EI-688
JAMES KUHN
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Coast Guard, Ellis Island 1952-1954

SIGRIST: Good afternoon, this is Paul SIGRIST for the National Park Service. Today is Tuesday, October 17th 1995. I'm in the Ellis Island Recording Studio using the portable digital recording machine. And I'm here with James Kuhn. Mr. Kuhn was stationed here at Ellis Island in the Coast Guard from 1952 until February of 1954. And it's just us up here. There's no other people. And we're going to find out about his Coast Guard experience.

Mr. Kuhn, can we begin by you giving me your birth date please?

KUHN: February 27th 1932.

SIGRIST: And, just quickly, where were you born and tell me a little bit about your family background.

KUHN: I was born in Green Bay, Wisconsin. My father was a barber. My mother was a schoolteacher. And—

SIGRIST: Ethnic background?

KUHN: My father came from good German, Lutheran stock. And my mother came from good Irish stock. My mother's people came from Tiporari. And my.., I'm not sure where my grandfather's people came from, the Kuhns, whether.., There is a history of them but I'm not familiar with it right now.

SIGRIST: Tell me, as you were growing up, was there one side of the family or the other side that you tended to lean towards. Which side of the family was the strongest?

KUHN: We definitely.., We definitely leaned toward the Irish side, my mother's.., My mother's family was, were farmers. And my mother was from a family of eight children. And my father was from a family of six boys and two girls, eight children there. They.., But we did.., My grandfather.., My dad's father had a tavern. When I knew him he had a tavern. Before that he had been a farmer. And my dad says not too good a one. But Henry was very good at picking up other languages. And the area that he lived in, which was Black Creek, Wisconsin, which

is about twenty miles west of Green Bay, was a heavy German Lutheran background there. And one of the funny things I think of at that time was that my uncle was born in the United States. And Uncle Oscar joined the American army. And most of the people around Black Crick, the Germans, would not speak to him because it was 1917 and ’18 and he was off to fight the Germans. So they would have.., They wouldn’t talk to him. They were.., They felt that he had betrayed their stock, their people. My, my mother’s people always clung to their Irish background. The story is that my grandfather was born in Watertown, New York. We lose.., That’s.., I don’t think anybody’s ever been able to prove it by finding any kind of a document. An interesting thing that came about is that my grandmother’s people adopted a young orphan that came through on a train. And he became our Uncle James. And my mother says that she feels that.., And he came from New York. And, and my mother feels that he was Italian, that he was very dark. At the same time, my grandmother also adopted another orphan, a girl, had red hair. And the two of them, of course, were not family, but they became family. I have that wrong. My.., The boy was adopted by my grandmother and grandfather. My, my great aunt, my grand Aunt Elizabeth, adopted the girl as a companion because in those days her husband was a horse trader. And he would leave the farm for many days at a time and so she wanted a companion. But the family always considered her family and always considered my Uncle James family, Irene and James. And it stayed that way.

My Uncle James never married. He never went to school. My grandfather would put him in the, in the milk wagon and they'd go to the cheese factory. And my father.., The schoolhouse was next to the cheese factory and my, my grandfather would drop him off there. And by the time my grandfather got back from the cheese factory and the two mils to home, James was there waiting for him on the steps. He never learned to read. He never learned to write, which was.., They just couldn't get him to do it. He didn't want to do it. And he always stayed on the farm. He never left the farm for any reason other than maybe to go to the fair. And otherwise he.., And he ended up eventually dying on the farm. He just.., I believe he was about seventy-six years old when he died. And my mother said the great thing about Uncle James was he knew horses like nobody ever did. And my Irish grandfather, she said that didn't know livestock from a hill of beans and he would have been better off if he'd have stayed in the hotel that he was running in Green Bay.

SIGRIST: You told an interesting story earlier on about the German side of the family and how they perceived the relative going to fight for the United States during the First World War. As you were a child and you were growing up, what was, where were the attitudes towards the military in your own family?

KUHN: Oh my family it, it changed.., The attitude was not there. All of my dad's nephew, my cousins, on my father's side, all, all served. One was at the landing on Iwo Jima. And they were all in the service and there was never any, any bickering or anything like that or any.., They were all patriotic Americans, and the Germans and the Japanese had to be defeated and that was all there was to it.

SIGRIST: What, what made you wish to pursue going into the military, going into the Coast Guard?

KUHN: Well, when I.., I was nineteen when I went into the Coast Guard and I was one year, one year out of high school. I didn't know what I was going to do so I didn't do anything after high school. I didn't look into college or anything. But then I.., Then the Korean War came along. And I always said that was America's gift to me for graduating. But the Korean War came along and I, I had been working as an apprentice pattern maker.

SIGRIST: An apprentice pattern maker?

KUHN: Pattern maker.

SIGRIST: Pattern—

KUHN: Pattern as in industrial patterns for machines, that sort of thing. Most of our work was for Northwest Engineering, which made

large cranes. And then Green Bay being a heavy paper mill industry there, machines for patterns to build paper machines. So anyhow, it was either the Army.., The Army was two years but there was a chance at Korea. The Marine Corps was two years, there was a chance of Korea. The Navy was four years and the Air Force was four years. The Air Force just going on its own, you know, at that time. And the Coast Guard was three years. And I had.., I thought that I was going to be drafted. I got my notice, you know, and, and I just happened to be playing baseball with a group of men. And we were sitting around and talking. And they said, "Well what are you going to do? Where you going in service?" And I said to my boss who was on the baseball team, I said, "Well, I don't know". I said, "It's either the, the Navy or the Air Force". I said, "I hate to go for a four-year hitch but I guess it'll have to be that". And a fellow piped up on the team and said, "Well, why don't you join the Coast Guard?" And I said, "The Coast Guard?" I said, "I checked into that. There's a six-month waiting list." And I said, "You have to know somebody to get into the Coast Guard". And he said, "Well, you know somebody". And I said, "Who do I know?" And the other guy said, "Well, you know us. We're the Coast Guard recruiters". I said, "I'll be down tomorrow morning if you can take care of me". And so I went down the next day, and signed all the papers and came home. And I was, you know, nineteen, but they still wanted my dad's signature. My dad and I went in the kitchen. He says, "Hey", he said, "are you serious about this?" I said, "Yeah".

He said, "[Unclear]. It's a three-year hitch". I said, "I can't do better than that". And he said, "Well," he said, "you realize that if I, if I sign this you promise you'll never forget that you're the one that told me to". "Because," he said, "I don't want to get a letter six months from now saying, 'Dad, come and get me'." [Laughs] And he never did.

SIGRIST: And then what happened? What, what was the process between that moment and the time you ended up here at Ellis Island?

KUHN: Well, up to that time then I left in September, September 10th I left Green Bay with two fellows from Minnesota. They had to come all the way from Minnesota to Green Bay because Green Bay was the only, was their closest Coast Guard enlistment station for them from Minneapolis. And so the three of us got on a train in Green Bay and then switched trains in Chicago and headed for Cape May, New Jersey. And when we got on a train we met some other fellows who were going to the same place. And we ended up, I believe, in Philadelphia. And then we had a train change stations and, and get on a little puddle jumper that was going to Cape May. And in Cape May we spent three months in boot camp down there. And they let us go home for Christmas. And right after Christmas we had to report to, a group of us had to report to Staten Island, the Staten Island repair base. It was interesting when we got out of boot camp. They called us in the last week to find out where we wanted to be stationed, which I never heard of anybody else doing. And

they said where do you want to go? And I said, "Well, I'd like to go to New Orleans". And they said, "Well, there's, there's only five openings in New Orleans and there's ten of you people that have signed up for it. So you'll have to draw cards, high card wins". And I drew the three of hearts. So then they said, "Well, where you want to go now?" I said, "Well, what's my pick?" They said, "Well, you can go to New York or you can go to Virginia or you can go to the First Coast Guard district up in Boston". And all the guys from Boston said, "Oh, you don't want to go there. It's weather ships all the way. You don't want to go there". Well it ends up that they didn't want us to sign up because they wanted to get back to the Boston area. Coast Guard district of the Ninth Coast Guard, which was the Great Lakes was closed. There was, there was no openings there. If you wanted an opening you had to find somebody in the Coast Guard district there of equal rate and you could switch with him. But you paid your own way then, which was kind of a unique way of doing things, solving problems. But I think one of the happiest days of my life was the day that I told them that I would, I'll take New York. And from there then, of course, they sent me up to Staten Island. In Staten Island they put us at the St. George repair base. And we all figured we were destined for the weather ships because there were two weather ships in at the time. And, of course, they go out for thirty days at a time and out somewhere in the middle of the Atlantic at that time in the fifties. And just was circling the

ocean and, and report the weather to the airplanes and the ships that are going by.

SIGRIST: And that was not considered a desirable thing to do.

KUHN: No, no. Thirty days, thirty days in the North Atlantic was, was not a picnic. And then if you went far enough you were closer to Scotland. And so you'd go to Scotland and get a few days of, of leave. And then they'd, you know, take on supplies and that and go back for another thirty days and then end up either in New York or Boston, those places. And so we figured we're all destined for a weather ship. And they told us.., And they came down and we're all working doing one thing or another to keep us busy and sweeping decks or, you know.., And they said, "Go to your, go to your barracks. Don't change your clothes. You're good just the way your are. And report to the main office". We said, "Hey, it's the weather ship. They're right down there at the end of the pier". We don't have any problem there. We just walk down there and away we go. And so we're all standing there and waiting. And this little guy came on, a little Irishman came out and Flannagan was his name, [unclear] mate second class. And he came out and didn't say anything to us. But the clerk came out and said, "Follow this man". So we're following.., We still hadn't heard anything and he's got all our orders. And he marches us. And instead of going right to the weather ships we go to the left. And he said, "Throw your sea bags down there". And we look

down there and there's this little forty-foot patrol boat. And finally we said, well, where are we going? He said, "You're going to the Port Security unit at Ellis Island". Woah. I thought that was just great. Another fellow that I was with thought it was just terrible. He wanted to go on one of the weather ships. So we got there and, you know, the first month you're on, you're on guard, you're on security duty. You go around with a little clock during the day or at night. And you're turning the key. And there's different stations on the, on the, which we called the hospital side of which where we were stationed. And so we, you know, just to acclimate yourself to what was going on there. Then they had.., They had two different sides. Well you could be in the maintenance or you could be in a pier guard group or you could be in the port, in the, in the boat group. And most of the, most of the.., Well, almost everybody.., I think we were one of the few exceptions. All of these fellows went to Camp Gordon, Georgia and took military police training. They.., After they left boot camp or they were on ships. And each of the ships had to designate somebody to go down there and take this training. And so most of the fellows that were there took this MP training down at Camp Gordon. They came back with the big army boots and all of that, you know. And then if you were in the pier guard group you were.., There were certain government-restricted piers. And you would, you would proceed. Then, if you were a pier guard, they'd drop you off on one of these piers, a couple of you. And you were there to make sure that nobody, no

unauthorized personnel would, would be on that pier. If you were in a boat group you delivered the pier guards to the piers. And then you ran a six-hour patrol in New York Harbor. The Yankee Patrol was from Ellis Island up to the George Washington Bridge on the Jersey side and down as far as Staten Island. And then there were two other patrols. One went the back side of Staten Island and the other one went up the, up by the Newark airport, in that area. And you were strictly water security if you saw anything that was, didn't look right, you reported it. If you came across a body in the water you tied a rope around it and called the harbor police. If a boat broken down you, you know, you had your regular Coast Guard duties rescuing people, pulling boats in, getting a hold of a tug boat and saying, "Hey, you've got a railroad barge going down the river here". And those patrols ran twenty-four hours a day.

SIGRIST: So were you rotated to these different duties?

KUHN: No.

SIGRIST: How did that work?

KUHN: Well, the first.., The first month whether you're on a ship or whether you're, you're on a base they've got you working at sweeping decks—as they call it, decks—and maybe scraping paint or doing some painting. And then you spent a week or

two in the galley, you know, washing dishes, peeling potatoes, that sort of thing.

SIGRIST: So when you were at Staten Island that's what you were doing.

KUHN: At Staten Island. But when I got to Ellis Island I got a month of that. And, and then if you didn't know what you wanted to do you could sign up for another month. I signed up for another month because I, I just.., I didn't want to go to any of the, any of the.., I didn't want to cook, go to cook school or any of the other ones, just wanted the general duty. And I wanted to get in the boats is what I wanted. I wanted boats. And so I spent another, another month in there and made sure that I kept my nose clean, didn't get in any trouble. Did what I was told to do so that when they, when I asked to get in the boats they'd say, you know, you did a good job. And at the same time I'm busy, I'm busy talking to the people in the boats so that they remember me and, and so that after two months I made boats.

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about the first two months and, and be very specific about the kinds of things that you did here at Ellis Island or any stories that you remember from those first couple of months.

KUHN: Well, there were.., You know, the thing about.., One of the.., You know, being from Green Bay, Wisconsin.., I mean, you know, I'm from like saying I'm from Podunk or something.

But.., And then coming, coming to New York and, and then I get with all these guys. And most of them are Italians, and they're from, they're from Boston or they're from Jersey or they're from New York. And the other thing about it is that I got the feeling that a lot of these guys that went down to Camp Gordon, Georgia were people that maybe were just a little bit of independent when they were on the ship, or they were doing things to get off the ship. And it was, it was the opportunity in some cases, not all cases, because there were an awful lot of guys that went down there and, and just signed up because they said, hey, you want to do this. But others, I think, got sent down there. So that, you know, there were, there were guys in there that just, I can't believe you'd do that sort of thing. You know, trouble makers, guys that were always looking for an angle. This one guy used to say to me, "Don't sweep so fast". "Why not?" He said, "Well, if you sweep fast we'll get some other stinking job to do around here". And I'd say, "But I hate sweeping. I'd rather do something else". They could give me anything. Give me a paintbrush or something. And then there were, there were, there were little problems that would come up. There was quite a bit of, you know, drinking going on at that time. And of course New York at that time had the rule that if you were eighteen you could go in any tavern or bar in town. You know, you weren't restricted and you could have beer. You could have whiskey, whatever you wanted. And so there were a couple of incidents there where guys got into..,

There were just two guys in a fistfight or something like that. But it was—

SIGRIST: Did that happened here on the island, or did that happen or did that happen when you were on leave?

KUHN: No it happened.., No. It happened on the island.

SIGRIST: Yeah. Can you be more specific about it?

KUHN: Well, there was one time that I got there or they told me, hey, you should have been here a couple of hours ago. Why? What happened? Well, so and so, this fellow and this other fellow took axes to each other. And we said, "What? What happened?" "Well, I don't know. But he said something to him and this guy grabbed an axe. And the other fellow ran into the closet". And then the ensign came—the officer of the say—the ensign came along and he almost got hit by the guy in the closet with the axe because he stuck his head in there. And the guy thought it was, didn't know it was him. So they said.., You know this is just one of the incidents. And there was an occasion where we had a boast that was made that whenever he went out on patrol he always put a round in the .45. We carried a .45, carbine and a nightstick.

SIGRIST: You should say for the sake of the tape because people listening to this may not know what all this is that that's a gun.

KUHN: All right. The .45 is an automatic, a semi-automatic, pistol and the carbine is a small version of an M1 rifle, fires a .30 caliber bullet.

SIGRIST: Could you spell carbine, please?

KUHN: C-A-R-B-I-N-E, capital C. And then of course we had the nightstick.

But he, the bosun's mate always carried a shell in the chamber, you know. He jacked one in there. And one morning we heard a loud explosion. And we went to the door of the gunner's mate shack. And the gunner's mate was absolutely white, pale. He was gray and shaking. And the seaman, the third class seaman or first class seaman, was standing there with a stunned look on his face. And the bosun's mate is smiling. And so we asked what happened. And he said, "Well, the seaman just put a hole in the ceiling". And sure enough, we looked up there and there's this hole in the ceiling. And when we came in from patrol we usually.., We'd come in and the bosun's mate required us to take the .45 out of the holster, pull back the chamber on the .45, look inside, snap it shut, pull the trigger. And, of course, that was it, you know. And then he'd take.., We'd prove to him that there was nothing in the chamber, the clip was out of the.., The clip was out of the pistol. And from there we just set the stuff down and walked away or signed a

slip and we were okay because we had to check these out and check them in every six hours whenever we went on patrol. What happened was that the bolostn's mate had put the, put the round in the chamber but then he was busy doing something. And he said, "Go up and give this to the, give this to the, to the gunner's mate. Check the guns in", which was something we always did. And so he forgot that the bosun's mate had put that round in the chamber of the pistol. And he went in there and he pulled the trigger and he blew a hole in the ceiling. The bolostn's mate came in right after and he thought it was pretty funny. But the gunner's mate was white because the guys didn't always point their gun at the ceiling when they, when they, when they, when they pulled the trigger. And it, it could have been one of the other fellows that just waved it around and fired it because sometimes you got careless. You know, you'd.., Nobody carries any. And it's always the unloaded gun that goes off. And that's, that's what happened in this case.

SIGRIST: Were you trained to use the guns and the nightstick here at Ellis Island or were you trained to do this before you got here?

KUHN: No. We had about a week on the rifle range in boot camp. And then we came up here and we were put into the boat crew and that. And we never had any.., The only.., We were sent back to Cape May in, oh, I think it was 1953 to, to rifle and to range again. And so then you, you went out there and you spent a week down there. And you maybe fired, fired this weapon

thirty times at the most, the M1 and then the .45 pistol and that was it. And then we came back here.

SIGRIST: So, so to the best of your knowledge there was no firing range or anything like that here on the island.

KUHN: No, no, no, nothing. Nothing like that.

SIGRIST: Could you describe for me starting from the time that you woke up in the morning sort of an average day. Would that be possible?

KUHN: Well if you were.., If.., The average day with the boat crew in the boats was—

SIGRIST: And that would be sort of the second stage of your time here.

KUHN: Yeah. Right.

SIGRIST: This is past the sweeping and the scraping.

KUHN: And the time in the galley.

SIGRIST: Right. Well what time would you wake up?

KUHN: We were all.., We were up at seven o'clock in the morning.

SIGRIST: And how were you gotten up?

KUHN: Somebody.., The first class bosun's mate would come in and wake you up. He would just come in and said, "Hey, time to get up". And, you know, I can't recall that we ever had reveille piped in. I don't recall that. But we were up by seven o'clock. Some guys, you know.., There was always something going on. And you eventually slept through it because guys were coming in at one o'clock in the morning off patrol. And other fellows were getting up at five o'clock because they had to take the pier guards out by five, by six o'clock and have them on the piers. And they had to go down and eat their breakfast and.., So there was always somebody coming in and out of the barracks, always something going on. But usually you were up by.., And then you went down.., You went down in the basement and to the galley. And you had your breakfast. And the food was good.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

START TAPE 1, SIDE B

SIGRIST: Would you wash before you went?

KUHN: Oh yeah. You had—

SIGRIST: [Unclear] wash—

KUHN: We had, we had, we had.., Each of the barracks had three different bathrooms and some with showers and some with just a lot of sinks so that you could shave and.., So you shaved.., You had to be clean-shaven every morning. And everybody got up, brushed his teeth and cleaned and shaved, and then went down as we used to say—and I keep forgetting because my wife told me to stop saying that because—we'd go down for chow. And my wife said, "It's not chow. It's supper or it's dinner". [Laughs]

SIGRIST: And you remember that being beneath where you were staying.

KUHN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You were downstairs after this.

KUHN: Yeah. It was.., You mentioned that being downstairs, which reminds me that being downstairs didn't secure you from.., I often wondered about it because the cockroaches were awful big. And boy, they were big. We used to say I think they walked off with my locker today. But we'd go downstairs and you could.., The galley was right off one of the main passageways in the basement there. And the kitchen was on one side and.., Or the, oh, where you peel the potatoes and all that stuff was one side and then down the hall were the supply rooms for the food supplies. And then the, the cooking stations

were there [unclear] and that. And there were only, I guess, about two hundred of us at the base at one time. That's I think officers and men.

SIGRIST: And what was the dining procedure say for breakfast? I mean did you have.., Well you tell me what the procedure was.

KUHN: Well, it was like, you know, going through a cafeteria line. It was cafeteria style. But the nice thing about it is they'd say do you want fried eggs? Do you want scrambled eggs? And they did it for you. And it always amazed me that those fellows could do two and three eggs in one hand, you know, and not break them. They'd just crack them and dump them on a, in a, on a grill and not smash them.

SIGRIST: Who were the kitchen staff?

KUHN: Regular, regular Coast Guard cooks.

SIGRIST: Coast Guardsmen.

KUHN: Umm-hmm. And then you had.., Most of the time you had fresh milk. You didn't.., You didn't get powdered milk. The only time you got powdered milk is when, is when they ran out of fresh milk. And.., Oh, the bakery. I swear I put on a lot of pounds just.., Because the bakery came over on the ferry and it was always, you know, nice and fresh. And you had Boston

cream pies and, you know, just about anything you can imagine was there. It was, it was a heck of a place to eat.

SIGRIST: How long would you get for breakfast?

KUHN: More than enough time, more than enough time. As a matter of fact, you could sit down there and after you're done eating and shoot the breeze for another, you know, because it would open at.., I think we opened at.., Well it opened at five thirty because the boat crews and the pier guards had to eat. So the cooks had to be on duty, have everything read for five thirty in the morning. And then they stayed awake until, or stayed that way, until somewhere around nine o'clock. And then, of course, it's.., You know I think the finest meal.., One of the biggest surprises I had was going through the line on a Friday and they had these big buckets that were steaming. And I watched and all of a sudden I said to the fellow next to me, I said, "Harry, what is that?" I said, "Is that a lobster?" He said, "Yeah". I said, "That's a whole lobster, isn't it, Harry, you know like we see down in the windows in New York City?" He said, "Yeah". I said, "I've never had a lobster". Harry said, "You've never had a lobster?" Well Harry was from Miami. And I, and I said, "No". I said, "I don't know what to do". He said, "Well, sit next to me.., When we sit down sit next to me and", he said, "I'll show you what to do". So Harry showed me how I break the lobster in half and told me, hey, the best part, the sweetest part is the claws. And I couldn't believe it that we

would have this, you know. I thought that was great. And then we got it again the next Friday. But those were the only two times that we had lobster but it was, you know, it was enough for me to enjoy lobster, one lobster every chance I can get.

SIGRIST: All right so when breakfast finished then—

KUHN: Then you went on.., Then, then we had.., Well, we.., It's clear in my mind. We couldn't stay there all the time because we had muster at eight o'clock.

SIGRIST: Which is what?

KUHN: Muster is calling all of the.., The boat crew would report to one area and the pier guards were at another area, and then the maintenance staff—if you weren't in either one of the pier guards or the boat crew—they met at another area. And what happened then is that a roll was taken. And everybody whose supposed to be on duty would be, should be there and, unless you were on patrol some place you had to be there to report for muster. And then they would, they would, the [unclear] mate would take people aside if they, if they were engine man or fireman, they went to the maintenance or the mechanic's chief, an old guy by the name of Dutch, Chief Dutch. And then the rest of us if we were, if we were—what the heck were—if we were with the maintenance group the bosun's mate said "I want you in the paint locker. And you two guys grab your brooms

and sweep down the main hallway. And don't get in the old man's way. And you people when you go to the paint locker I want you to get the paint. And I want you to go paint those windows. And you guys go over in that barracks and you scrape the paint off of those windows. You did a lousy job on it yesterday. Let's get, let's get that, the windows cleaned up".

SIGRIST: So the mustering is sort of the organizational beginning of the day—

KUHN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Where everyone was assigned—

KUHN: Everybody gets his work, his work orders.

The other thing is that every morning when you got up your barracks had to be swept. And somebody had to come through with a buffer and buff the floors between the bunks and that. Everything had to be put away. Your beds had to be made. And you usually did—

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

KUHN: Um-hmm. The, the chief would come, or the first class bosun's mate would come in during the day or in the morning to

inspect. But on Fridays was the, Friday morning was the main inspection. And for that one you had to make sure that your, you, you, there were, you had to.., The most important thing was you cleaned all the heads, or the bathrooms, all the toilets, all the sinks. And once that was done nobody used them. We maybe had one area where we'd say you can use that bathroom and that's it. And when inspection came around even if you were on a, even if you had been on a mid to six patrol you had to get out of bed, get dressed and go some place because the old man was going to come around and he was going to inspect. And he walked through and he inspected. Everything had to be put away.

SIGRIST: Do you remember an instance in your time here where the inspection was not acceptable, where whatever, whatever the inspector found was not—

KUHN: No. It was.., It wasn't.., You know it wasn't the same as in boot camp. In boot camp you had to lay out all your clothes and they all had to be tied. And the knots had to be on a certain seam and, and all your clothes were.., One thing about being in the navy or the Coast Guard all your clothes were folded inside out. I don't, you know.., All.., If you look at a Navy blue, blue uniform the seams were always bent to the inside. And because that way it didn't get linty. It didn't get dirty. And, and then they had to be.., In boot camp they had to be rolled as they would if you were out at sea because everything went into a sea

bag. Where here we got away from that because we had these big lockers that we could use.

SIGRIST: So it was a little more relaxed.

KUHN: Yes. It was, it was a, a more relaxed atmosphere. And, and really I think back many times. And the Coast Guard at the port security unit at Ellis Island was almost the closest thing to civilian life you could get. Your life was.., You had what they called port and starboard liberty. Your liberty started at, what was that, one o'clock in the afternoon. You were off from one in the afternoon until ten. You had to be back at ten o'clock the next morning. And your duty worked the same way. When you, when you came back you got back for duty. You got back by ten o'clock and you changed into your work clothes and you reported to whatever it is, whoever, you know, the [unclear] mate or something. Or you might have a patrol that you had to go on. And—

SIGRIST: What was the process to get liberty and what did you have to do to obtain—

KUHN: You had to keep your nose clean. If you didn't.., If, if there.., If you made some infraction.., You know, for instance, if you came back late from liberty, and you didn't call up and say, "Sir, I'm going to be late. I'll be an hour late" you could lose your liberty. Most of the time you, you if you had a captain's

mast.., Captain's mast was kind of the lowest form of trial that you can get in the Coast Guard or the navy. And they were held right in the main hallway of the, of the administration building across the way on the Ellis, on the Coast Guard side. And the commander, the captain, would come out and he'd stand in the hallway and, and the, the, the young urchin that goofed up would stand across. And then there'd be the recording secretary, the scribe would be there. And I forget that they call them a scribe. But the secretary would be there to take any.., The yeoman, the yeoman would be there to take the notes on everything. And then the old man would tell the guy what he was going to get. "All right. You're going to report to [unclear] mate and the [unclear] mate's going to do this" or you're under his jurisdiction or you do not have leave for a week. Not leave but liberty for a week or two days, something like that. And it was very efficient. And it took care of all the problems. It was held once a week. So the guy that goofed on Monday had until, I forget what. I think Monday morning was, was.., So if he goofed up Monday afternoon he had to wait a whole week before he found out what the old man was going to do to him. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Is there a story about a specific instance where this happened to someone you know that, that you can be specific about? Or did it happen to you or—

KUHN: I got out.., My-. I got into a problem one time because I came, I came back from liberty the night before but I thought.., I was being a little smart and I thought that I could get out of cleaning the barracks on inspection day if I just went back on liberty again. So I did. Well, when they came looking for me I wasn't there. The bolston's mate when I came back at ten o'clock, he came around to see me and informed me that he had turned me into the.., He had booked me and turned me into the executive officer. Well, the regular.., I got a break. The regular executive officer was an academy man. And they were rather strict. And he was on leave. And so we had a reserve lieutenant commander that was, that was the acting executive officer. So I had to report to his office. And, you know, I apologized to the bosun's mate. I apologized to the officer. And the officer took me seriously and so he said you will report to the bosun's mate for the next three days for extra duty. And so I did. And the bosun's mate would, would say, "Okay. I want those shower stalls scrubbed. I want this deck scrubbed. I want—." Whatever he wanted me to do after my full working day, then I worked for him until he said I could quit. I might have to scrub a deck or whatever it was. But that was three days. And he had, this bosun's mate, had been turned in. He was a first class bosun's mate.

SIGRIST: Do you remember his name?

KUHN: Yeah. Yeah. His name was Flow. And he was turned in by a first-class engine man. The engine man and his crew were, were, [unclear] and his crew were scrubbing a deck, one of the passageways, and waxing it. That's one of the things that had to be done, you know. You didn't have janitors. You were the janitors.

SIGRIST: Well, and I should say for the sake of the tape that when you say, you know, you're washing the deck, you're meaning the hallways, the floor—

KUHN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: You're not actually talking about boat decks.

KUHN: No, no.

SIGRIST: You're just talking about lingo for the floor.

KUHN: But when you're, when you're, when you're in the navy or the Coast Guard whether you're on land or sea a wall is a bulkhead, the ceiling is an overhead and the floor is deck.

SIGRIST: That's good for us to know.

KUHN: And if you don't say it that way you're corrected immediately. As a matter of fact, that's one of the things they, they drill into

you when you're in, when you're in boot camp. And that's not a door that's a passageway, you know. So I.., The bosun's mate came along and, and bosun mate Flow came along and, and he walked on the floor. He walked on the deck that they were scrubbing. And the first class didn't know who he was because we didn't have any rates and our arms were all in chambris shirts and dungarees or overalls. And so he said something to the bosun's mate about, hey, you stay off this deck, we're scrubbing it. Well the bosun's mate didn't know he was so he smarted off to him because I'm first class and, you know.., So that guy just looked at his name and said, "Oh, okay" and just wrote it down and turned it in. Well, Flow had to stand in front of the captains' mast and explain why, why he did this. Well, when the, when the first class found out that Flow had done it he said, "well what was I going to do? I didn't know who he was". You know ordinarily they'd have said, both of them would have recognized each other and everything would have been just fine. So Flow, you know, was kind of irritated because it affected his, his, his 4.0 conduct by doing it.

SIGRIST: Four, oh, being a rating of some kind.

KUHN: Being the best.., You have either 4.0 conduct or you go down from there. And you always wanted to maintain a 4.0 because if you're a 4.0 you're sure you get your rate. If you're going to get an advancement you had to have that 40.

SIGRIST: Is that like a 4.0 or—

KUHN: Yeah. Yeah.

SIGRIST: Not like 40.

KUHN: No.

SIGRIST: That's what it'll look like on the transcript.

KUHN: Yeah, 4, 4—

SIGRIST: Four point oh.

KUHN: Just like college, you know, you want a 4.0. A 3.9 is not as good in the military as it is in college. So anyhow, that, that, that was an incident that happened. The two of them had it. We had.., Oh there was.., One time a boat was missing.

SIGRIST: What kind of a boat?

KUHN: A forty-foot patrol boat. And the cooks always got off at midnight. They could leave the building at midnight. There was only one thing wrong with that. The last ferry left here about eleven o'clock. So there was only one way that they could off of the ferry and that was, that was.., Or get off of the

island and that was by patrol boat. And so the boat crew always took care that the cooks got where they wanted to go. If they lived in New Jersey we'd, they'd, we'd take then on our patrol and then drop them off some place.

SIGRIST: So the cooks themselves were, were hired then. They were not Coast Guardsmen.

KUHN: No, they were Coast Guardsmen.

SIGRIST: But they were allowed to live at home.

KUHN: Umm-hmm. Umm-hmm. And they actually got off every night, the cooks did. But somebody had to be back the next morning to prepare food. So they.., But if they wanted to they could go and they could come back. You know, they'd be done by I'd say six o'clock. And most of them would go home. And then they'd have a skeleton crew on for the rest.

SIGRIST: Why would they be allowed such, such—

KUHN: Because they weren't needed really until five thirty in the morning. And they, and they worked all day.

SIGRIST: Why weren't they required to live here?

KUHN: I don't know. They, they.., It's always that way with, with the cooks.

SIGRIST: To get special treatment?

KUHN: Yeah. Yeah. Everybody takes care of their cook.

SIGRIST: I interrupted your story. I'm sorry.

KUHN: So, so the boat was missing. Well how come the boat was missing? Well the radioman said, "I called". I looked out the window of the administration building. I looked out. I saw this boat going out. There was no lights on it. But it left. And they called them and nobody answered. And then the next morning St. George repair base called and said, "What do you want us to do with this forty-footer you got over here?" And the guy said, "Oh, is that where it ended up?" Well, one fellow decided to go AWOL from the boat pool. And the other, the cook and a, and a, and another bosun—as a matter of fact ended up being the one that I had—went with him. And they took.., They delivered the cooks where they wanted to go on Staten Island some place or Jersey. And then they, they went to that repair base and they left the boat there. And then the one fellow went home to his wife and family. And the other fellow just went AWOL. And the funny part of it is that they could never prove who took that boat. And I think after forty years the statute of limitations won't touch them anymore.

SIGRIST: What about for extreme cases? Do you remember any extreme punishments being administered or was there a place on the island that was, you know, like a jail or something like that would be used in certain circumstances.

KUHN: No. They felt that we didn't need a jail because this was, you know, they were on an island. There were only certain ways they could get off. And if you got into trouble everybody knew you were in trouble. And the last thing they were going to do is take you off if you were in trouble. There was an incident and the fellows were restricted to the base for three months for, or at least a month, for turning in a false alarm down at South Ferry one time. And the two of them got some, got some time. But the New York police—

SIGRIST: Was this a fire alarm?

KUHN: Yeah. The New York police caught them right away, put them in jail and then turned them over to our legal officer. He brought them back here and they stayed here until they had a hearing. And then they were.., Then they did not get any jail time for it. They were, they were remanded to the custody of their legal officer here on the base and, and, and I'm not sure but St. George repair base had a brig and you would be sent to the brig over there.

SIGRIST: That's on Staten Island?

KUHN: Yes. Yeah.

SIGRIST: We sort of got rerouted from our daily routine here. Anyway, so, so you were mustered to your individual duties.

KUHN: Um-hmm.

SIGRIST: So why don't we talk about when you had boat duty because that made you happy when you did boat duty.

KUHN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: So what would happen? You were, you were given your instructions and then what happened?

KUHN: Well, after, after we got.., The first thing we had to do was, was.., The first thing that had to be done is we had to deliver the pier guards. And there'd be about six of them. And we might have to send, deliver them to, over to places in, in where was it, in Jersey City, in that area in there. Or over into Grave's Inn Bay they called it, over in Brooklyn. And then we would deliver them. And then we'd bring the other pier guards back. And then we'd go in and maybe get a cup of coffee or a sandwich or something and then go on patrol.

SIGRIST: So these pier guards would be stationed here.

KUHN: Um-hmm.

SIGRIST: What were they guarding? I mean what, what was the function of a pier guard?

KUHN: The pier guard, it was a government restricted pier. It was a pier that usually was loading supplies, military supplies. The only other interesting thing that we had when we were either a pier guard or a waterside patrol, is what they called us. But the other thing we had to do was—that was interesting was—observe ships that came in, into the port that were either had put into a communist country like Poland or, seldom Russia, but into a community country. Or if somebody aboard that, the ship that came in was suspected of dealing in dope. And then we had to make sure that we had put our ship right, our little boat next to this big ship and stay alert all the time for fear that they'd drop an atomic bomb or something like that into the water. And the ships were that did put in to foreign had stopped at a communist port. Many times, all the time, they were met outside, outside of the continental limits and searched. And officers would go aboard with Geiger counters to check to see if there was any atomic or any uranium or anything like that on there.

SIGRIST: And are you on those little forty-foot boats?

KUHN: Um-hmm.

SIGRIST: Doing this?

KUHN: We didn't.., We didn't go aboard the ship. But we—

SIGRIST: No. But I mean—

KUHN: But the guarding, the guarding of the ship and that while it was in port, yeah.

SIGRIST: That brings up a whole other side of this. Did you have any interaction with what was going on at Ellis Island in its function as an immigration station at that time because suspected communists and people such as that were being detained here in the 19, early 1950s. What--? Where there rules about your interaction with this part of the island? Or did you indeed have some interaction with this part of the island?

KUHN: The only interaction that I had as far as, as immigrants were concerned, and as far as Coast Guard duty was concerned, is that one day in 19, I believe it was 1953, we were, our boat was ordered to, our crew was ordered to stand by our boat. And then a tug came in, a Coast Guard tug came in and pulled up on the immigration side. And they loaded all of, a whole group of men, from, let's see. I don't know if they were from Cuba or,

you know, but they were Spanish speaking. And they were all Spanish speaking. So I don't know if they were Mexican or Puerto Rican or Brazilian or just what.., And the Brazilians don't speak Spanish anyhow. But they were being shipped out of the country. They were being deported. And it was our job to watch, to follow that ship, stay along side that ship or follow that ship or that tug, to the ship that they were putting them aboard, and that was over in Jersey. And so we went over there. We followed them over there. And waited until they were all marched up the gangplank and put on the ship. And then we pulled out, went back on our regular duty. But an interesting thing was that one of the fellows a couple days later came back to the barracks. And he said, "Read this". And it was a headline in the *Daily Worker*, the communist newspaper here in New York, that said that gun toting Coasties haul off citizens, deport people, you know, and, and they.., You know that was really the only time that, that.., There was a second time and that's when two people on the immigration side escaped. Wrapped all their clothes in a shower curtain and jumped off the Jersey side of the wall here and went into Jersey. Who knows? They might be back in those swamps yet. But that time we were, we were.., We all searched our side. Went up into the attics and where we usually punched the clock for fire watch. But we had to go through the attics and all the rooms and that and search to see if those two fellows were there. And eventually we got the news that, no, they had, they had swam over to the Jersey side and escaped. The other thing

about.., I used to come over here for, for mass on Sunday. And—

SIGRIST: Could you describe where that was and what that all entailed a little bit?

KUHN: Well, it, it.., The thing I remember, it was a large room because there were an awful lot of people that went there.

SIGRIST: And it was here on the immigration side.

KUHN: It was on the immigration side. And, you know, we came.., We always had a guide to take us over there. And you went through it so fast. And you had to, you know, you didn't get a tour of the place or anything. And so it was hard to remember. But I do remember the room had one of those large murals on it. And you know, a lot of.., I don't know if that was done in the 1930s when, when so much, so many artists were given jobs doing murals on walls for, to keep them busy, to give them money, you know, during the Depression years. But, anyhow, I remember the murals. And there'd be the benches like you have down in the main hall, benches like that were in there to sit on. And then they'd have sort of an altar there and a place for the priest to stand while he gave his sermon.

SIGRIST: Was it a Coast Guard chaplain or was it a priest who came in?

KUHN: No, it was a.., It was a.., I believe.., I don't know what the Order of priests were but it was from the Little Church at South Ferry. There's a, there's a little church at South Ferry and they would bring a priest over every Sunday to hold mass. And the one time that was really, you know, humorous. It's something that you think how can it be humorous, you're at mass? Well, the priest.., It appears as though there was a family in the front row. And the priest gave his, said mass, was saying the mass. And he got to the gospel and the, and the epistle. He did the epistle in English. And then he did it in what I think was Polish. Then he did the gospel in English and he did it in Polish. And then he gave the sermon in English and then he did it in Polish. Well, by that time the people that were sitting in the back.., As far as I know there must have been fifty men back there—

SIGRIST: We've got to stop just for a second. I've got to put another tape in. We're just about to run this out. Sorry. We're going to pause just for a moment and I'll put in tape two.

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B

START TAPE 2, SIDE A

SIGRIST: Okay. We're now beginning tape 2 with James Kuhn who was in the Coast Guard here at Ellis Island from 1952 to 1954.

Mr. Kuhn when we ended tape 1 you were telling us about being in a service up at the chapel and there was a family in the front row. And you noticed that the priest was alternating between speaking English and speaking Polish.

KUHN: Well, when he, when he got to the.., when he started to do sermon in Polish—because the sermon in English was long enough. And when he started to do it in Polish there were about, there had to be about fifty men in back of us—we sat up in front with this family. And all of a sudden during the Polish section of the sermon the noise got louder. It's these guys talking and carrying on and, and, you know, like, like, "hey, when's this guy". I didn't speak.., And it was all Spanish or.., It wasn't English. But there were these fifty guys were talking. And, and so they were very irritated that they were getting this thing in Polish. I mean they'd had the, you know, both versions, English and, and they.., And of course most of them probably didn't speak English so then they're getting another language besides Polish.

SIGRIST: Well now I'm confused. Were these men not other Coast Guardsmen?

KUHN: No, no. These were, these were immigrants. I'm sorry.

SIGRIST: You should get another interaction that you had with the immigrants then. They were attending church services here.

KUHN: Um-hmm.

SIGRIST: Oh, I thought that this—

KUHN: I'm sorry.

SIGRIST: I was under the impression that the church services were held for the Coast Guardsmen.

KUHN: No. We were just.., We were guests, you know. We were, we were guests over here. They were.., Immigration, you know.., Somebody made arrangements that we could come over. I imagine our officers made arrangements that those people that were Catholic could come over. I didn't know of any other services that were held over here that other fellows went to.

SIGRIST: That's why I asked you if it was a Coast Guard service.

KUHN: Yeah.

SIGRIST: I assumed it was for the Coast Guard.

KUHN: So these fellows were all another nationality and, and I believe it was Spanish. So they started talking. You know, as far as they were concerned this church was over because they'd, they'd had it. And the priest stopped talking. And he, and he

looked out at the bunch of them and he said, "If you people don't keep quiet I'm going to have the officers here clear this room and you won't hear mass today". And there was a little talking back and forth like somebody saying, "What'd he say" in Spanish. And the other fellow saying in Spanish, "Hey, he said he's going to cut this thing out if you, you know". And it took a minute or two for things to settle down. And then, you know, I thought the good father pushed his luck. He went back into Polish again to finish the sermon. But then after that we, we had the rest of the mass was said and there was no problem after that. And never ran into it again while we were there. But of course we didn't have someone come in and give a sermon in two different, in two different languages.

SIGRIST: Would you have a different priest periodically or--?

KUHN: Yes, because it wouldn't always be the same priest. And I don't know for sure that this particular.., It would seem kind of strange that this particular priest would be, would come over from there and speak the language of the people that are at the island and, and are, are detained here, that family that was detained here. But that's what happened.

SIGRIST: Were you required to sit in a certain place at the services?

KUHN: Yeah, they had us sit up in front with the, with any people that were not, that, that.., It seemed to me that were guests, you know, or detainees in good standing, you know.

SIGRIST: Were you ever given any instructions like when you first got here about rules about addressing detainees or anything like that?

KUHN: No, nobody ever—

SIGRIST: Were you allowed to talk to them if you felt so inclined?

KUHN: As far as we know it was, it was.., You know they took us through so fast. After all, we were guys twenty-one and twenty-two so we didn't come to church an hour early or a half an hour early or fifteen minutes. If mass was at nine o'clock we'd go marching over at about ten minutes to nine so they could bring us into the room. And we very seldom saw any activity going on. We saw more of the immigrants and that when we were, when we were washing our boats and they would come on the ferry boat. We'd see them. And that was, that was great because you saw people wearing all kinds of dress, you know. You know the Hasidic Jews, which I thought were just interesting as good be. And I'd never seen that before, Green Bay, you know.

SIGRIST: Who maintained the boats that were here, these forty-foot boats that you seemed to do everything in, who maintained the boats and how were they maintained?

KUHN: Well, the.., We maintained them ourselves. Each boat had its own engine man. And then—

SIGRIST: Were they docked in a certain place on the island?

KUHN: They were, they were docked on the other side. And—

SIGRIST: Other side of what?

KUHN: The other side of the ferry slip.

SIGRIST: I see.

KUHN: The ferry, the ferry—

SIGRIST: On your side of the ferry slip.

KUHN: Yeah, on our side of the ferry slip.

SIGRIST: And not on the immigration side.

KUHN: And there were, there were approximately thirteen forty-footers here at that time, had thirteen of them. And they were—

SIGRIST: Just docked in the water or were they pulled out of the water or—

KUHN: Just.., No, just docked in the water. The only time they came out of the water is when we had to take them over to the St. George repair base. And then they had a crane that lifted them out of the water, put a sling on them and lifted them out of the water. Changed the screws or put them up on the dock so that we could scrape the bottoms and paint them and then put them back in the water. Otherwise all the maintenance on them for the most part was done here. The.., Every once in a while the bosun's mate would say, or the boat officer would say, "It's time for you fellows.., Your boat needs painting". And so we'd get out a little raft. There was always a raft [unclear]. And we'd pull the boat over to the raft and we'd paint that side. And then we'd turn it around and paint the other side, paint the decks. And the Coast Guard was big on painting. Yeah. White boats, black lettering and.., White and spar was the color. Spar being a brown. But—

SIGRIST: Does that go for the interiors of the Coast Guard [unclear]?

KUHN: Yes, yes. Most—

SIGRIST: You probably will remember. You probably painted them.

KUHN: White and.., White and spar was.., Except the big wood work doors of the barracks and that, they didn't do those. But anything else that was.., Anything in metal and that usually got painted spar or gray or, or white.

SIGRIST: Were there multiple barracks, too, or were you all in one and the officers somewhere else?

KUHN: No, no. There was.., We had, we had a port in what they called the port and starboard boat crew. And there were forty-four men in each of those crews. And then there were.., And each of them had their own barracks on the main floor. And then the, then the, the pier guards had.., What'd they have? They had at least.., They had at least two barracks. And they were over on this side. We were down that way. They were on this side and they were upstairs and downstairs. And then—

SIGRIST: Those were the, the men guarding the piers that you used to ferry back and forth.

KUHN: Yeah. And then the groups that just did the, oh, just, just did the business of—what do I want to call it—just did the maintenance work and that, the new arrivals and that, that would come in there. They would be in another barracks. So that you know you never, you never really mixed except when you took the pier guards out to their, to their places that they had to guard. You never mixed with them. The boat crew was

over here. As a matter of fact, you knew the guys in the other boat crew but you didn't have a lot to do with them because they were always on duty when you weren't, you know.

SIGRIST: What about--? What about training? What kinds of training or classes did you have to undergo while you were here if any for--? Well, for instance, I mean we've had descriptions of signal mastering school being conducted here and semaphore and that sort of thing. Did you in, in, in the late or mid-fifties, did you have any of that here?

KUHN: No, I made it.., I didn't get.., I didn't get the training, the school training, that I wanted because I made the mistake of—and I didn't know it was happening.., They were scheduling a class in boat handling. And, and that was to include not only the handling of the boat but the navigation involved with it. And, and it was an upper class of seamanship. And I took leave. And when I came back they had started the school so I couldn't get in. And that was, that was the last school that they had. But then I was able, I was able to become a boat officer by, by, by taking, by just taking a test and, and passing the test. And then I became the officer in charge of a boat. And, and otherwise.., The fellow, two fellows that I went through boot camp with, they were there at that time and they got to go to the school. And it was, I don't know, it was about a month.

SIGRIST: Was that held here?

KUHN: It was held right at, right at the island. Right. The officers that were here did the training. The other training I had is.., At least.., It was quite often that you would either have semaphore training, refreshment or—what was the other thing—first aid. And the other thing was, was fire drill. Man you'd.., I mean this place.., You had a fire drill and you know you had to know, you know, what your job was. And when they had the drill you had to be there. If you weren't there you could go, you know, you could be booked, you could be turned in for a captain's mast for not being where you're supposed to be at that time. Because, you know, one of the first things you learn whether you're on a ship or whether you're on land is general quarters, what's your duty at general quarters and what is your duty at, for fire drills. And, of course, we didn't have general quarters here, which would mean everybody to a battle station. But the fire, the fire drills, you either showed up with an axe or you were the third man on the hose, or you had to bring in a, a pump and, or you were in charge of putting the suction into the water to start the, start the hose in order to start the [unclear] the gas operated pump to water pump the.., So you had a job that you had to do—

SIGRIST: Was that one of the first things that you learned when you got here?

KUHN: Um-hmm. The first thing you learned is what your fire station is, and then where you sleep. And, yeah.

SIGRIST: Was there ever a fire here while you were here?

KUHN: Not that I can recall.

SIGRIST: You did mention fire watch earlier in the interview. And we haven't really described what that is. That's something different all together. So maybe if you could just take a minute and describe that.

KUHN: Well the fire watch is, or security watch.., What you did was you reported to the, you reported to the master at arms or the officer of the day. The officer of the day was the guy who ran the whole thing after the old man left. And or the officer of the day was the fellow in charge of everything because the old man was busy. And the executive office was busy so this guy answered any questions. You reported to him. And they gave you a clock with a, a, a, paper dial in there. And then they had areas all through the, all through the building that you had to.., What'd they call them? Clock stations or something. But up there in the rafters in the attic was a key to this clock. And you went up there and you put that, you reported up there, and you turned the key in that clock. And that made a punch. Then you went to the next one. You went.., Started up at the top and you went all the way to the bottom, these different stations all along

the way. And sometimes it.., But you were there to observe, you know, and, and.., You just kept doing this for six hours.

SIGRIST: So it's an inspection process of sorts.

KUHN: Right.

SIGRIST: What are you looking for exactly?

KUHN: Mostly we're looking for fire. Just, you know.., Of course it could be anything else, too, you know. Some animal might be up there or something like that or.., But for the most part you're just looking for fire to protect everybody, you know. Because it was an awful big building and it was built a long time ago. But it was your job to see to it to protect all the people. And if.., You know you could get into trouble.

SIGRIST: Were those paper dials then turned over to someone with all the punches in them? Who was in charge of that?

KUHN: You reported, you reported back.., Maybe it was only a two-hour watch. I can't remember. But you, you, you reported back to the officer. And they opened up that clock and they inspected it. And if there were any punches missing you were called in and they wanted to know why this punch wasn't made. And you know, the thing about it is is somebody took you through and showed you the punches where they were and then

you, it was up to you to remember where they were and make all the punches.

SIGRIST: There was no big sign.

KUHN: No, no.

SIGRIST: Or anything that said, clock here or—

KUHN: Left at the next punch. No. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Tell me what kind of medical facilities were offered to the Coast Guardsmen who were here and, and if you had an occasion to use them.

KUHN: The only thing they had here was a chief. It seems to me there was either.., I believe there was a chief but we didn't have a doctor. If there was anything wrong.., If we had any problems, medical problems, all we.., We could report to sick bay. And then the, the corpsman would look you over. And, and if they take your.., The corpsman would be a first class hospital man I think we called them. We called them corpsmen or hospital men.

SIGRIST: How do you spell that?

KUHN: Corpsmen, C-O-R-P—I think the S is in there—M-A-N.

SIGRIST: I see.

KUHN: And so you'd go to him. And he'd take your temperature and he'd look in your throat. And he'd say, "Yes, you got a bad case of strep throat. Gargle with salt water and report back here tomorrow", you know. And he would.., He would have the power to, to put you on, put you on no duty, you know. He could say, you know, with what you've got here you'd better report to your sack and stay there, you know. Or they'd put you in what they called the sick bay. They'd put you in, in one of their rooms, which was, you know, like you might see a little clinic. We never had a doctor here. We were sent up to, oh, up to the, the.., Public health doctors were on Manhattan Island. And we'd either get sent there or they'd be sent over to Staten Island to the merchant marine. I believe there was a merchant marine hospital there. And we'd be sent over there for any problems that we had.

SIGRIST: Do you remember an incident where you were sick or somebody, one of your fellow Coast Guardsmen, were seriously ill or hurt somehow that, that would require medical attention?

KUHN: I.., One time I, I seriously twisted my ankle, and so I reported to sick bay and because it was .., You know I sprained my ankle. And they said, hey, you hobble up to the public health

doctors up there in Manhattan. I just can't remember what the, which street it was on there anymore. But I had to go up there and spend.., It was funny because they didn't give me any crutches to get up there. And when I came back all they did, all they had done up there.., It was kind of a fast clinic like. And they just wrapped it with an ace bandage and sent me back, no crutches, no cane, nothing. And I suppose they figured, well as long as I wasn't wounded that was good enough. But otherwise, no, I can't recall of.., I spent, I spent fifteen minutes in one of the bunks one day over there. I was using a paint scraper. I was scraping the bottom of one of our Monomoy surf boats. And the paint scraper had a, had .., They were sharp but it had a hooked end and then it had a straight end. And I pulled on the hook end and the straight end ran and put about a three-inch gash in my, my leg. So I went in and the corpsman said to me, "Oh, you're going to need stitches". I said, "I am?" He said, "Yeah". And I said, "Well, where do I go?" He said, "I'll do them". So he got out all the equipment and put stitches in my, my leg. And I said, "You know", I said, "this is the first time that I've had stitches put in me while I was awake". And he said, "Well, this is the first time I ever did it". So after I was done with that he said, "Oh, hey, got a favor I want you to do for us". I said, "What's that?" And he said, "Well, we got that one bunk in there that we didn't make up. And the old man's coming around for inspection". It was a Friday morning. "The old man's coming around for inspection?" I said, "Yeah". He said, "Would you mind laying in it until he goes?" So I said,

"Yeah, sure". So I climbed in the bunk and the old man came through and looked at me and said, "What'd you do, sailor?" And I said, "Sir, I was working on the Monomoy surf board out there". And I said, "I, I opened up my knee with the paint scraper". Turned to the, turned to the scribe and he said, the yeoman, and he said, "Make a note of that. We got to have those paint scrapers checked". He said, "They're getting dangerous". [Laughs] So everybody was happy.

SIGRIST: You've used the word twice describing the boat that you were scraping. What was that word?

KUHN: Monamoye.

SIGRIST: Can you spell that please?

KUHN: Probably not. Monamoye, monamoye. How is--? It's like M-O-N-A-M-O-Y-E.

SIGRIST: Is that a—

KUHN: Or M-O-Y. It was.., I don't know where it came from. I always felt that it was named after some point or something along the east coast.

SIGRIST: It's not a brand name for a boat.

KUHN: Not that I know of. No. They—

SIGRIST: If the, if the immigration side of the island is this island—

KUHN: It wasn't a surfboat. It was a lifeboat, a Monomoy lifeboat as well as.., Okay. This surf boat is something different.

SIGRIST: I see. This is the immigration side. The Coast Guard is sort of in the middle area. What was going on on the far end of the island that you know?

KUHN: The only thing I know about it is the, is the, oh, that the administrator of the island, I believe, was staying here, and with his family. They had the last building closest to the Statue of Liberty. And they were in that building. And one, one time we were in that, in that area. It was great for marching. We used that, that, what would you call it, plaza or, if you could call it a plaza—

SIGRIST: That middle area.

KUHN: That middle area there. We called it the parade ground. But we mustered there after a while. The boast crews and the pier guards would muster there. And we had to march for a parade for a man named Kurt Carlson. Captain Kurt Carlson was a, was a captain of the Flying Enterprise, a ship that sunk in the Atlantic. And it was days whether he was going to be able to

save the ship. Large, large ocean going tugs went out there and were pulling the ship and that, you know, and towing the ship, I should say. And he, and he stayed aboard. And finally the ship was going down and that's when he got off the vessel. And so when he came to the United States they decided that they would have this parade for him. And this is 1952. And it was sort of like in March, something like that. So we had.., You know, Marconi's daughter was at it, you know, the whole thing. But we knew this parade was coming up and so we never marched after we left boot camp. Okay. So now we, now they say we've got to practice marching because we're going to be in this parade in New York City. And so we were marching. And we had this bosun's mate—he was at third class, second class, something like that—a tall skinny guy. Can't remember his name. But he was funny. But anyhow, he would.., Most of these guys, as I said, were from, had been down at Camp Gordon, Georgia for MP training under army instructors. So they did a lot of marching. And while they were marching they picked up an awful lot of raunchy chants. You know, C-H-A-N-T, chants. And, you know, they "here we go to the old chow hall", you know, and after that it was nothing but, you know.., One day the.., We were doing it and then everybody's going "sound off, one, two, three, four" and all that. And all of a sudden the officer of the day comes out, stops and he just starts on the bosun's mate right there. "If I ever hear another chant like that from you you won't see the light of day for a long time". And it ends up that what happened is that we're doing

all these chants and we're marching around the place. And it appears as though the administrator of Ellis Island did not think that the chants were appropriate for his wife and his daughter to hear. And he called over and chewed them out. They proceeded to chew out the bosun's mate. And the rest of us are standing there just smiling. We just couldn't believe that, that, you know, that this was, you know, that he was chewing him out in front of everybody, you know. And the bosuns' mate just keeps getting redder and redder. And nobody ever said anything to him about it. Boy, he really got it. We just kept our mouth shut.

SIGRIST: We've got about six minutes left and then we're really going to have to end if we're going to go over and, and look around the abandoned parts. What I'd like you to talk about is the process of getting off the island, and when that happened, and what that entailed.

KUHN: You mean as far as when I left here permanently?

SIGRIST: Yeah, when you left. I mean what, what had you accomplished and why were you moved on? Why did you move on?

KUHN: We moved on.., I think they closed it down. The port security unit was here just to protect the harbor, protect New York Harbor. And we did a heck of a job because not one commie did any work while we were here. There were no explosions or

anything. We had those guys scared stiff. [Laughs] I'm being facetious. We, we were called in. We'd heard that the Korean—or we knew the Korean War was over. And so they were, they were down sizing everything. Some guys if they checked and they said, if you have less than six months to go you can get out six months early or if you have less than a year to go you can get out six months early. Well, the other stipulation was that you couldn't, you couldn't be a petty officer. You couldn't be a third class bosun's mate. You had to be a seaman or less. The thing that irritated me was that six days before that they had given me my third class. So I had to wait instead of getting in say January, I got out—or in March—I got out in, in September. So then they, then they came up to us and they said, where do you want to go? Do you have any place that you want to go? And, and in the third Coast Guard district. And so I said, "Well what do you have open?" And they said, "Well, we got this life boat station, this life boat station, life boat or we got, we got the, the USS, or the Coast Guard cutter, a weather ship..," I can't recall the Campbell or Dispense or one of those that are, that are, you can go on. And I said.., The boat officer came around and he said, "Well, Kuhn where do you want to go?" And I said, "Well, Mr. Monk, I'll take a life boat station". "Oh no, Kuhn. I'm sending you out on a weather ship." "Sir, if you send me out on a weather ship you're going to set the Coast Guard back sixty years in seamanship." "All right. Where do you want to go?" "Well, what do you got there?" "So", he said, "I got the Hereford Inlet

life boat station at Wildwood, New Jersey". I said, "That sounds good. I'll take that". And so in a couple of days he called me in and they gave me my, my orders and my papers and I, I think I came down here and got my.., I always got my train tickets here at, on the, on the immigration side. I'd walk over and get my ticket and I'd be all set. And I'd get on the ferryboat and cross over to Long Island and—not Long Island, Manhattan Island. And I always took the Pennsylvania Station because I'd less.., I could get home real quick by the Pennsylvania because I didn't have a waiting period at, at the train station. So anyhow, then they, they shipped me off and sent me down to Wildwood, New Jersey for the last nine months of my, or eight months of my time in service.

SIGRIST: How do you look back on your experience here for those two years that you were here now?

KUHN: Oh, you know, I think it was, I think it was just great. I always have. You know fellows at that time from nineteen, from eighteen to twenty-three were going to college. And I got out of service and a lot of these guys are, are telling me about the good time that they had in, in, in college, you know, and all the parties and all of that stuff. And after I was out I got married almost immediately and, and started raising a family plus going to school, going to college. So I look at my service time as a great time. And when you figure that I was off every other day for two years. I was getting.., I was keeping twenty-one

dollars every two weeks and the rest was sent home. But I was living on twenty-one dollars. I could go to New York City anytime and see anything for a dime on the subway. And I paid a dollar and a quarter today. And a dime on the subway and come back here and sleep. And I'd go up to Times Square and I'd meet guys from town, from my hometown, guys I went to high school with, things like that. I, I went to stage plays. I went by one time, a lady, the doorman at the, at the theatre said, "Hey sailor, come here". And I said, "Oh what's this now". So I said, "What do you want?" He said, "A lady stopped, gave me this ticket and said give it to this first serviceman to walk by, that walks by". So I got to see "The King and I" with Yul Brenner. I got to see Jose Ferrer and [unclear], you know, just all kinds.., The USO shows and that were.., Or tickets Arthur Godfrey, you know, all the big shots and that. It was, it was great. Central Park, the Jewish USO, it was just marvelous. I love it. I love the Big Apple yet and that's why I'm here.

SIGRIST: We need to end now. Mr. Kuhn, thank you very much. We've been talking for an hour and thirty-one minutes. And—

KUHN: You said forty-five.

SIGRIST: I did say forty-five. It's been wonderful. I think we could probably talk for another hour or so. This is Paul SIGRIST signing off with James Kuhn on Tuesday, October 17th 1995 here at Ellis Island. Thank you, sir.

KUHN: Hey, thank you, Paul.

END OF INTERVIEW