'm in the home of Mr. John Will, who came from Scotland in 1924 when he was seven years old. Mr. Will, can you start out by telling me your name, full name, and date of birth?

WILL: John Will, January 20, 1917.

MATSEN: Can you tell me where you came from? Can you tell me the size of your town and describe it for me?

WILL: I came from the town of Cooper Fyfe, Scotland, approximately five thousand.

MATSEN: What did it look like?

WILL: It's a small farming community that was seven miles from the world famous Saint Andrews Golf Course.

MATSEN: And what was the, I guess the industry for the town would have been farming?

WILL: Farming.

MATSEN: What would they farm?

WILL: Wheat mostly.

MATSEN: What was your father's name?

WILL: Alexander.

MATSEN: And what did he do for a living?

WILL: He had his own business in town, which was a coach building business, making wa… in those days, it was primarily making wagons for the farmers and repairing wagon's, equipment. And then he just had started into the early phases of automobile sales.

MATSEN: Can you describe for me his personality, his temperament?

WILL: Very quiet, kind of an unassuming type of guy. Very nice, very kind. Participated in, in community affairs to the degree.

MATSEN: And what did he look like?

WILL: He was much shorter than me, five foot eight and a half. Of slight build. Wore a mustache.

MATSEN: Okay, is there any story that you associate with your father from your childhood that you can remember?

WILL: Yes. We were five kids, and he ran his own business and had a shop, and he had an office up in front, and on Saturday, that was payday for the kids. Each one of us would track down there to the shop, and he would open the safe and dole us out our weekly allowance. I also remember relationship with my dad that his shop was on a corner, kiddy corner across from the war memorial that was erected there, and Queen Mary came to dedicate the war memorial, and we stood on the roof of his shop and looked down and watched the ceremony.

MATSEN: Your mother's name?

WILL: Jane.

MATSEN: And did she have a job outside the house?

WILL: No.

MATSEN: What did she look like?

WILL: Short, chubby.

MATSEN: Okay.

WILL: Rather, rather plain, I guess, I'd say.

MATSEN: And what was her personality?

WILL: Her personality, she was a warm, friendly type, too. She took real good care of all the kids, was always concerned about the youngsters' well-being, and particularly she was pretty heavy on the educational bit. Wanted to get the kids education, which I'll go into later when we describe coming here.

MATSEN: And is there a story you remember growing up in Scotland that you associate with your mother?

WILL: I was ill. I got tapeworm from eating the ice off the top of a cow's drinking fountain in the field next to us, and she had to take me to the hospital, and our little town didn't have a hospital, so that involves getting on the train and going to Edinburgh to the hospital there. I remember that quite specifically because it was a, you know, a new experience, being in a hospital, but I…

MATSEN: What was the hospital like? Do you remember the doctors, do you?

WILL: It was just pretty much like any American hospital. It had wards, there were several beds in the ward I was in. I was only there about three or four days.

MATSEN: Do you remember the doctor, do you?

WILL: No, I don't.

MATSEN: Okay. Your brothers and sisters, can you tell me their names and a little bit about them?

WILL: Yes, my oldest sis, the oldest one would be Mary. My sister, she went to the London School of Nursing. She's a registered nurse. The next one would be Agnes. Agnes, when we first came here, in Britain, practically everybody learns French, and my sister, Agnes, was quite fluent in French. So when we first arrived here, she taught French in a private school for a while, and then went to work in a, in a insurance outfit. The next one would be my brother, Alexander. He's, was a mechanical engineer, and he worked for a big steel company there, Consolidated Steel, and, and then later U.S. Steel, which merged. He was a, in, eventually a pretty big type of engineering. He supervised two hundred engineers for the U.S. Steel Company just before, few years before he retired. He was a kind of an expert on mechanical stuff. During World War II, they shipped him to the naval gun factory in Washington, D.C., where he worked with a team on the mechanisms for the dual purpose five-inch guns that were to be mounted on the new destroyers, and the next one above me, his name is David. He worked in legal work all of his life for the Arco Oil Company here, used to be Richfield. He was not actually an attorney, but he, pretty close, I guess.

MATSEN: And then you were the youngest, I guess?

WILL: I was the youngest, yup.

MATSEN: When you were in Scotland, can you tell me if you had a garden? Did you have a garden in your backyard?

WILL: Yes, we did.

MATSEN: Tell me about it.

WILL: We had a rather extensive garden in the backyard. My dad raised vegetables, and then, way in the back, he had chickens, so he raised chickens there. By the way, an interesting story about my home, which I can later show you a picture on the wall in there of it where I was born, is we went back on a visit, and I remembered everything about my little town that I thought I would, and I remembered about my home, what it looked like and everything, of course I had a picture of it, but the interesting story was that our front yard, you know, you had a house, and then you had a little lawn deal, and then down by the sidewalk there was a, a wall, a little stone wall about, made out of sandstone, about three feet high, and then it had ironwork along on top of it. Now, I always remember this story my mother told me that when, when I was born in that house, the snow was up to the top of the palings, as they call 'em, those steel things were palings. And we went on a visit, lo and behold, the wall was there but no palings, and I could see where the stubs of 'em where they had been in the stone, and the people were not at home that lived in my old home. But the man next door came out and talked to me, and I inquired, I said, "What happened to the palings?" The answer was that they were cut off, melted down, and shot at the Germans.

MATSEN: So (?)

WILL: In other words, they were so short of metals during World War II that they cut off stuff like that and used it in the, in the armor (?).

MATSEN: That's interesting. How about cooking in your family?

WILL: Cooking?

MATSEN: Who did the cooking?

WILL: Cooking was by coal, coal stove, large kitchen.

MATSEN: Done primarily by your mother?

WILL: By my mother, yes.

MATSEN: Do you remember what she would make? Do you remember a typical dinner? What she would have for dinner?

WILL: Now that leads you to another story when…

MATSEN: Okay, good.

WILL: When she took me to school in, in America, in Los Angeles, there was a great debate in the grammar school as to what grade I should be in, and they finally decided I'd be in the third grade because that was equal to what, I had gone to school for two and a half years in Scotland. You start at four and a half, and they call the grades standards. I had been in the second standard, and they translated that into the, the third grade. In the process of all that, I was about the first Scottish kid that that school had ever had, and so there was a lot of questioning, and one of them was what did I eat? And my mother, who was quick on the trigger sometimes, said, "Soup, meat, and pudding," which, either way, describes what we ate. We had plenty of meat, plenty of vegetables, Scottish people are pretty heavy on soups, she makes her own breads, as well as bakery stuff that she would get.

MATSEN: What was your favorite thing that she would make? Was there something that you liked more than…

WILL: Roast beef.

MATSEN: And do you remember your grandparents?

WILL: I only remember one grandparent. That would be on my mother's side. She went to be ninety-six. She lived in Edinburgh by herself. She's a rather amazing woman. She was the mother of seventeen children. Her husband was a career army man in a British Army, was a Master Sergeant when he retired. She was the only one that I knew. I remember we visited her. She lived in, in Edinburgh, what they call a flat, you know, rowhouses, and I remember going there two or three times with my mother. The rest of 'em had passed on.

MATSEN: Before…

WILL: Yes.

MATSEN: Before you were born? Okay. Can you tell me a little about religious life in Scotland?

WILL: Religious life?

MATSEN: Or your religious, your family's religion, or…

WILL: (laughs) Most Scottish people, about ninety-eight percent plus, are Presbyterians, very few Catholics. We went to Sunday School at, my folks went to church, we went to Sunday School regularly. I was baptized in the Presbyterian Church in Cooper, and that's about that as

far as that was concerned. Then this brings us again to an interesting story. We arrive in Los Angeles, and the first Sunday rolls around. It's traditional in Scotland that you dress up your young kids for Sunday school, and dressing up in Scotland means wearing a kilt, and I was seven years old, my mother dressed me up in my kilt or I put it on, I guess, and off I go down the street, three or four blocks, to the Presbyterian Church. Needless to say, this was a riot. The American kids had never seen anything like this, and we went through all the routines that you get kidded about about kilts, about, you know, what's a kilt, what do you wear under it, all that kind of stuff. I might add that that was the first and last time that I wore a kilt. End of that one.

MATSEN: How about holiday celebrations? Do you remember holiday growing up in Scotland that you can tell me about?

WILL: No, I don't.

MATSEN: Okay, how about school, did you go to school when you were in, obviously you did go to school in Scotland. Can you tell me about what the schools were like?

WILL: I went to what was the equivalent of a American grammar school. It was in a nice location, there were nice buildings, good teachers, individual desks.

MATSEN: What was your favorite subject, do you remember that?

WILL: I really don't remember a favorite subject.

MATSEN: Okay, how about playmates or, or other children that you went to school with?

WILL: Did I what?

MATSEN: Do you remember other children?

WILL: No, no, I don't.

MATSEN: Do you remember any games that you would play in Scotland?

WILL: Soccer. Everybody plays soccer in Scotland. Soccer is like American football, you know, it's beginning to catch on here, but in, in countries like Scotland and a lot of other ones, it's the number one.

MATSEN: So as a small boy, you'd play soccer after school, or

WILL: Yes.

MATSEN: Coming to America, can you tell me who decided to come to America and why you came here?

WILL: Yes, that's probably an interesting story. My father, after he served his apprenticeship as a coach builder, worked for a couple of years, and then went to South Africa in 1890s during the diamond rush. Being a skilled woodworker, as he was, he was, the work that he got was as a foreman, first on the railroads, and later on the, in the mines, or for the mines. He spent five years there and saved quite a bit of his salary. He was single. He came back. He went, by the way, with a buddy of his by the name of David Harold that they went together in a, you know, they did everything together, I guess. He came home to Scotland and met my mother, married her, and he had saved enough money that he wanted to go into business for himself, and so he bought this business that I

referred to earlier in Cooper Fyfe. Now, during World War I, again because he was a skilled woodworker, he went from his shops, he left his shops in the hands of two, two or three real old men who were too old for military service. World War I, practically all the youth of Scotland was in the army, okay, so my dad, because of his skills in woodworking, was made superintendent of a air company's body frame. The body frames of airplanes World War I were made out of wood, and then covered. He was the superintendent of airframe for about, I think approximately three years. An interesting point in that is that, because he was considered fairly well to do because he had his business and what have you, he didn't accept any money from the government for that whole time, that was gratuitous. When the World War I ended, he was the first guy in Cooper to know about it 'cause he had gotten the message at the airframe factory, and he rode a bike into, no Italics *Cooper* and told them the war was over. Okay. Now, he tried to bring his business back. Originally, this was a shop that had about twenty-five employees doing new construction and repair work. Okay, he tried to bring his business back, but the economic conditions, as a result of World War I in, in Scotland, were very, very poor. The farmers were not making any money, and if they had a broken down wagon, they didn't have any money to fix it, or they'd bring it in, and he'd fix it and put it on the books. They were not buying hardly anything new, so he kept trying to bring his business back, but was not successful in that. He was going broke, and also, he had a secondary condition, thought in mind and that was the education that was five kids. Scots people traditionally are very educational minded. They shove and push for better schools and better education. Okay. So, remembering his time in South Africa, and he was a prolific reader, he had read a lot about California, the orange groves, the climate, land of opportunity, and all the things you hear about, you still hear about same thing today, he decided that we should immigrate to southern California. In this transition, he auctioned off his shop and all

the equipment, he auctioned off our home, and then we were ready to go, but there was a problem with the quota system. As I get the story from my folks, they had thought that they had the seven quota numbers necessary for the family to travel together, but when they came through, only four came through. So, this caused a big debate between my father and mother. My mother wanted my father to take the three oldest children and go, and she would wait for the additional quotas sometime in the future. He didn't want to do that, so we ended up by being parked in a little town called Gourock (?) on the beachfront waiting for additional quota numbers, and that took several months before we got 'em. Then we finally got 'em, and the seven of us left from Liverpool on the ship "Baltic" and for New York. They, primary reason for immigrating was lousy economic conditions and didn't look like any much opportunity for his kids and brought us all here. I might add, without trying to be too egotistical, that all of my brothers and sisters did very well in our new country. They all…

MATSEN: That doesn't sound egotistical.

WILL: Did, did, did keen, did keen, yeah. I told you about my brother, the engineer, the other one that worked in legal work, he had a lot of people working for him, and I've been lucky too (?).

MATSEN: Just a couple more details about your voyage.

WILL: Oh.

MATSEN: Do you remember, what, what did your mother feel about coming to this country, did she want to come to this country?

WILL: Yes, yeah. I, I think that she just as, she was just as motivational to come as my father was.

MATSEN: Did anyone give you a, a party when you left?

WILL: No.

MATSEN: No.

WILL: I was just going to tell you that on the, I remember one thing about on the boat, on the ship, I think that was the first time I had ever had a Hershey bar. One of the ship's officers gave me a Hershey bar, and I remember that quite clearly.

MATSEN: Where did you stay on the boat?

WILL: Where did we…

MATSEN: Third class, first class, second class, steerage?

WILL: We were third class.

MATSEN: Okay, do you remember where you slept? Do you remember what that looked like or what it was like?

WILL: Yes, it was, there were large cabins, we, we were all pretty well together, as I recall. It was, it was not the best, and, but we, you know, it was alright, we…

MATSEN: Do you remember what, what you brought with you? Do you remember anything that you wanted to take with you when you left Scotland?

WILL: No.

MATSEN: No?

WILL: My mother, my mother and father brought, really brought quite a lot of stuff with them. You know, one of the criticisms that I have of what I've been seeing about the Ellis Island Project is that you depict a lot of downtrodden types and poorly dressed with bags on the tops of their heads and stuff like that. Much more so, if you don't do much with people that are coming that are not in that kind of a category, those are primarily the south Europeans that really don't, they really poor, really, really hard up, but there actually, there was people, like our family, that were, you know, fairly decent type citizens in education, in background, appearance, you never caught my father without a suit on, he dressed formally all the time. So that that was a one change. When we hit Ellis Island, everything was going great until my mother had a, some kind of a medical problem, I don't know what it was, but it required additional tests. So the end result was that we stayed on Ellis Island for about four days, and that was something different because on Ellis Island, the, the men were here and the women were there, so for the first time in a long time, I guess, our family was kind of separated, although they could visit some time during the day. So it took us about four extra days to get through the Ellis Island deal. I don't remember too much about that, but I do recall that we slept in bunk beds, and dad was busy looking after us all the time, and…

MATSEN: What was the name of your ship?

WILL: "Baltic."

MATSEN: The “Baltic.”

WILL: “B-A-L-T-I-C”. It’s a British ship.

MATSEN: Do you remember any of the meals that you had when you were on the ship?

WILL: No.

MATSEN: How about on EI… Ellis Island? Do you remember eating?

WILL: Hardboiled eggs. (laughs) I remember that, it’s, other than that, I don’t know.

MATSEN: Do you remember, describe the scene for me. Do you remember who, other people at Ellis Island that were staying there? Were there a lot of different languages being spoken?

WILL: Yes, yes, that’s, plenty of foreign languages being spoken, and op, people that were, you know, pretty, it was the melting pot for sure. There was people there from all walks and strata of life, and a lot of ‘em were, a lot of ‘em were in the category that you play in the, in the literature, but…

MATSEN: Were there other Scottish people there? Do you remember meeting anyone else from Scotland?

WILL: I don’t know, I don’t know.

MATSEN: Do you remember seeing the Statue of Liberty?

WILL: Yes, yes, very clearly. We, we were up on deck, and, you know, that's the first thing that, everybody knows where we're, we're coming in, and everybody lines up and look at it.

MATSEN: Were, were you examined medically? I know your mother was examined, but do you remember

WILL: We were all examined.

MATSEN: What can you tell me about that? What was that experience like?

WILL: Well, just pretty much routine. Figuring whether our arms and legs worked, and I remember, oh, they, they tested your eyes and your hearing and your throat. That'd be about it, I guess, and no, nothing in the way of x-ray or anything like that. It was a, kind of a, a fast, go through a line kind of project. Somewhat similar to going into the military in the United States. Somewhat.

End of Side A

Begin Side B

MATSEN: Do you remember any type of entertainment while you were on Ellis Island? What did you do for the five days that you were there as a small child? Did you get into any trouble? Did you explore?

WILL: I really don't recall any games. We got to go outside, I know that. I guess we just went outside and walked around, looked at the harbor, looked at New York. I don't remember any, I doubt whether there was any programming going on, any, any recreational systems or anything like that, I don't think there's anything (?).

MATSEN: Okay. When you left Ellis Island, who came to pick you up, and, and how did you leave?

WILL: Oh, okay. My mother had a sister living in New York, who was married, and she and her husband were the managers of a, one of these big apartment buildings that they have in New York, and we were coming to her.

MATSEN: What was her name? Do you 'member her name?

WILL: Oh boy.

MATSEN: It's okay if you don't.

WILL: What's her name, remember?

MRS. WILL: I'm trying to think, I can't.

MATSEN: Well, we can keep going.

MRS. WILL: I know his (?), he was Willy, but what was her name, I don't know.

WILL: Bill Robb.

MRS. WILL: Yeah.

WILL: Wasn't it Robb?

MRS. WILL: Her name was May. Wasn't it May?

WILL: May Robb, yeah, okay, alright, sorry.

MATSEN: That's okay.

WILL: Sorry about that. Her name was May, and the last name was R-O-B-B, Robb, and they managed a apartment building. We were picked up by them, went to their apartment.

MATSEN: How'd you get there?

WILL: In a taxi.

MATSEN: Okay.

WILL: And we stayed there for about a week, and then we came by train what they call the southern route, which would be from New York to Washington, D.C., New Orleans and across to Los Angeles.

MATSEN: Do you remember that trip?

WILL: I remember that trip, yeah, very well. It was, the train down through the south was not air-conditioned in those days, and it was hotter than heck. Keep in mind though that I came from Scotland, which is a cool climate area, and when it runs up in the nineties, that's pretty hot. Anyway, I remember that, and I remember that great selling of ice cream cones on the train, and the kids all got ice cream cones all the time. I also should reflect on some of the information that I guess my mother had picked up about southern California, it turned out to be pretty erron, erroneous. Family came equipped with Panama hats. She (laughs), she bought us all big Panama hats. She thought that we were going to be out in the torrid sun, I guess, and so they, they kidded us on the train, I guess. We, the kids wore some of 'em. Then we came to, in those days, in order to

come to this country, you had to have somebody sponsor you, and we had a sponsor by the name of Alexander Monroe, who lived in Los Angeles. He was a, a kind of a second cousin relative to my mother. Let's see, I guess that way would be, he was my mother's sister's son. Okay? Anyway, they rece… they were the ones that signed up the, the deal that we would not be living on charity and all that kind of stuff, and they signed up for us, and so we moved into their house, which was on Baltimore Street in the York area of Los Angeles. We only stayed there about a week for, time for my folks to find a house to live in, what have you, and my dad found a job with the Los Angeles City Railroad, the, the old-fashion, what they call the yellow cars. He worked in their repair shops. I went to school.

MATSEN: What were schools like, do you remember them?

WILL: Was my school…

MATSEN: Much different or…

WILL: My, my initial recollection of school was that everybody was very curious about me, and, you know, I was the only Scotch kid in the school, and what's more, I, I think some of those teachers were a little bit misinformed in life in Scotland. There was a story about, I don't know how this came up, but my mother was having a conversation with one of the teachers and got onto the subject of music, and she said something about the fact that we had had our own piano in Scotland, and the teacher's retort to that was, "Gee, did you have pianos?" You know, there, there was not much cross-country information at that time, I don't think, so that, we had some interesting experience, but that was short lifed. I mean you, pretty soon you were being treated like an American kid. I guess I had an accent for a little while, but I, when you go to school

and mixed with other American kids, you quickly lose your accent. You can turn it on if you have to, though.

MATSEN: And your house in Los Angeles, what was that like?

WILL: Well, we moved around a little bit, but, you know, basically we got a house big enough for the family and, be a four bedroom house, I guess. Nice. We were a little sparse on furniture for a while because my mother was interesting in what she brought from Scotland. My dad, being a woodworker, he built a big, what you call a chest of drawers, big thing like this with a bunch of drawers, and she packed all of our linens. British people have lots of linens, good stuff too, and then she packed, they got barrels and packed all of our dishes, so all of our dishes and kitchenware and all of our bedroom stuff was shipped through the Panama Canal and up here. So, we had all that, but when it came to the basic furniture for everything, it took us a little while to accumulate that because, you know, my dad had spent a lot of money waiting for us to get the quota numbers, and then by the time he arrived in Los Angeles, he a little bit short. But the housing was good.

MATSEN: What was your first job?

WILL: My first job? American Can Company. I graduated from college in 1938.

MATSEN: Where did you go to school?

WILL: I went to University of Redlands, and, well, let me put it this way. I went to University of Redlands. In 1938 when I graduated, that was supposed to be a kind of a depression year, but I was fortunate to, I got a job with the American Can Company. Now that brings up a good story, I think. You see from my background that I've been in personnel business all my

life, forty years. So, I'm very acquainted with discrimination and non-discrimination and what you do for minorities and what you don't do for minorities and all that kind of stuff. American Can Company is a big outfit with plants all over the country. The Los Angeles plant was the one that hired me, and the conditions of my hiring were a little bit different in this business of discrimination or not. The district office, which would be in San Francisco, had instructed the Los Angeles office and factory to recruit some young college kids each year, two or three or four, depending upon what their circumstance. The plant in Los Angeles was managed by a gentleman with the name of Gio, Giordino, very Italian. Half of the plant supervisory structure, not half of it, but several of the plant supervisory structure were likewise Italian. They did a lot of business with the fish industry in Los Angeles Harbor in providing cans, where the fish industry also had a lot of Italians. So that when he got the instructions that he was supposed to hire some college kids, his idea of college recruitment was to go over to Loyola University, which is a Catholic university, see the priest, and say, "Send over a couple of your boys." So that had been going on for three or four years, and they practically always were football players, and so the youngsters coming up in the training for management jobs, what have you, were pretty much graduates of Loyola, pretty much Catholic, all Catholic, and in that kind of (?), well, the district office finally tumbled to this and said, "Hey, mix this up." So, I was in the first group to, to mix it up. I was a University of Redlands graduate, and there was a UCLA graduate hired at the same time, the two of us, and we came into a situation where, I wouldn't say we weren't wanted, but I would say that we were breaking the ice, and it was a little testy for a while, but as usual, I had played football myself, so I had played football against a couple of these guys, so that we broke down the ice, and it, it worked out alright. I worked at American Can Company until, that's where the, I met my wife, by the way, for about four years, and then the war started, World War II.

MATSEN: Well, tell me how you met your wife.

WILL: How I met my wife? There was a front office to the can company, and then there were manufacturing buildings in the back. She worked in the front office, and I was in the personnel office, which was part of the industrial structure, so I was in another building with the industrial guys as against she being in the main office, which was the accounting and payroll, that kind of stuff. But the Coca-Cola machine was out in the entrance to the industrial plant, so the people from the front office, if they wanted a coke, had to come out to the coke machine, and that's where I met my wife. She was getting a coke, so was I, and, okay. That's the answer to that, okay? Want me to go on from the can company?

MATSEN: Yeah, that would be great.

WILL: Okay. Next deal is the World War I. I was draft age, of course, I was registered in the draft. When it looked like my number was gonna come up, I didn't want to go in the Army, so I had been around the waterfront much of my life, so I wanted to go in the Navy. This relates another story of possible, you could describe it as possible or related discrimination. I had not become a citizen until I was twenty-one because my father had not taken out papers, and so I didn't benefit for what they call a derivative citizenship. I had to wait until I was eligible my, on myself. I filed, and I became eventually a citizen, when I was, became twenty-one years of age, I had filed the papers ahead of time. Okay. So, when it looked like I was going to be drafted, I run down, all the guys went to school with me were running down and getting commissions in the Marine Corps and the Navy and what have you, so I run down to the Navy and everything's great. I've got good grades, healthy, but I had not been a citizen for ten years, and there was a regulation for commissioning people directly that

you had to be a citizen for ten years before you get commissioned. So the Navy guys tell me that and didn't like it, of course, so I ran around so the Coast Guard, Marines, the Army, all of them the same. Okay, so about that point, the draft guys were getting ready to breathe down my throat, so I enlisted in the Navy as an enlisted man. Okay. This was an interesting experience for me. The last thing in the world I ever expected to do was to be in the military service. However, I was, and I, you go to boot camp down in San Diego, and they gave you a bunch of tests, and after the tests, that would be about thr… the results of the tests are reviewed after about three weeks, in the meantime you're marching up and down until it goes out of style. And the keen in the, look at the tenth scores, and then found that I was a university graduate and found that I had worked in personnel administration. The personnel office was having lots of problems, so the, they sent for me about the third week of boot camp and wanted to know if I wanted to work in the a personnel office. They pulled me out of boot camp, which was great, and, so I went to work in the, in the personnel office. There's a whole bunch of ratings in the Navy, and I could run step by step on through 'em, but I won't, I won't, because that's kind of, but anyway, I got promoted pretty, very, pretty fast, okay? So, when I was a first class petty officer, they sent me off to a school in Baltimore, Maryland, that was the personnel classification type of school, and there was about a, a hundred and thirty men in, in the class that was there. This was the first one that they had, and all these other men were primarily guys who couldn't get a commission for one reason or another. For instance, the man that sat next to me, believe it or not, had a Ph.D. in psychology and taught at Oklahoma University, but his finger was cut off at the end here, and so he couldn't get a commission. It's crazy. But anyway, there was a lot of people there, there, all kinds of educational backgrounds, most of 'em pretty sharp cookies. So we go through this school for four weeks. Each week they give us a test, and at the end of the four weeks, they posted

the listing, and out of a hundred and thirty some, I ranked fourth, and so, the next deal was they, personal interviews like this, and I was first class petty officer. They, they said that they were authorized to make me a chief, and they wanted to ship me off to Newport, Rhode Island, but in the meantime, I had just moved my wife to San Diego, and the officer in charge of the office in San Diego, he said that he didn't wanna, he didn't want them to commis, I mean, to make any of his men chiefs, he wanted to do it himself. So I was returned to San Diego. I didn't want to go to Newport as a first class, but the guys in the Bureau Naval Personnel in Washington that had talked to me, they didn't like this guy, didn't agree with, pardon me, didn't agree with this gentleman down here. So they, in about a week, send a telegram that, to rate me a chief and to send me to the diesel classification school. Now the reason for that was that I knew personnel work, and I also happened to know quite a bit about internal combustion engines 'cause, all the way through school, I worked in garages, and I even know a little bit about diesel. So I went to the diesel school, and then the, the orders were for further transfer to the receiving station in San Francisco, where I was to establish a, what they call a diesel classification office. That was the first one in the navy. There was one established here, and one established in Norfolk at the same time. The problem was that the Navy had a lot of ships with diesel engines, they vary in size from twenty-five horsepower engines up to three thousand horsepower engines, and ones that are slow engines, slow turnover up to high speed engines, they had in-line engines, they had v-type engines, and opposed-piston engines. Okay. When they had all these ships coming out with these diesel engines, they didn't know how to assign men aboard those ships that do those engines, so the idea was I was to set up, along with another guy, some, a screening process to screen the machinist mates and the motor machinist mates of the Navy as they came through the receiving ship and classify them by the types of engines and the type of equipment that they knew, whether they were

just operators or whether they were capable of repair work, and we assigned them accordingly. Now that was a great deal for me because I got a chance to do something brand new, all on my own, nobody was telling me what to do, and the, the funny thing was, here I was only a chief petty officer, I was direc… directing all kinds of stuff. At that point, we had a, a number two officer of the receiving ship, that's a great big place where there was about thirty thousand men a month coming through on assignment to the Pacific wars. He was a captain in the Navy, regular Navy, and he also was an ex-submariner on submarines, and I had a sign up put outside the door, Diesel Classification Center, and after a while, he came around on an inspection, and I never forget this man. He sat on the corner of my desk, full captain of the Navy and all that, way up there at that time, and submarine insignias, and he talked to me, and he said, "What's this all about?" You know, he asked me about what I was doing, how it came about, and he, he went away, and in about two hours, his chief yeoman, that's the head secretary type guy in his office, called me and said, "Say, do you have a copy of the transcript of your university?" And I said, "No, I don't, but I can get it." He says, "Well," he says, "Captain Buford (?) wants to get you a commission." So I got a hold of a copy of my college transcript to prove that I was a graduate. I gave it to, we, we filled out the forms, and I gave it to them. Seven days later, I was commissioned. He, he sent it directly, instead of going through channels, sent it directly to a, a classmate of his in the Bureau Naval Personnel in Washington, they commissioned me, sent him back a, a telegraph that I was commissioned an Ensign with a date, so that, I had an interesting experience there, and I, I finally got the commission, even if I didn't have ten years citizenship. Okay? I ran that, that got to be a pretty big operation. They sent me to another location to Shoemaker to start another one just like it, I did that, and then at the very end of the war, they sent me down to San Diego, I was the officer in charge down there,

okay, so that takes care of the Navy days. Want to ask me anything about it? That's enough detail, I know, okay.

MATSEN: (laughs)

WILL: Okay, the next deal was…

MATSEN: (?) any questions, everything was very clear.

WILL: The, the, the next time is, I think when I look at my career that I really have been fortunate in that only twice in my life have I looked for a job. I looked for a job when I got out of college, and I had to look for a job when I got out of the, out of the Navy. I ended up by going to work for the Veterans Administration in West Los Angeles. Again, in personnel work. I worked there for about four years, when one of the doctors there who had been appointed the manager of a brand new hospital in Montrose, New York, which is up the river from New York City, next to Peekskill, you probably know that, and he called me in and said that he wanted to know if I'd like to go and be the personnel officer there. I had the number two job in west Los Angeles, so being number one would be good idea. Also, again it gave me an opportunity to start something from the grassroots up, so I opened up the hospital there, which was the largest one that the VA opened after World War II, and that was at his request. Okay. Then I was there about a year, when I get a call from a guy in the Bureau of Engraving and Printing of the Treasury Department in Washington, D.C. The Bureau of Engraving is where they print U.S. currency, postage stamps, and all the security documents of the country. It's also a printing operation. Printing unions are the strongest type unions that are in this country, and they had something like twenty-six separate unions for all the different skills in the printing and engraving business, and they were having union trouble, and they didn't have

anybody that really knew too much about unions, and I had worked with unions at the American Can Company, and also, I, in the educational bit, I guess I should back up and say, that when I was working for the VA, I went to night school at UCLA under the G.I. Bill, and I completed their work, twenty-four semester hours, for a, what they call a Certificate in Industrial Relations, which was all about unions, okay? So this call that I got from the Treasury man said that they were looking for somebody in the personnel business that knew unions. So I ended up by going down there, getting interviewed, getting hired. Three years there, which was a real keen job, by the way, lots of fun, three years there, when a clerk of the Civil Service and Post Office Committee, yeah, the, the chief clerk of the Civil Service Post Office Committee up on the Hill for the House of Representatives called me up on the phone and said that the Army Quarter-Master Corps was under investigation for some problems they had that were largely personnel administration type problems and would I be interested in going over there. So, I went over and talked to them, and each one of these is, of course, is a step up the totem pole, better grade, and they offered me the job, so I took the job, so I was the, the head of the Army Quarter-Master Corps Personnel Program for, oh, let's see, about six years, I guess, something, and they had, you know, they had installations all over the United States, so traveled a lot. Got tho (coughs), got that (coughs)

MATSEN: Mr. Will, we're going to pause just for a second, so that we can…

WILL: No, that's alright.

MATSEN: Turn over the tape. Okay?

MRS. WILL: Hour long, huh? Yeah, (laughs) I figured (?)

WILL: That's alright, I'm…

MATSEN: (?) and we'll start, we'll start on tape number two.

MATSEN: This is Elysa Matsen for the National Park Service. I'm back with tape number two with Mr. John Will, and we're talking about his, his life and careers after he came to America.

WILL: After my service with the Quarter-Master Corps, the Army has great statistical and comparison information about what all the various commands do, and so they, they rank major commands as to how they're doing in the various personnel program areas, and I was fortunate enough to be able to bring the Quarter-Master Corps rankings way up in practically every category. As a result of that, I was asked by the Director of Civilian Personnel for the U.S. Army Headquarters. Now this is a big, big personnel operation. It is four hundred and eighty-five thousand employees working in approximately eighty-five different countries. Many of those are foreign national type employees, where we hired people to work in their own country and then we would have, send over some American type, personnel types to work with 'em. They called me and asked me if I would like to come over and talk to them about the deputy job, that would be the number two job to this whole operation. I went over, and I got hired. Here again, they came to me. That was a job that I had for about three and a half years. That was an amazing position because I literally traveled the world. My superior, although he liked to travel, he was kind of tired of it, and the end result was that I got a lot of the assignments, so that take in Tokyo, take in Okinawa, Korea, Alaska, Panama, Europe, as well as many installations in the United States. And then in between trips, of course, I was a, a deputy. This was a real good deal, and again, I got a lot of credit for things because I, I didn't like the overseas personnel program that I found. At that time,

the military or the Army, as I was working, keep in mind I was a Naval office… ex-Naval officer working for the Army. I found that they were hiring civilian employees for overseas for a year, two years, depending among where it was, and then, but that was their term, two years or three years, and they were not built into a career system, so that when they got ready, finished with the, their tour there, they could, some of 'em got renewed, but then they had the, the business of coming back and where would they go? There was no system. They, they were peddled around to see if anybody wanted to take 'em into the commands, but this was not a very popular operation because the commands had their own people they wanted to promote, and most of the overseas types were in the fairly high grades, so one of my contributions was to get going hard on a career program. A career program meant that you were going to have a rotation system. You were going to rotate some of these people from the, for what we call, Conus, Continental United States overseas for a couple years, and then we would rotate 'em back into the system, and they would be guaranteed a proper placement in accordance with their background and grades. That took a while to sell, and it took a while to, to get actually operational. In the meantime, we had, (coughs) we had what they called homesteaders. Homesteaders was guys, employees, pardon me, whom had gotten jobs overseas, and they were dug in. They were more like the citizens of that country than the citizens were. That was particularly true in Okinawa. I was sent over there to clean that one out, and there was people on the island in civilian personnel jobs and in other, and in other kind of jobs too, not just civilian personnel. In Okinawa, they, they ran the whole civil government. The, they had, you know, they had a Supreme Court with a whole bunch of U.S. citizens running the Supreme Court for the Okinawans, gee. Okay, we changed all that, and that was pretty well established, the career program. About then, a, get a call from the, in the process of all this, I had become very well acquainted with the people in the Civil Service Commission,

naturally, particularly the late John Macy, who was chairman of the Commission and had been the personnel advisor to President Johnson. Macy liked my work, and the Director of Personnel job for the Department of Commerce was going to be available. The gentleman there was retiring, and Macy called me up and talked to me about it, said, the end result was I went over there for an interview by the officials of the Commerce Department, and I was hired for that. That was a, a, I worked there for ten years. That again was a kind of a renewal project, in that their system was old-fashioned. It was not automated. First thing I had to do was to automate it, so I found out what I had. I, the, the, the office didn't know what they had, they didn't know what kind of programs they had out in the field, they didn't know what was good and what was bad, but when you automate it, you can get all the statistics in and get all the information in, you can kind of get an indication along with personal visits so that we worked on that for a while, and I was there for ten years. During the time I was there in my later years, I became a troubleshooter on occasion for the Civil Service Commission. When they had problems, a lot of personnel men are not operational minded. I had done practically everything there was on the way up the totem pole, so that I was very operational minded and knew operations so that I was borrowed by the Civil Service Commission to, first one was to go to the Office of Economic Opportunity, which was run by Mr. Shriver at that time. They had personnel problems. I spent thirty day detail there, and then another one which was really fun was the FAA. No, pardon me, pardon me, wrong one, National aeronautical, yeah, the aeronautical one, anyway. Get that title proper.

MATSEN: Is it, not NASA, right, is it NASA?

WILL: NASA?

MATSEN: Could be NASA? I'm not sure, maybe, anyway.

WILL: Yeah, it is NA… yeah, that's right, it was the National, no, Aeronautics and Space Administration, I'm sorry I got that mixed up.

MATSEN: I thought that's what it was.

WILL: Okay. They were having union problems down in Huntsville, Alabama, which was a big center, and it was directed by Werner Von Braun [ph], the bomb man from Germany, and Germans basically are not very good at personnel administration. They're more of the dictatorial type, command performance. Okay, I went down there and worked on their program for a while, which involved some visits with Von Braun, quite an experience, and then I was there a month, worked on that, came back, and about another month, got another call from Macy, wanted me to go to Cape Kennedy, which is another part of NASA, and likewise, they, they were having personnel problems that primarily involved civilian employees versus contract employees and union problems there. So I spent a, so anyway I had got to be used on those types of things. Also, I had a lot of experience in Employ the Handicap. I served on the president's committee for Employ the Handicap for about ten years, and I got a presidential plaque, which is on the wall out there for my service on that, and I deci… decided to take an early retirement in 1974, primarily because the federal employees had a salary cap at that time, much like the baseball guys are advertising, and I had been at the top salary for about three and a half years, and what that meant, operational, was that when the staff and the regular employees would get a cost of living increase of three percent or five percent, whatever it was, I wouldn't get anything, and so as I sat still at one salary, several of the staff members that worked for me and in different bureaus, they were sneaking up on me all the time. So the end result is I had about fifteen people in

Commerce personnel that were making the same salary as I was. I didn't like that very well. Plus the fact I had been in the job for ten years, and that's way too long in one job, five years is ideal, but ten years is way past, and if I hadn't gotten out of there, they, chances for some of the other people on the staff to get promoted were actually blocked okay? So anyway, I took, I took a young, early, pardon me, retirement, and inasmuch as we had originally come from here, we ended up by coming back to California, and we settled here. One other stint that I did since I've been here, I spent a year on the Orange County Grand Jury, which I was the chairman of the administrations committee, and that's it. Now, that's the work history.

MATSEN: What can you tell me about your family?

WILL: About my family?

MATSEN: Do you have any children, and, and how many children, and…

WILL: My family?

MATSEN: Yes, your family.

WILL: Oh, oh. I've son, Tom, who is a graduate of the five year school at the University of Eng, of Virginia Engineering. The five year business is you get a, you can get a mechanical engineering degree in four years, you take an extra year and you get the, some of the humanities, what have you. Right out of school, he got a job with Rohm-Haas, chemical firm which is in Bristol, Pennsylvania, and he has done exceedingly well. He is the, the head project manager for the whole corporate company. He travels the world like I did in the Army, and a, I think he does me one better because, not very long ago, he told me that he got on the airplane,

went to London for one day for a meeting, and came back, and I thought to myself, boy, Rohm-Haas [ph] must have plenty of money. Anyway, he's done very well. I, I only have the one son. I have three grandchildren. The grandson is the oldest. He is a, an accounting type manager for Discover Card Company, and he just recently gave us our first great granddaughter, yeah, great granddaughter, and one other granddaughter is, works for a trucking firm, and then the other one just graduated from the University of Delaware this year. That's it.

MATSEN: Okay. If you had to answer this one last question that I have for you, are you glad that your family came to this country, how, how would you answer that?

WILL: Oh, I'd, I'd answer that very strongly in the affirmative. Economic conditions certainly were poor in Scotland, and for a young man growing up in Scotland in my era, your choices were pretty much, you go to sea and become a marine engineer or you go in the army. Now, quite a few of my cousins are marine engineers on ships. You know, Scotch guys are famous for, for that, so I would say that bringing us here was the best and the kindest thing in the world that my parents could do to bring us to a place where we had opportunity, and they kid all you want to about United States and California as the land of opportunity, but it is. I've just run through my career, and I, you know, I worked forty years in the personnel business and only twice did I ever have to look for a job, they came to me, and, so it, in my case, it certainly worked out. Look at the Navy experience, when I couldn't get a commission direct. I got in there, and I got one anyway. So a lot of these things have always been, in my judgment, the best for me and the best for my family, even if some of 'em have been pretty fortuitous.

MATSEN: Well thank you very much, Mr. Will, for this interview. I'm here in the home of John Will with his wife, Marge, and Peter Hom, who's been doing the recording. This is Elysa Matsen signing off for the National Park Service on the sixteenth of September, 1994, for the Ellis Island Oral History, History Project.

END OF INTERVIEW