

EI-669

JOSEPH HANNAN

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SIGRIST: Good morning. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Friday, September 22nd, 1995. I'm Pompton Lakes, New Jersey with Joseph Hannan. Joe Hannan was in the Coast Guard at Ellis Island beginning January 10th, 1942. He was in boot camp there for six to eight weeks and then made a return appearance at Ellis Island in 1944 before he was given a new assignment. Present also is Kevin Dailey, who's running the equipment, and we are in the Florida room, as it's been called in the back of Joe's house here.

Joe, can we begin by you giving me your full name, please.

HANNAN: Joseph Frances Hannan.

SIGRIST: And your date of birth, please.

HANNAN: February 26th, 1923.

SIGRIST: 26th, 1923. Where were you born?

HANNAN: Patterson, New Jersey.

SIGRIST: And can you give me just kind of a thumbnail sketch of your family background?

HANNAN: Yes. Irish Catholic on both sides. My father was a—my grandfathers were both mill workers. Grandmothers stayed home. My father was a city employee, was the foreman of the Shade Tree Gang in Patterson, New Jersey.

SIGRIST: The what gang?

HANNAN: The Shade Tree.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

HANNAN: S-H-A-D-E. Shade tree.

SIGRIST: Tree?

HANNAN: Tree gang.

SIGRIST: I may be asking to spell things because we do transcribe these interviews.

HANNAN: My mother died when I was ten years old. She didn't work. She stayed home and I was kind of raised by a conglomeration of aunts, but my father did remarry. My stepmother and I didn't get along too well, so I became kind of a semi-street kid. I didn't—I didn't spend a lot of time at home.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me your parents' names, please?

HANNAN: Parent was Frank Hannan and my mother was Alice O'Neil. Do you want my stepmother, too?

SIGRIST: Sure.

HANNAN: Lillian Hersinger.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that?

HANNAN: H-E-R-S-I-N-G-E-R.

SIGRIST: And were there any other brothers and sisters?

HANNAN: No, only child.

SIGRIST: Only child. And you grew up in Patterson?

HANNAN: Until I joined the service. I was seventeen going on eighteen, I guess, yeah.

SIGRIST: That's 1942?

HANNAN: 1940—yes, right.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me how you got involved with the service?

HANNAN: Yes, I was an usher in the Fabian Theater in Patterson.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Fabian?

HANNAN: F-A-B-I-A-N.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

HANNAN: And I was there when Pearl Harbor was bombed and we were called to the rear of the theater and the manager said, "They just bombed Pearl Harbor." Where's Pearl Harbor? We didn't know. And we had to go through the audience and tell all the servicemen to return to their units immediately. I was going with my girlfriend—my present wife—at that time and she said, "What are you going to do?" I said, "I'm not going to do anything." A lot of people, of course, the draft was in effect, and I was still in high school, but somehow, I really the circumstances, I decided that I was going to enlist. I used to fishing out of Jersey City with my father on one of the big party boats, the Palace, I think it was called, and I always saw the Coast Guard, the big white Coast Guard boats moving out. I thought, "Well, that's a good service to get in." They had openings there, so I went and I joined the Coast Guard. My father had to give me permission, but I have no recollection of going over to New York, except for my physical and for my final day, but I must have gone over and enlisted or something. So I went to sea almost immediately because I was sworn into service at the Barge Office, which is down around the present Lower Manhattan. I guess the building is still there. And went to sea immediately because they marched us across to a small boat. I think it was called an eight-three footer, and we were filed aboard that and taken over and deposited on Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Can you tell me a little bit about the process of enlisting? I mean, what that actually entails, what you went through?

HANNAN: Well, I went down and it was really on a physical. I guess they gave me a written test, too, but I don't remember it all. The physical was filing through nude and getting examined. In fact, they really had a discussion because I weighed about a hundred and fifteen pounds.

SIGRIST: Hundred and fifteen?

HANNAN: Fifteen, and I was the same height as I am now, five foot seven. So they were afraid that I suffered from malnutrition and there was a little debate amongst them whether they should take me or not, but they were taking lots of people, probably in worse shape than I, and they passed me. Then I went home and they sent me a letter. I can remember the wording, too. It said, "Dress properly in order to make a good appearance upon your first day in service." Words to that effect. So I put on my Fingertip reversible coat and my square-toed shoes that were the in the style in those days, rubber souls, and I reported that way.

SIGRIST: Can you describe what a Fingertip jacket is?

HANNAN: It's called a Fingertip because it hung down this far, I guess. I really don't know. Actually, it was a reversible raincoat, winter coat. And, of course clean underwear. Good thing I did because I was in those clothes for thirteen days before I was issued a uniform.

SIGRIST: At Ellis Island?

HANNAN: On Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: Why was that?

HANNAN: They didn't have supplies. I hope I washed the underwear, although I don't remember anything. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: How did your father feel about your decision to enlist?

HANNAN: I think he was kind of pleased. I really do. He and I got along all right, but we weren't by any means close, and I was a very poor high school student. I was thrown out one time. Well, dropped out, really. He wanted to take me and I think he was kind of relieved that I was doing something like that, and he had told me I should get some kind of training, so I come out, I would have a job.

SIGRIST: Did he have any military training in his background?

HANNAN: No, he did not. No, I guess his age for World War I was a little off. I have his draft card, so I know he was eligible, but he wasn't taken.

SIGRIST: Well, when you were brought to Ellis Island, did you know what that was?

HANNAN: Uh-huh.

SIGRIST: Or even where they were taking you, for that matter?

HANNAN: Nope. I had no idea where I was going or what I was expected to do and I didn't for a couple of days after on the island, either.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about the ride from Battery Park to Ellis Island that very first day?

HANNAN: I can remember it, but I can't really say that it was a—since I had gone in and out of that area many times, I saw the things that I always saw, you know. The sugar—was it the sugar factory? You know, the big—oh, Colgate was there and that kind of thing. So I was familiar generally with that. But, no, I didn't remember anything particular about it.

SIGRIST: Can you describe the boat that brought you to Ellis Island that first day?

HANNAN: Yeah, it was what the Coast Guard called an eighty-three footer. It was eighty-three foot long, very narrow. It was a patrol boat, almost a harbor patrol boat. Almost a harbor patrol boat, and it really wasn't designed to carry groups of enlistees. So we were just kind of crowded aboard, my recollection.

SIGRIST: How large was the group that was going out there?

HANNAN: I have no idea.

SIGRIST: But there were more than—

HANNAN: Oh, yeah, there must have been—oh, I would say that the least there would have been would be fifty, but I really don't know.

SIGRIST: What's the first thing that happened once the boat docked at Ellis Island?

HANNAN: There's something I want to put in before that, too, because I think it was interesting. We were standing out in front of the Barge Office—

I'm sorry, no, this was inside the Barge Office and the officer—I guess it was an officer. It could have been a chief, I don't know, who administered our enlistment oath said, "Now, is anybody changing their mind? If you are, step forward now," and it crossed my mind. I said, "Gee, this is the only time." I had no idea. Going to war, I don't really know what that meant, but I said, "This is the only time I'm going to have a chance." I glanced over at my father and he didn't say, "Yeah, step out," so I continued with the oath. Then they brought us outside and said, "Now, we're going to march." Well, you can imagine if we want to put the number at fifty marchers who had never marched before, I'm sure we weren't much marchers. Then we got down to the boat and got aboard.

A recollection on the other end is clear to me is because the ferry boat that is there now was in and I watched that. We pulled up on the starboard of the side of the harbor and we unloaded right in front of the immigration building.

SIGRIST: Then what happened? What was the process once you arrived?

HANNAN: Specifically I really can't say. I know that in my memory there was a tremendous number of lines of people waiting to get shots, waiting to get food, waiting to get supplies and so on. Being brought up in a very modest Irish Catholic house, I was a little uneasy with the nudeness, you know, that went around there. Also, I remember I guess I must have had trouble going to the bathroom because there was always somebody—when I had to defecate, there was always a line. So I looked in one of the other toilets on it there and it had a red cross on it and nobody was in there, so I said, "Well, I'll use that," because I thought that was for pharmacist mates, but it wasn't. It was for venereal disease patients. [Laughs] I didn't know that until after I used it a couple of times, though.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me the facilities where you slept on the island?

HANNAN: Yes, it was—are you familiar with the island at all? I mean, have you been in it?

SIGRIST: My office is there.

HANNAN: No, I'm talking about where we were.

SIGRIST: Oh, yes, but explain it for someone who doesn't know.

HANNAN: Okay. But I'm asking this because I want to know, this was, we were in what was called the Drill Shed. I think it was called the Drill Shed. It's the room with the great big compass painted on the wall. It was

still there when I was there a few years ago, and the bunks. Of course, we were not drilling in there. The bunks had to be at least three high. My brain says it was higher than that, but I kind of doubt that it was. But we were in bunks three high and maybe four, who knows, for all of the time I was there.

SIGRIST: How many people in the room?

HANNAN: Oh, I don't know. Hundreds and hundreds, I guess. When you figure that whole room was full of these stacked bunks.

SIGRIST: Was that the only room where people slept?

HANNAN: I don't know. It's the only one that I saw, anyhow.

SIGRIST: And how many bathrooms were attached to that?

HANNAN: No recollection of that at all. There was another big room that was the mess hall and I think the bathrooms were off the mess hall, but the physical characteristics, the layout of it, is kind of vague to me.

SIGRIST: You mentioned the compass painting on the wall. Can you describe that a little bit for us on tape?

HANNAN: Well, I suppose it was to teach you how to box a compass, how to use a compass, but it wasn't used for that while we were there. If we had any training, and we did have some, they were done in small rooms, in small groups scattered around the building. So we never—that room was never used for instruction, to my knowledge. Nor was it used for drill. If we did our drill, we went out in the yard or most of the drilling that we did was over in front of the immigration building.

SIGRIST: And can you describe what drilling entailed?

HANNAN: Well, they taught us the manual of arms, you know, how to carry a rifle, and parts of the rifle. We never fired one. You know, the left turn, right turn, about face, that kind of thing.

SIGRIST: Were the rifles functioning rifles or were they dummies rifles?

HANNAN: Yes, they were. We knew they were functioning rifles because part of the assignment that we had there was to guard the seawall. To walk the seawall carrying a rifle and an ammunition belt, web belt and they gave us one clip of ammunition which we carried in the belt. We were forbidden to put it in the rifle. They were Springfield, I don't know what the—oh, ought threes. I think they were from 1903, I'm

not sure. But we were instructed never to put the clip of ammunition in and none of us knew how to, I don't think unless we experimented. None of us knew how to put the ammunition in, anyhow, and of course, certainly not how to fire. There was a range on the island, but I never remember using it.

SIGRIST: So rifle use was never part of your instruction there?

HANNAN: It was, yeah. Oh, yeah, we had regular classes in it, but they were classes. They weren't practical.

SIGRIST: All in theory, not in practice.

HANNAN: Yeah, and of course we were there to prevent saboteurs from coming aboard the island and from prisoners, aliens, whom we also guarded, escaping. I never had any occasion to stop anyone, although we were told that when the office, the relief came, we had to challenge them in a true military fashion. You know, "Halt. Who goes there?" and we probably had passwords, too, but I don't remember it as a big problem.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about the guarding of the aliens and what sticks out in your mind about that experience?

HANNAN: That is the thing that most sticks in my mind. We were taken down to—one of the guard positions—that was an outside. The one I just described was outside, where you could see other people around you. But then inside the building, probably in the basement of the immigration building, they had these two giant rooms. By giant, they looked awfully big to me, and they—one side were females and the other side were males, and of course, I didn't know what this was all about. Enemy alien didn't mean anything to me, and I don't think anyone ever explained it. We were issued—we didn't carry guns when we were down there, we carried clubs and we were told that we had to make sure that order was kept and that there's no intermingling on the two sides because these were families broken up. You know, the females and the males.

I remember the over riding thing that I could smell was oranges. That's interesting. I guess they were given oranges to prevent scurvy or something. I'm sure they were fed all right, but that was the order. You would think maybe an odor of human sweat or things like that, and there may have been, but the thing that stuck with me was the orange smell. I was fascinated by it because first of all, why were they there kind of thing because they were Americans, most of them, you know. I mean I delighted in looking at some of the teenage girls because they were my age or just about and they're

rolling the bobby socks, you know, and their angora sweaters and everything like that and talking English, although we were not supposed to talk to them, but you could hear them. So it was a very mysterious kind of a thing.

SIGRIST: That was one of your instructions, that you were not to speak to these—

HANNAN: I suppose it was. I don't remember anyone specifically saying it, but somehow we didn't.

SIGRIST: Can you remember an occasion where you did speak to one of these people?

HANNAN: No, I never remember doing that.

SIGRIST: Do you recall—you mentioned you thought they were Americans. Do you recall any other nationalities being held at Ellis Island at that time?

HANNAN: Well, the Germans. There seemed to be, at least in my mind, after I found out why they were there, were mostly German, and I think a lot of them were. I must have either overheard or talked because I know—no, this could have been at home. Some of our neighbors—I think it was a German baker, had been picked up, you know. I didn't see him or anything like that. I didn't know. Our baker was Scotch, so he wasn't one of the enemy aliens, but I never remember seeing any Japanese. Italians, yes. There were a lot of Italians. Italian and German, that's about all.

SIGRIST: Would guarding the enemy aliens be a daily thing for you? Was that part of the routine, or was that a special—

HANNAN: Well, it was a daily thing, but not necessarily for me because we rotate different—you know, you had your training sessions and your classroom sessions and your guard duty. That would be at night, by the way. I don't know whether—I guess we did it during the day, too. Sometimes your guard duty would take you to other places in the building, too, or you might be a messenger. And one of the spots, which I've been back to the island and searched for and can't find it, and it's so clear in my mind that I can't believe it's not in existence. One of the spots was in front of a big vault. I mean, a walk in vault. Oh, much bigger than this room, and you know, they said, or not whether they said actually, but what was in that was the valuables of the people who were interned. But when I back to Ellis Island four or five years ago with Brian, we couldn't find.

SIGRIST: We should say for the sake of the tape that the Brian that you're referring to is Brian Feeney.

HANNAN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me—you've done a little bit of it already, the daily routine? Starting with the time you got up and what you did and go on through the day.

HANNAN: I really can't specifically say. I know that we were out five o'clock in the morning until four o'clock—

SIGRIST: And how were you woken up?

HANNAN: Probably a boson's whistle. Bosons would walk through blowing their whistles. I don't remember a bugle corps, but there could have been that. Someone else may remember something different. Then you would get up and you would have your breakfast and bathroom facilities, and then you would go to whatever you're going to do that day and they would have orders of the day posted. What uniform, what the uniform would be—when you got a uniform.

SIGRIST: When you had one, yeah. [Laughs]

HANNAN: As I said.

SIGRIST: Where did you go for breakfast?

HANNAN: There was a mess hall right near there.

SIGRIST: Where in relation to where you actually slept? I mean, did you have to walk a distance?

HANNAN: I remember it being that, pointing left, but I'm not really sure that's where it was.

SIGRIST: Can you describe for me what they would feed you for breakfast?

HANNAN: Oh, I imagine the usual thing, French toast, shit on a shingle, as they said. Cereal, I imagine, but that's really I'm reconstructing that. I really have no specifics, you know. I don't remember ever being hungry, except the hunger of a young man who didn't snack all day, you know. They didn't keep us tremendously busy because I don't think they had room to keep us busy. There just was so many people and they were struggling to get this thing organized. I mean, nobody

expected it to happen, and it was so new, the war was so new, I mean, after you all you were talking a little over a month after Pearl Harbor, you know. And no uniforms for a long time. For me, anyhow. I guess for others, too.

SIGRIST: What was the general age category of the men who were brought out at your time?

HANNAN: I would say that that was the general age here, my age. The early twenties, late teens, although occasionally I—my best friend in the service I met—well, it was my next assignment. So I guess you don't want to discuss that. They didn't work at Ellis Island, but he was a man in his—I think he was thirty-three, which is quite—and just accidentally we stayed together for the next two years after that. He was kind of 'pop' to the group because he was so much older than the rest of us.

SIGRIST: You've mentioned guard duty on the seawall and guarding the aliens. What were some of the other things that you went through during the boot camp experience at Ellis Island?

HANNAN: Well, one of the things that really sticks in my mind, right then about the time I was there, was the late winter or spring, they had a parade in New York called the New York at War Parade and all of the military units in the whole area were going to march in this parade because it was to last sixteen hours, which I think it did. I think it was sixteen hours.

SIGRIST: The parade itself was to last sixteen hours.

HANNAN: Yes. Yeah. So, we were non marchers and we were taken out to the seawall, really, and we were put through the paces as far as marching and, you know, turning properly and so on, but we still didn't become marchers. At that time, too, I saw Jack Dempsey for the first time, because he was in charge of physical training for the Coast Guard. Heavy weight champion of the world at one time, and he came out and I saw him. I didn't speak to him or anything, but he came ashore for a few minutes and, I don't know, talked to the officers or something and went back in again. Back to New York again.

But we then were taken—we were taken by truck then into New York City. Now, the parade would start uptown, probably Fifth Avenue.

SIGRIST: You were taken by truck from Ellis Island?

HANNAN: Well, I mean we would cross by the ferry, I'm sure, and then got on trucks at South Street Seaport area, that area. Then we were taken uptown to where the parade started. I don't know, 60th maybe, somewhere up there.

SIGRIST: 60th Street?

HANNAN: Yeah, and then we were marched down and that was the funny part because there were a couple of guys in the group, there were two professional boxers. Cohen and Freidman I think the two names were. Al Cohen and I forget Freidman, what his first name was, but they were really tough guys. You know, I guess somebody told them to get into the Coast Guard so they wouldn't have to go fight, which I don't think they did. I think they stayed on Ellis Island the whole time. They were both New York guys, Brooklyn guys, you know, but they weren't very much for marching and we were marching down 5th Avenue and somebody in the rear of me said—Al got screwed up and I think his rifle fell off his shoulder and somebody in the background, "Get in fucking step, you fucking Jew bastard." He stopped right there, right in the middle of the parade. "Who said that?" and he was ready for a fight right there, you know. [Laughs]

But I got to know them a little bit later. They were both really nice guys, you know. I enjoyed them. They were characters. I tried to looking them up. I did find one of them. I mean as far as their records, because I'm sure they're in the record book. Freidman was called "The Man who built Brooklyn Arena," he always called himself.

SIGRIST: The Brooklyn Arena?

HANNAN: Arena, whatever that is.

SIGRIST: You know, talking about this makes me think that were there athletic activities going on with the Coast Guard at Ellis Island that were for recreation?

HANNAN: Well, if you look at the records of the island—I have some of these here—they had a tremendous—when it became a receiving station, they had a tremendous athletic program. In fact, they were like the champions of the area in a couple of sports. Baseball I think was one of them, and a lot of big name athletes came through here. Usually they didn't—Victor Mature was the only other big name that I remember. I never saw him, but he refused [unclear] thing like that. He wanted to be an enlisted man and he stayed an enlisted man the whole time he was in the service, but others I think, if they were good athletes, they were out there. It was a very [unclear] recreation, but not when I was there.

SIGRIST: So in your time there there was nothing like that.

HANNAN: Not that I remember.

SIGRIST: [unclear] talk about the boxers being there and Dempsey and all of that.

HANNAN: Yeah, but I just happened to run into them, you know. I don't know what they were doing. They were the same as I was, going through boot camp, I suppose.

SIGRIST: What other things were you taught in boot camp to do?

HANNAN: Well, we were taught knots. Learned to tie knots like a sailor. Nomenclature.

SIGRIST: Can you explain for me how they taught you to do the knots? I mean, what were the circumstances?

HANNAN: I don't remember where it was, but I'm sure it's just like Boy Scouts, you know. This is a knot that's used to shorten a rope, and this is how you tie it and now we'll practice. That kind of thing. I'm sure that's how it was done. Where in the building, I don't know that, but also we had classes in seamanship, you know, what to do aboard ship. You know, when you go aboard a ship, you always have to salute the colors and the officer of the deck will be there. So that we knew a lot of this stuff, but we never had a chance to lose it. The only kind of thing that maybe it's a combination of recreation and training, one of the things they did, they had lifeboats on the island on [unclear] so that they could be lowered into the water. So a couple of times we were given lifeboat drill and we were put down into the lifeboats, climbed down into the lifeboats and then taught, you know, how to pull an oar or how to act when the coxswain said, "Toss oars," you know that meant hold the oar up in front of you and in oars I guess was the other one. But then we would row out to Statue of Liberty and go around that and come back in again. That's the only sea training that I had.

But another thing that I remember, I guess everybody kind of liked this because it was a chance to grab a nap. They showed us slides of the various silhouettes of airplanes. You know, this is a Zero, and this is a whatever bomber they were using, the Japanese and the German planes, and we had to identify them just by the silhouette. That's because every sailor, no matter what he was going to be eventually, was trained to be a deckhand and an observer. So I

never had any occasion to use that, but I dozed off many a time in that class, you know.

SIGRIST: That's interesting. I've not heard that before from any of the Coast Guardsman. What—did they offer you any kind of recreation while you were there?

HANNAN: I have no recollection.

SIGRIST: Movies, or I mean anything like that.

HANNAN: They may have. I don't remember anything like that.

SIGRIST: Not that you remember. Did you have an occasion—you rowed around the Statue of Liberty. Did you have any other occasion to go over to Bedlow's Island to the Statue of Liberty in your time.

HANNAN: No. We didn't land there. We just went around.

SIGRIST: Right.

HANNAN: Maybe some of the other coxswain would take you on, but we didn't. Mostly I spent my time, my free time brooding because, you know, when you go out to the rear of the building you're only about a couple of hundred yards from New Jersey. But I couldn't get there, you know, and so I was homesick as hell, as all of us were, I'm sure. I used to go out there and kind of brood. I think that's probably a good military procedure that all of our sailors and soldiers do.

[End of Tape One, Side A/Start of Tape One, Side B]

SIGRIST: Maybe you could explain for us exactly the process of getting liberty and how often you were allowed that.

HANNAN: Well, we weren't allowed any liberty during boot camp. I don't know when it was that I had—I know I tried to get liberty because my class was graduating from high school and at that time they graduated in the middle of the year. It was a great big high school in Patterson, East Side, and graduation, you know, was in there somewhere and I was supposed to graduate. As an aside, I don't know whether this is—I wasn't a good student, as I said, and I had been slated to graduate before, but I never did. But then when I went in service, the vice principal told me that since there's war and there's been a war on the books from World War I, anyone going into service with so many credits is automatically graduated with their class. So I asked for leave to go home so I could participate because I could envision

myself going up the aisle in my uniform, you know, but they wouldn't give it to me. The only time we thought we were going to get off the island was they get us up one night and said that we should be prepared to go ashore to help fight a fire, which I later found was the Normandy burning. We were alerted, but never went ashore.

But then eventually I know that I got liberty and I think it was probably every other night. Usually when you're attached to shore duty, it's every other night. I know that I got it because what you had to do before you were finally finished enough with training, you had to be able to recite the Articles—the Articles of War? No. What's the other thing I'm talking about? The Duties of a Sentry. I guess that's what it was, and you had to be able to recite those to an officer without referring to any notes. Everybody studied like crazy and I remember studying like crazy and I got liberty and went home. But then I was back the next day.

SIGRIST: So would that be towards the end of your time?

HANNAN: Yeah, I would think that was maybe after about a month, because I remember many times sitting waiting for the ferry in the ferry house over in Manhattan waiting to come back out.

SIGRIST: Was that a problem when you were on liberty, the boat schedules?

HANNAN: No, they ran very often. I don't remember anything. I think that those of us who were nervous always worried about it, you know, because if you're late, you're really in trouble, but I don't think so. They were very frequent and unless there was fog or something like that, there was no reason for them not to be.

SIGRIST: Did you or any of your colleagues ever get punished for some reason for something that was done that sticks out in your mind?

HANNAN: No. I did have a Captain's Mass, which is a punishment mass. Well, actually it's a Captain's Request Place and they use it for punishment. That was in Puerto Rico, though. I wasn't—not while I was on the island, no.

SIGRIST: And nothing that you remember?

HANNAN: No, no other person that I know of.

SIGRIST: Was there a place at Ellis Island that you remember that was used for punishing the Coast Guard—

HANNAN: Yeah, the brig was down in the basement. I saw that. That was still there when I visited the island. It was, you know, a barred room, and you heard talk of people being—see, what the island was at that time, was kind of a peculiar combination of things because of the health services. You know, the Public Health Hospital was there. So there would be a lot of guys in the Public Health Hospital who probably were quarantined or weren't allowed liberty, but they would get off somehow, you know. So there was always talk about the brig, you know, that somebody ended up in the brig, but mostly scuttlebutt. That's the word that was used that you learn after you take seamanship. It's not a rumor, it's scuttlebutt. No, I have no direct knowledge of anyone.

SIGRIST: Did you have any opportunity to go to the Public Health Service Hospital or any of your colleagues?

HANNAN: The only time I went over there wasn't for sickness. I guess I was on messenger duty and somebody needed to see the captain, the commanding officer and they told me where he was. He was playing poker over on the other side, near the Public Health Hospital. I'm not sure, that may be where his quarters were. But I went to his quarters and gave him a message that he was wanted some place.

SIGRIST: Tell me about the officers that stick out in your mind at that time and why they stick out in your mind.

HANNAN: Well, actually the officers really don't stick out in my mind because we didn't have much contact with officers. We had contact with enlisted men. There was one guy that everyone hated, Red Miller, I think his name was. He was the boson in charge, and just as I've been going out to these reunions and talking to other people, "Oh, yeah, his father owned a store up in Manhattan and he had influence, and he was there the whole war." But he was a mean son of a gun, and always screaming and supposedly punishing people. I don't remember him doing that, but we were afraid of him. We really were. He's the only one that stands out in my mind. He was such a threatening figure all the time because they're always screaming. That's true of any service. You know, they're always screaming at you for something and a lot of times you don't know what they're screaming at you for.

SIGRIST: Was there an inspection process that you had to undergo?

HANNAN: Yeah. Yeah, you had to lay out your seabag.

SIGRIST: And what is a seabag, can you describe what that is?

HANNAN: Seabag is a long like a hollow tube closed at one end with a drawstring at the top and what you packed everything that you owned. So when you picked up—usually you had a mattress to wrap around it, too, so when you picked that mattress and seabag up, you were ready to go.

SIGRIST: Must have been a thin mattress.

HANNAN: Yeah, it was pretty thin, although not uncomfortable. I don't remember it as being unable to sleep or anything like that. But in the seabag would be all of your winter uniforms, when you got them, all of your summer uniforms and they all had to be rolled in a certain way and stopped. They had a little thin stop cord it's called, in which you rolled them up and then tied the two ends with a square knot. Had to be a square knot. So then you would have to take all that stuff out of the seabag and lay it out so that inspecting person, probably an officer, would be able to tell at a glance whether anything was missing from there. I still have the seabag downstairs, and the uniforms, by the way. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Who would do the inspection?

HANNAN: I don't know. Probably—I guess it would depend on their assignment. Onboard ship it would probably be the executive officer. He was kind of the guy that ran the ship, you know, but then sometimes your captain's inspecting, too. That would be the same thing, you know. Captain would come in and inspect the ship. I mean the ship. I mean for cleanliness and also inspect some of the guys, too. But I don't really remember that. I wish I'd taken notes about that.

SIGRIST: You mentioned earlier that the boson was in charge of waking everybody up. Can you talk a little bit about the boson's role in this society?

HANNAN: The boson is the man who's in charge of the deck forces. He's in charge of everyone, really, but basically he's the one that supervises the deck force. Usually they were guys who were long service, excellent sailors. They really knew their business, but on Ellis Island, see, they weren't because they were just guys that got in the Coast Guard and for whatever reason, influence or just because they have a mean streak, they were put in charge. Some people can get that, you know, be put in charge of things. So the island was kind of a confusion of things. You had these old salts who had been to sea for twenty years and you had these other people. They were not officers

or even petty officers. I mean, there were two kinds of petty officers. You know, up to first class they would wear a sailor suit and then after that chief and warrants, they were not commissioned, but they wore the peaked cap and the suit coat kind of thing.

SIGRIST: So what were some of the other duties of the boson in a boot camp situation, other than waking you up?

HANNAN: Well, I have to go back a little bit about this. See, the boson onboard a ship—I have to refer to what his normal job would be. He would be in charge of, a I say, the deck hands. You want to refuel that—a destroyer comes alongside to refuel. See, the boson, usually the chief boson, would be in charge of rigging it. He'd do all the rigging, you know, and telling how it's done. Give the orders on the winches, things like that. But there's another person aboard a ship which is called the master at arms and his job is discipline. Get up in the morning, you know, administer punishment. So I don't know whether this guy, Red Miller, if that was his name, was a master at arms which would be probably a boson's mate, so-called right arm mate, you know. You wore your insignia on your right arm, you were deck force. Your left force, you were black gang. So he was acting the part of master at arms, which was the disciplinarian. Aboard ship, you know, they'd come find you in the sack in the morning after everyone is supposed to be roused, they would administer punishment, you know. Put you on report for it or so on.

So I don't know. Things were so confusing there, I don't really know. I think his rate was coxswain, which is a one stripe right arm rate. I think that was his rate when I knew him, but whether he was an actual boson's mate, I don't know.

SIGRIST: So at Ellis Island, these traditional roles all got kind of blurred.

HANNAN: At least in my mind.

SIGRIST: Yeah.

HANNAN: Maybe other people would be a little more sophisticated, as far as sailors went, and they weren't so blurred. But to me they were.

SIGRIST: Were there parts of the island that you were specifically instructed not to go to?

HANNAN: Oh, we weren't allowed over to the Public Health Service at all. But—and anything that's called "officer's country," you're not supposed to go to. They usually would have a guard, but I don't remember where that was on the island. No, I guess of all the places

where we could go, we were allowed on the drill field, the outdoor drill field.

SIGRIST: Do you remember where that was in relationship to maybe the immigration building?

HANNAN: Well, it faced New Jersey. That was it. It was kind of like if you're looking towards New York City and the immigration building is on your right, so behind the other buildings was the field. I don't remember—I walked up there with Brian and went down to the end because part of that was given over to the aliens for their exercise area. Then the part closer to New Jersey was our area. I suppose we did some drilling there, too.

SIGRIST: The area that was used for aliens to come outside, how was that delineated from the rest of the space?

HANNAN: Just a wire fence outside.

SIGRIST: Do you remember how tall that was?

HANNAN: Oh, I guess that must have been seven, eight foot tall.

SIGRIST: Did you ever have any duties outside guarding the aliens?

HANNAN: No. Seawall watch. I [unclear] no aliens out there. So seawall watch would be any place on the island, so that way we'd have to go down through the Public Health and around because the seawall was right there. I was thinking that you have to be careful and don't let your imagination—boy, it's raining like hell. [Laughs] I remember—that could be a story I heard. Maybe not actually a story. Somebody sneaking back aboard after being absent without leave, you know, into the hospital. I wouldn't absolutely swear to that, but it was in my mind that they did, but I'm not sure.

SIGRIST: You mentioned earlier Victor Mature, who of course was a big Hollywood film star at that time. Were there any other well known people either who were detained or who were in the Coast Guard at that time that you remember?

HANNAN: No, I don't remember, but I know I read about them, and I think he was there while I was there. But I can't bet on it, because I don't know the dates. I could check it. Enzo Penza the opera singer was there and reading his autobiography lately, I mean, maybe about ten years ago was the first time I read it, he describes what they had to do on Ellis Island when they were aliens. So I'm not sure that he was

there when I was there. It's a possibility that he was, but I never saw him.

SIGRIST: Kevin, has anything come to you? Any questions that you'd like to ask?

K: What was playing in the theater when Pearl Harbor occurred, do you remember?

HANNAN: No, I don't. That's a good question. That's a beautiful question. It probably was—

SIGRIST: That's a good question.

HANNAN: No, I—because my buddy and I were center aisle. In fact, I later became—at that time I was captain of ushers, but when I was working the center aisle, after we saw a show five or six times, then we could do the musical numbers and sometimes we would, you know. [Laughs] But I don't know that. That's interesting.

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about the second and last time you were at Ellis Island, when you went when it was a receiving station. If you can give me like a quick sum up of what happened in between 1942 and '44 when you went back to Ellis?

HANNAN: Well, I have to preface it a little bit, if you have time to do that, with—

SIGRIST: Fifteen minutes? Yeah, sure go ahead.

HANNAN: Okay. Because when I came back, I went to—I was sent to Puerto Rico. There were no electricians mates in the entire 10th District, which was then Puerto Rico.

SIGRIST: And is that what you were? That was your rank?

HANNAN: Well, what they did was, see, I could feel you in between. I didn't go to electrician's school on Ellis Island. From Ellis Island I went to what they call the boarding detail, which we lived in boarding houses or any place we could find a room on Staten Island. We would report to Staten Island headquarters down at the ferry in the morning. Then we'd be given assignments to board a vessel coming into the harbor, either from the Atlantic or up at the other end coming from Long Island Sound. Then we would be put aboard that with the pilot, with a forty-five which we didn't know how to—at least I didn't know how to fire, and we would board that and then stay on that until we were relieved. By saboteur kind of things. So we had our gathering place

at Staten Island and somebody in there came in one day and said, "Who'd like to go to electrician school?" and I remember my father saying, "Get a trade." I said, "I do." Said, "Okay, come on." So that's how I got into it. The guy that I had met, the older guy, he was already an electrician. He was a subway electrician, very knowledgeable guy. So he put his hand up. So we came together and they said, "Okay, get your seabags." Well, my seabag was in a pile probably as big as this house of seabags because you just took out the things you needed to live in Staten Island. We had to search through that pile of seabags to find out where our seabag was. Then we went to—people don't believe this. We went to Seaman's Church Institute, which was down in the Battery and from there we went to school, which was on a ferry boat tied up under the Washington Bridge. So we would march every morning from the Seaman's Church Institute to school at Washington Bridge, where we were taught by a man who was an expert electrician on housing. Taught electricity. He didn't know too much about marine electricity. So we came out of there and went to Puerto Rico. We went down to Puerto Rico. I forget—I interrupted myself. I had another thought on that.

Oh, then after eighteen months in Puerto Rico, I came back and I went to—it wasn't the Barge Office, but somewhere around there that's the Coast Guard District Office I guess, and I went in and there was an officer on duty. It was on Saturday or Sunday. Oh, I came back and got married, by the way. I had ten day's leave and I got married. So the officer on duty was in an office and then in front was a yeoman, and he said, "Oh, where you coming from?" and I said, "Puerto Rico." He said, "How much leave do you have?" I said, "Well, I have ten days." He says, "Ten days, that's all you have?" I said, "Yeah," and then I heard him say to the officer, "Sir, this guy just came back from the South Pacific and only got ten day's leave." So the officer said, "Give him another ten days." So they sent me another ten days and then when I reported back, I went to Ellis Island like one day and then they sent me to Manhattan Beach and there I was—oh, my assignment was the USS General Gordon and we went to Manhattan Beach and from there went to Bayonne. That's where the ship was fitting.

SIGRIST: Can you talk just briefly about Ellis Island's purpose this time? I mean what had it become?

HANNAN: It was a receiving barracks. That's what it did. People coming through for other assignments—

SIGRIST: Coast Guardsman still?

HANNAN: Yeah, right, would still be—would be kind of processed through Ellis Island. In other words, they had to have a place to sleep and eat and be on the roster somewhere, so that's where they'd wait until they were assigned to whatever. A school, like I was sent to school. By the way, you know, there's lists. I have them, in fact, if you want them. Maybe you gave them to me, I don't know. I have lists of the schools, with my name on it, all the schools. They would go to signalman's school, damage control school, electrician's school, radioman's school all over the country, mostly the east coast and that's what it's process was. Was kind of just like feeding them, and then they had a permanent company there whose job was to run the island and to do all the paperwork. They're the one that had the job of the beauty of living right around New York with—[Laughs]—recreation. Plenty.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about that one day that you spent there?

HANNAN: Nah, nothing really. I can remember thinking, "The damn ferry boat again," you know, and being on the island. That whole depressed feeling I had the first time I was there came over me again. Then when I got to Manhattan Beach, it didn't help much because everyone was on their way through. Nobody was—and I was put in charge of cleaning the floor, running a waxer. Here I am an electrician second class, and I'm running a waxer, but I didn't stay there long because what happened was the plug came out of the wall and I went over and pushed the plug in, and the waxer, I didn't have the switch off, started spinning around and the handle drove through the captain's—commanding officer's door. [Laughs] So I left after that. I don't know whether they were looking for me or what, but—[Laughs] But from there I went to Bayonne.

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

HANNAN: I was in four—let's see, four years and I guess about forty days after that. I don't remember my exact date. It was in February, though, just before my birthday.

SIGRIST: When you look back on your experience in the Coast Guard and especially Ellis Island because that's sort of the beginning of it all, I guess, how do you think that experience has influenced the rest of your life?

HANNAN: I think being in the Coast Guard was the best thing that ever happened to me except marrying my wife. It really—you know, it gave me a real purpose, at least for those four years, you know. I

knew where I was going. I've always appreciated it and then, of course, the GI Bill of Rights that led to two degrees and a whole career, you know, that was gravy. But I remember seeing that posted for the first time about the GI Bill of Right, I said, "Jesus." I always wanted to go to college but I never studied, you know. "This is another change I'm going to get," and I took it.

SIGRIST: And talk a little bit about going to Coast Guard reunions now and what that feels like.

HANNAN: That's interesting because, you know, for years I've been—for years and years and years I've been saying, I remember we were on the—I think it was the first convoy that came out of New York City and went directly went into Europe, northern Europe and we landed at Cherbourg. We didn't land at Cherbourg, but I didn't find out until I went to the reunion, it was Le Havre. But then I sent for the log of the ship, so I know where the ship was every day that I was assigned to it, which is practically her whole life because I was a plank owner and I left there only about three weeks before the Army transport took her over. But I say it was really a great thing for me, experience to have. You know, even with all the fears. You know, we're under attack in an English channel and you're looking—I'm on the engine room. That's my assignment, looking at the escape hatch. How far is the escape hatch, if a torpedo comes through? And troop transports, you know, that's what they were looking for, but I never had any real fear. I never felt that I was going to die or even get injured. I don't know. It was a really—really a great thing. In fact, I think I would have stayed in under different circumstances.

SIGRIST: We should say for the sake of the tape the name of your wife.

HANNAN: Marge.

SIGRIST: Marge.

HANNAN: Marge is what we call her. Her name is Margaret Condon.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that, please?

HANNAN: C-O-N-D-O-N.

SIGRIST: And when did you marry?

HANNAN: April 13th, 1944—45? Let's see. '44, yeah. Celebrated our fiftieth anniversary last year.

SIGRIST: And children?

HANNAN: Five.

SIGRIST: Can you name them please?

HANNAN: Yes. Joseph is the older, just turned fifty. Then Kathleen, she's next, and then Frank and then Matthew and then our baby is Eileen, and I have seven grandchildren, too. We have seven.

SIGRIST: Wow. Well, Joe, I want to thank you very much.

HANNAN: Well, thank you, Paul.

SIGRIST: We've been trying to do this for some time now and we finally got around to doing it.

HANNAN: Good.

SIGRIST: This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Joe Hannan today, Friday, September 22nd, 1995 with Kevin Dailey in attendance, here in Pompton Lakes, New Jersey. Thank you.

HANNAN: Okay!

[End of Interview]