

EI-650

VINCENT WIXTED

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COAST GUARD

ELLIS ISLAND, 1953

SIGRIST: Good morning, this is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, August 15, 1995. I'm up at the recording studio at Ellis Island with Vincent Wixed. Mr. Wixed was in the Coast Guard for four months here at Ellis Island in 1953. Can we begin please by you giving me your full name?

WIXTED: My full name is Vincent DePaul Wixed Jr.

SIGRIST: And your birth date please.

WIXTED: January 16, 1931.

SIGRIST: Give me a little bit of family background. Tell me a little bit about your parents and where they came from and that sort of thing.

WIXTED: Well, originally from what I can find out, the family is Pennsylvania Dutch. My mother's people came from Germany, I understand. My father's people came from Ireland. To me, I have an English name to help things along. And they probably came over right at the time of the potato famine, in the middle 1800s sometime. So that was how we got here.

SIGRIST: And where did you grow up?

WIXTED: I grew up in Pennsylvania.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

WIXTED: So...

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your growing up.

WIXTED: I don't know, I was probably the average Depression baby, to get that in there for the time period. And once the war started, everything was on a war footing, schools, kids, did our things with running around to get rubber, save tires, tin cans, and all this kind of stuff until the war was over. And even in school they had us do various things to help the war effort. Even if it was to go down to the shop, even for sixth grade and junior high school students to make models for the Air Force. And then they would give a little recommendation or say Thank you for the work we did for them. Then after that when I got to high school I took electronics. Was really going to be a wiz kid. But you know how that goes. Then afterwards, I kind of started out... I really didn't know what I wanted to do. But then unfortunately the Korean War came along, so I thought I should go, but I didn't know where I wanted to go. And I decided on the Coast Guard.

SIGRIST: Did you-?

WIXTED: And eventually I wound up here.

SIGRIST: When you were a kid, how did you think about the military? How did you perceive the military because it was wartime, it was World War II...?

WIXTED: Perceive the military...

SIGRIST: Yeah, how did you think about the military?

WIXTED: Well, I thought it was a good thing. Partly because my father was in the National Guard. So to me it was kind of “Hey, let’s be gung ho!” And actually, even being in the Boy Scouts and whatever, everything was kind of a military thing. And all my, most of my uncles and my older cousins were all in the CCC, so everything was kind of on a military footing starting from the Depression, which we all thought was a good thing, for all this WPA stuff and everything they had going.

SIGRIST: Tell me how you initially got into the Coast Guard....What’s the process? How does one become a member of the Coast Guard?

WIXTED: Well, let’s see, how did I start...Actually, I started out as a naval reservist. And I had been to sea, but then when the Korean War came along I decided, well, I wasn’t called up. So I thought I would switch services. So I had to travel about 80 miles from I live, over to Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania, where they had a recruiting station to start to sign up. Tell them that I wanted to get in, I wanted to enlist, and all this good stuff. So then they told me to wait, come back, gave me a little time limit – I think it was a month or so – to come back. Then on December the 7th I believe it was, 1950, I was sworn in at Wilkes-Barre. But that was only at the recruiting station. And that was your last chance if you didn’t want to go. And then after that, with the processing and the paperwork, put you on a train, you went to California to boot camp. So we went out to Alameda.

SIGRIST: Alameda was where the boot camp was.

WIXTED: At that time. There was Alameda and Cape May, New Jersey. Alameda is in California though. Just below San Francisco on the bay. And then once we were out there they started and it was just a regular regulation boot camp, just like the Navy. We went through the same process. And then we were re-sworn in again when we

got there to make sure we were going to stay. And then we started. We started our thirteen weeks training period.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things did you learn in boot camp?

WIXTED: Well, some stuff I had picked up. But we still had to learn how to march, how to work as a unit. Primarily it's regimentation. So a group of people can work together as a unit. And it how to march, salute, take care of your uniforms, how to maintain your clothing, how to keep on a strict schedule. A lot of...

SIGRIST: Any special training? Special skills?

WIXTED: No, not at that time. Because they want to make sure everybody is in a state of physical fitness and I guess you'd call it regimentation so that everybody can work as a unit. And then after you leave boot camp, then to become assigned to a unit after taking a lot of tests to see what you're best suited for. And then you're assigned to a unit someplace in the country after you leave.

SIGRIST: I see. Well tell me just quickly how you ended up at Ellis Island.

WIXTED: Oh, how I ended up at Ellis Island? Well, the Korean War ended. I'd been on the cutter Spencer for over two years. I think it was...I was working on a third year. And then I think I had asked for a transfer for some reason, I was trying to get to go to school at the time, I believe. And I think I asked for a transfer, and they all of a sudden decided to approve it. And since I had a short time I think that's why they sent me over here.

SIGRIST: Tell me about what you remember from the first day you were here.

WIXTED: Oh, that was fun. I started out from Staten Island, the old Coast Guard base at St. George. That was where the ship pulled in on a Saturday morning, August the 15th, 1953.

SIGRIST: This is your anniversary.

WIXTED: And I had my orders, my sea bag was packed, and they told me I was to come over here. So I wasn't quite sure about how to get over here, but I knew the patrol boats were over here. So I went up to the patrol boat office to find out if there was a boat coming over here, they told me Yeah, I asked them if I could get transportation, they told me Sure, come along when they leave. So I got a boat ride across New York Harbor to Ellis Island. And we pulled in next to the ferryboat down here that was running at the time. That was how I wound up...and then I was, they wound up assigning me to the carpenter shop. I don't know which set of buildings you call that over there. The first set, right to the port side of the ferry entrance. That was the sign there. And at the same time, I got married the very same day. It was a good thing they gave me liberty. So Monday morning I had to be back to work.

SIGRIST: I should ask-

WIXTED: And after that, I did meet, there was more people here from the other units I had served on that I did meet that had previously been assigned.

SIGRIST: So am I to understand that you took the boat over to Ellis Island, you dumped your duffel bag down or whatever, and then you went somewhere else and got married?

WIXTED: Not exactly. Well, first I had to get in the uniform of the day, go to my assigned station, make sure I had quarters, make sure I had an assignment. They gave me a job. Then they decided since it was the weekend they'd give me liberty. So I went and got married.

SIGRIST: What was your wife's name?

WIXTED: My wife's name was Doris.

SIGRIST: And her maiden name?

WIXTED: It was Doris Fay. And she came from Long Island City, New York.

SIGRIST: F-A-Y-E?

WIXTED: No, just F-A-Y.

SIGRIST: F-A-Y. Describe for me your work in the carpenter's shop.

WIXTED: At the particular time, my job was...they had 40-foot patrol boats over here. And occasionally, for repair, and I believe we had a small repair barge over here that could lift them...so my job was to build boat davits so we could sit out here on the...I won't call it the pier, you have a sidewalk over there now, outside the buildings. But they used to hoist them up, set them in there, if they could do some preliminary repairs or some quickie stuff to make sure the boats were operational and then put them back in the water.

SIGRIST: And...

WIXTED: I believe they had a small barge over here. Like we'd work on the ferryboat pilings to keep it maintained and make sure everything was operational over here.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the inside of the carpenter's shop for me?

WIXTED: Oh, what'd we have in there? In the bottom part of the building, there's a long hallway that faces out to the ferry entrance, and off of each side there were shops. I

believe ours was the last shop at the end of the building next to the stairway. I noticed there is a set of stairs outside on the end of the building, but ours was down below and kind of a subterranean thing. It was a very well set up carpenter shop with all the primary wood lathes, table saws, just as if you'd go into some carpenter shop out in the civilian world.

SIGRIST: How many Coast Guardsmen worked in the carpenter shop?

WIXTED: If I remember correctly, there was myself, there was a chief – I happened to be third class at the time – there was another third class...I think there was four of us that worked there.

SIGRIST: Were there other responsibilities other than repairing the ship- the boats?

WIXTED: Well, we had to know...There was a small fire jeep here at the time.

SIGRIST: Jeep?

WIXTED: Jeep.

SIGRIST: Small vehicle.

WIXTED: Regular military jeep that had been reconstructed to look like a little fire truck. And as far as I know, this is the only vehicle that was ever on this island besides the electric train they had for moving supplies and produce to get the food on. Because the ferryboat was too small. So then the other duties we had was we would have regular military duty nights, we were still responsible for other people, non-ratings, and then if I remember correctly there was a movie hall, out behind a building on the parade grounds that's between Islands 2 and 3. And then we would get the duty, we'd be responsible as petty officers to take care of the movie hall, to make sure

everybody behaved themselves, keep the place clean, and go around and still keep up with the military-type thing. Everything was on a schedule.

SIGRIST: How often would you see movies?

WIXTED: Oh they had movies every night at this particular time.

SIGRIST: Is there an experience that sticks out in your mind about going to see a certain movie or something that happened...?

WIXTED: No, not that way. It was just, Hey I got to go over here and listen to all these guys scream and holler for what the movie was.

SIGRIST: Were you offered any live entertainment?

WIXTED: I don't think there was at that time. But they were still having inter-service athletics at that time. They were still having baseball games, football games, whatever they could do on the field.

SIGRIST: Did you participate?

WIXTED: No, I didn't even know they had it at that time. Because my previous assignments kept me at sea too much. Where maybe on a ship they'd have boxing matches and maybe some volleyball if you had enough room to set up a net. But we were usually gone or out to sea a lot on call so they didn't always do it. But boxing was a big thing.

SIGRIST: Was boxing important here? Do you remember seeing any boxing at Ellis Island?

WIXTED: No, I don't remember any here. They could have had it though, before I came. I think it just depended...At that particular time, whatever was on the schedule of activities for sports when I was here, because it was coming up to the fall season.

SIGRIST: You came in August so you were here through December?

WIXTED: Yeah. Till the beginning of December.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me where you slept? And not where it is, but what it looked like.

WIXTED: What it looked like... Well it probably would've been, I'd probably have to go look at the rooms now over there to see. If I remember correctly, we each had our own room, there was enough space in the buildings, in certain sections of the buildings that were still, that you could still occupy. So we had a regular what do I call I? Military-type cot, a dresser, and a closet. You really didn't need an awful lot. You didn't spend too much time in there, really; only for sleeping hours if you were going to study at night.

SIGRIST: Then was there a bathroom attached to that, or where did you wash off?

WIXTED: I really can't remember now whether we had bathrooms in each room or there was like a shower room.

SIGRIST: What about eating?

WIXTED: Well, we used to have a mess hall, and there was a kitchen in the lower level of the building. There was a regular kitchen set up that the cooks had And we had a dining room down on the lower level.

SIGRIST: What times would you eat during the day?

WIXTED: Oh well it'd be a regular 7 o'clock in the morning have breakfast, noontime have the main meal, and then usually about 4:30 in the afternoon you'd have a light supper. And hope you got liberty so you could leave and go into the big city.

SIGRIST: What would you do if you did got...if you got liberty, what would you do in New York?

WIXTED: Oh well primarily at that particular time, I was married, so I would go over and see my wife and do your wife thing.

SIGRIST: Where was she living?

WIXTED: Well at the time we were living in Long Island City. That would wind up being just off the end of the 59th Street Bridge.

SIGRIST: Now how would you get into Manhattan from Ellis Island?

WIXTED: At that particular time, they had a small ferryboat. I think it had a diesel engine in it, caterpillar-type thing I believe. It looked just like a miniature ferryboat. Just like the Staten Island Ferry but it was a lot smaller. And that used to have...it used to have a regular schedule from here over to lower Manhattan, to the...I believe it was the MIO building over there. Right next to the Staten Island Ferry terminal was where they used to pull in and leave from. And occasionally if it broke down, they'd send us over we'd wind up on a tugboat that would leave from the same place, but...

SIGRIST: What was the, do you remember how late the ferry ran at night?

WIXTED: That I don't recall because this place was operational, Customs people were in and out of here all the time. So I don't know whether it really stopped or not.

SIGRIST: Did you have any interaction with the immigration side of what was going on here?
Or do you remember seeing-

WIXTED: Not at my particular job. I remember seeing people come and go. And then the ferry boat would come in and you'd see I don't know whether that's US Marshals or Customs people, but they would show up with a lot of people, people to be processed or people that just came off some of the boats, the ships that came in. And they would bring them over for processing. And then I used to see people in the other buildings, and when I asked them about it was either people that they thought were sick, that they wanted them to have a medical checkup before they actually went into the city and to have some sort of I guess you'd call it a deposition for what they were going to do medically, or there were some detainees that they were going to deport, is what they told me. And this was quite an active place at that time, before it closed.

SIGRIST: Did you receive any special training here?

WIXTED: For over here?

SIGRIST: Yeah, in something. Some skill you learned in the four months you were here.

WIXTED: I don't think it was necessary at the time when I came over for what my particular job was.

SIGRIST: What about...?

WIXTED: They had people on the patrol boats, and as long as the patrol boats were operational, and if there's small thing to be repaired, I took care of it, mainly that was my job. As a metallurgist then it would be, because I believe they had the aluminum boats then.

SIGRIST: Would you have participated in any drills while you were here of any sort?

WIXTED: Oh we had fire drills a lot, you got to have fire drills.

SIGRIST: Can you describe was that, what does that entail?

WIXTED: They would pick on a part of the building that they would use for a fire drill. I don't know whether that involved the civilian people that were here or not. I believe the Customs people took care of that and the maintenance people on this side of the, on the Customs side of the island. But we would have drills over there, because we had this fire jeep that was always – that thing always had to run, it always had to work, it even had a water pump on it, hoses, a short ladder so we could get up the what is it? Three stories I think for the buildings over here. But they would run around and have quite a fire drill. Stop everything dead, everybody would go get this little jeep around, make sure it worked, ran, squirt water. Go through a regular drill just as if it was a house on fire.

SIGRIST: Do you remember any kind of serious problem happening while you were here in those four months?

WIXTED: The only serious problem to me was when the ferryboat didn't run right! And it wouldn't be operational and we'd have to take the tugboat back and forth. I think that's what everybody worried about.

SIGRIST: That was your biggest concern.

WIXTED: Yeah, that was probably our biggest concern. But we were very I don't know how I should put it...it wouldn't be interactive, but we had good rapport with the maintenance people on the island. So if they needed something at the time and we had it, we could go back and forth and kind of work together. Or if they needed some...they didn't have enough people and something happened at the time, we could give them a little assistance. Or it'd be the other way around.

SIGRIST: Do you remember a specific incident where you were assisting the maintenance people on the island?

WIXTED: Right off there was something that happened on the back side of the island. Probably the fence fell down or something at the time and we had to put it back up, because I recall there used to be two high I believe they were twelve foot chain-link fences. One was on the outside of the wall. Then there was a walkway down the middle of that. And then there was another fence, just as if...kind of a prison yard kind of a thing. And there were some silly people that decided they didn't want to stay here and they didn't get deported, and they wanted to swim to New Jersey. That was because there was no bridge out there at that time. It was surrounded by water and the patrol boats would even go around out there. But they would try to swim and as soon as they found out somebody left or somebody was missing, or they saw somebody out there in the water they'd send a boat around. And they usually didn't quite make it. They'd get out there because there was a nasty current out there.

SIGRIST: Are there any incidents that stick out in your mind where bodies were found in the harbor during your four months here?

WIXTED: No I don't remember any over here. Or else at the time that would've been the patrol boats that would've wound up doing that.

SIGRIST: What about-

WIXTED: There had been in other parts of the harbor, I remember.

SIGRIST: What about medical facilities. For instance, if you slammed your finger or something, what would happen? Where would you go and how would you be treated?

WIXTED: I think at the time, we had our own small medical office on the island, in our particular area so that we could keep separated from the Customs department. You know, if it came that bad. If not, we'd wind up going to the Marine Hospital on Staten Island.

SIGRIST: Did anything like that happen to you?

WIXTED: No, I was lucky.

SIGRIST: What about to any of your friends?

WIXTED: Well, one of the other fellas, I believe he smashed his hand or something. Something kind of nasty did happen to him, I don't recall just why. But as far as I know, they put him on a patrol boat and went. And that was the easiest way to get across the harbor at the time.

SIGRIST: So it wasn't treated here...

WIXTED: Well, they would do a preliminary thing, a triage kind of a thing, then put him on a boat and take him to Staten Island.

SIGRIST: Do any of your officers stick out in your mind for any reason, or colleagues in general? I mean, was there somebody that you served with that...?

WIXTED: They stick out, but I can't remember their names.

SIGRIST: Well that's all right. But tell me why they stick out.

WIXTED: The chief I worked for, I believe it was the end of September, October, one of these Northeaster storms where the water rises in the harbor and comes back, and the water used to wash over the seawall here. And we were here and we came down to go to

work one morning, and the basement was full of water, so we couldn't even get to the shops. And here comes the chief in a little rowboat, I don't know where he got that from, but he's rowing through the hallway to see what condition his work area was in. And that was the silliest thing, and I always remembered that. And then every time they talk about a northeast storm up here, and they always talk about the water level rising and coming through the seawalls either here or in Manhattan or in the surrounding islands, this I always remember.

SIGRIST: Any other Coast Guardsmen that stick out in your mind? Or a buddy that you used to do something with? Anything along those lines?

WIXTED: No, not really because at the end of the day when my job was over if I had liberty, hey, it was home. I was a new married person and that was the big thing.

SIGRIST: Did you ever bring your wife out here?

WIXTED: No, I tried to get her to come and she wouldn't come. That's why I was trying to come on the 40th anniversary, was to bring her over to the island since it was restored, and I could show where I was, where I wound up, and possibly what I was doing when we first got married. But unfortunately it didn't work out.

SIGRIST: But in 1953 she didn't, you didn't bring her out here.

WIXTED: No.

SIGRIST: No. She didn't. Were you allowed to have visitors out here?

WIXTED: I really don't recall. I don't think anybody had any dependents over here. It was strictly the service people that were here.

SIGRIST: Right. I was just wondering if people, if they allowed you to bring people out if you wanted to.

WIXTED: I really don't...I never bothered to ask. Maybe if I'd asked they would have given me permission, but it probably would've only been for the day anyway. But I really don't think so. I don't think it would have an appropriate thing at the time for what the island's operation was.

SIGRIST: Did you participate in any instruction taught in a classroom anywhere?

WIXTED: No. No, it was strictly my shop job, and what my rating pertained to.

SIGRIST: Were you required to do any marching on the island, having learned it at boot camp?

WIXTED: We had morning muster out back in the ball field.

SIGRIST: What is that? Describe to me what "morning muster" is.

WIXTED: Every morning as long you had the duty, after breakfast, say 8 o'clock when the flag goes up, we'd all muster out back standing in a big line like two ears of corn, and a boatswain would check out everybody that was supposed to be there in our particular group to make sure all his people was here that was assigned here, unless somebody was sick or somebody had leave. To make sure he had the right number of people, really. And still it's, it's still more or less a military operation completely.

SIGRIST: It's kind of like taking roll call.

WIXTED: Our job is a little different. Yeah, he's taking roll call.

SIGRIST: Then but did you have to...?

WIXTED: Then we would start. So if the train was here, the groceries came in on the ferryboat, then we might go down to the storage area for the kitchen or something and help unload the foodstuffs and make sure everything was put away. If we had material coming over to work on in our shop, we'd have to take care of that.

SIGRIST: Tell me about this electric train. I've never heard anyone describe this before.

WIXTED: You never seen an electric train?

SIGRIST: Describe...the food came on the little ferryboat, the Ellis Island ferryboat...

WIXTED: It looks like the thing that they have out at the airport to carry the baggage around. That's what it looked like.

SIGRIST: And where was it exactly?

WIXTED: It just...I don't know where they kept it really.

SIGRIST: Did it run on tracks?

WIXTED: No, no it wasn't on tracks. It was a wheeled train. And I believe there was three cars, they were probably 10 foot long, say 10 by 4 each car, and it was electric-motor driven, what would you call it...a mule. Probably the same dimension but with an electric motor. And they'd hook it all up, add solid rubber tires on it so it was easy to get on the ferryboat and off.

SIGRIST: So it was...

WIXTED: And we could take the jeep on the ferryboat, but that was the only thing that would fit.

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SIGRIST: And then it was used for what? It was used for groceries...

WIXTED: Well for general moving of materials, let's say.

SIGRIST: And did it...?

WIXTED: It was kind of a carryall.

SIGRIST: Did it have a driver as such? I mean, was someone sitting-

WIXTED: Oh yes, they had a driver. It just didn't drive by itself. No you had a driver. It kind of reminded you of moving the baggage at the airport though. That kind of a baggage train thing.

SIGRIST: Oh that's interesting.

WIXTED: It was probably really similar. They had probably come up with that probably about the same time they started moving baggage at say, La Guardia. Because I don't believe the...I think they were just working on JFK then. I don't think it was finished yet.

END OF SIDE A

START OF SIDE B

SIGRIST: When you look at back on your days in the Coast Guard, how do you see them now?
How do you think about your days in the Coast Guard?

WIXTED: It was an adventure. I don't know. It was different. There was a lot of good camaraderie. I learned a lot more things. The Coast Guard gave me a chance to do what I wanted to do. That's the way I looked at it.

SIGRIST: And what was it? What was it that you wanted to do at the time?

WIXTED: I wanted to be an engineer and a mechanic. Of course, other people told me, "Why don't you be a cook? Or just go out and be an old deckhand and run a mop around all the time," but that isn't really what they do either, constantly. Sounds good, that's what a lot of people say. But the service has a lot of different ratings, a lot of different things to do. And they did give me a chance to do what I wanted to do. And that was to be in engineering, and really work on the whole ship. So I managed to go through that and it gave me a chance to work on naval and civil engineering then.

SIGRIST: Tell me about-

WIXTED: So I really enjoyed my job.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the process of getting discharged from Ellis Island and what you had to...what did that entail?

WIXTED: I really don't think it entailed too much. It's like asking somebody else that was getting discharged at the time, even probably out of the army, they'll say, Oh hey I said I wanted out, and the next thing I know I'm gone, and here's the paperwork. But really it probably wasn't that. You had a separation date when your enlistment ended, so you still had to have...be physically fit when you left – because if you had a medical problem they'd keep you until it was reconciled. You still had to be in shape. And then they would work on getting all of this paperwork and assignments, and to make sure all your time was accounted for, that you had proper rating, if you had medals that was to be given to you of any kind, that you got those. It seemed

like a lot of paperwork, but it went quick because primarily the people in the office worked it up.

SIGRIST: Did your routine change as your time was getting closer to the end on the island?

WIXTED: Mine never did because I never tried to change it. I was doing the job I had, and what my rating called for I liked, so I just kept working at it until I ran out of time and they said, "Tomorrow's your day. Be in the office. Sign your discharge papers."

SIGRIST: What did you wear when you left Ellis Island?

WIXTED: We had our dress-blue sailor suits, navy type.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what that is? Describe it in words, please.

WIXTED: Well, your travel uniform was a set of dress-blues that consisted of a wool Melton uniform, a jumper, wide collar, three stripes, a big silk tie tied in a square knot, bell-bottom pants – not necessary bell, but they were straight leg pants with thirteen buttons on. You looked like you came from the Navy Yard at that particular time in a Dixie Cup hat.

SIGRIST: Did you have multiple uniforms? Were there different kinds of uniforms for different activities?

WIXTED: We really only had three kinds of uniforms. It would be the same as what the Navy has now, I believe, at that particular time. Dungarees, which they call denims now for work. Then we had whites for in the summertime. There was still a jumper and a pair of white duck, it was a white duck uniform. Actually it's a heavy cotton, is what it is. And then you were still wear your silk scarf with it and your little round

Dixie Cup hat and your dress-blues. Uniforms looked the same; they were just different colors.

SIGRIST: Were there inspections that you had to undergo while you were here? Were you ever inspected to make sure your tie was on straight or I mean anything like that?

WIXTED: I don't know. I really don't recall because I always tried to stay, you know, be ready to go. But I believe they always when we checked out to go on liberty, when they said we could go on liberty, the officer of the day always checked us to make sure we looked good. If we didn't, we couldn't go until we got straightened out or we satisfied his wishes as far as uniform went. He wanted us to look, be properly dressed and appropriate when we went ashore. That they always wanted, and that I always tried to do. Looked like I just stepped out of the tailor's shop, or everything just came from the cleaners. Always with a nice, you had to leave with a nice clean uniform.

SIGRIST: I'm curious about how your wife felt about being a newlywed and not being able to live with her husband?

WIXTED: Well, we had gone together for awhile, so she knew that I was going to be coming and going all the time because she was still sitting over in the city while we were running up north on the ship anyway. So she knew that I was going to be gone and that I had duty days, where so many days they would give me liberty if I deserved it, and then I would have duty days where I would have to stay here. So she accepted that.

SIGRIST: Interesting situation for a woman...

WIXTED: And she didn't later on, too, when we really...we really got into it.

SIGRIST: So you were discharged in December...well your paper's right here, right? It's December, I just saw it, December 7th...no, no that's when you started.

WIXTED: Well that's the day I got out, too. Separation date's over here someplace.

SIGRIST: Yeah, okay. And you were at Ellis Island about 4 months.

WIXTED: Yeah.

SIGRIST: And just tell us quickly what happened after that. Tell us about the course of your life.

WIXTED: The course of my life...

SIGRIST: In five minutes or less.

WIXTED: That ought to be easy. Well, I was going back home to Pennsylvania. I didn't know precisely what I was going to do. But then I decided I should go to school, and go back for architectural drafting I believe it was. But in the end, when I couldn't find a lot of good jobs like the other million people that got discharged from the service about approximately the same time. . . Everybody seemed to be kind of dissatisfied. Everybody was trying to go back to school, so there was a lot of ex-GIs in school taking courses, but then I don't know, for whatever reason after a couple of semesters I became dissatisfied. So I decided hey, maybe I should just go back into in the service because I liked it, and it got to the point where I missed it. Probably the regimentation, the camaraderie again. And the things I was doing, I was doing things I liked. So decided I should reenlist and stay. And we came back to the city.

SIGRIST: So you went back into the Coast Guard?

WIXTED: I went back into the Coast Guard again.

SIGRIST: And how long did you stay in the Coast Guard?

WIXTED: I stayed long enough to retire. So I stayed until 1972.

SIGRIST: What was your rank in 1972?

WIXTED: I was Chief Petty Officer.

SIGRIST: And what did you start off as?

WIXTED: A seaman recruit in boot camp.

SIGRIST: Well that's interesting. So you actually chose it as a career ultimately.

WIXTED: Yes, I made a career out of it then.

SIGRIST: Did you ever have an opportunity before now, say, to come back to Ellis Island where you were, while you were still in the Coast Guard for any reason?

WIXTED: No, because I believe the island was closed at that time. And that was before they even started to renovate the place. So I would've been probably...I probably retired before you started renovations.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

WIXTED: I'm not even sure what year that was.

SIGRIST: Well they started doing renovations in '83. But they actually started giving tours in the early 70s.

WIXTED: Did they?

SIGRIST: So that's why I was just curious...

WIXTED: Then I heard about how they were going to renovate the island, and I think they were already working on the Statue of Liberty.

SIGRIST: Well so now I see why the Coast Guard means so much to you, you spent your whole life in that institution.

WIXTED: Yeah, but this was just the tail end of my first enlistment in the Coast Guard. But I thought it'd be nice to come back, show my kids where we started out – or where I, part of the places I started out. Because before that I was on the weather ships, the big cutters up to that point, that's where I spent my whole first hitch.

SIGRIST: And that's another oral history project altogether.

WIXTED: Yes yes, that's a whole another thing.

SIGRIST: Well Mr. Wixed, this probably a good place to-

WIXTED: Although it is in the history books, and there's a lot of stuff you can find in the libraries. I even found interesting books in the school library for Ellis Island that had very good coverage. I was really surprised to find because I didn't think they went that much in depth for as late as they did go, because they did cover the time period after the renovations started, they do show you.

SIGRIST: I want to thank you very much for coming up and letting me ask you some questions about being in the Coast Guard here at Ellis Island. The description of the train is very interesting. As I've said, we've not heard that before.

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WIXTED: Maybe if you go and look in one of the buildings you might find it.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Vincent Wixed on Tuesday, August 15th, 1995 here at the Ellis Island recording studio. Thank you.

WIXTED: And thank you.

END OF TAPE