

EI-070

MARK HORODNER

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INTERVIEWER: JANET LEVINE, PH.D.

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TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY: PAUL E. SIGRIST, JR., 11/1993

IMMIGRATION AND NATURALIZATION SERVICE GUARD AT ELLIS ISLAND
1940-1946

Oral Historian's Note: Mr. Horodner insists on periodically reading from a previously written essay about his experiences working on Ellis Island. Paul E. Sigrist, Jr., Director of the Oral History Project, 11/10/1993.

LEVINE: . . . in Miami, Florida. It's August 24th, 1991, and I'm with Mark Horodner, who was an immigration guard at Ellis Island. And Mark is the first immigration guard that we have interviewed, so it's a pleasure to be here, and why don't we start by saying when you worked there.

HORODNER: It's a pleasure to have you here. I worked there from about 1940 till about '46. And then I moved down to Miami and went into business. After being in business for a number of years, I returned to immigration service, and I had a total of fifteen years service. I returned locally.

LEVINE: In Miami.

HORODNER: In Miami, yes.

LEVINE: Okay. Uh, why don't we say, start with, what's your birth date?

HORODNER: It's March 27th, 1914.

LEVINE: Okay.

HORODNER: I'm seventy-seven years old. Pretty good shape, swim every day, do little exercises every day. You see we have a little pool out there, and we keep active here. It's always something to do, gardening, etc., to maintain the house and so on.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, tell me how you came to work at Ellis Island.

HORODNER: Well, do you mind if I, okay. It's also interesting how I did start there, because I'm not going to read the whole thing because it's quite a big letter, you know, unless you want me to. I don't mind. I told you, I believe that I wrote to you folks at the urging of my granddaughter who visited Ellis Island in June 1991 and found it to be the most interesting part of her visit to New York City. My brother Arnold suggested to me that I start taking civil service exams.

LEVINE: Now, how old were you around that time?

HORODNER: I was about twenty-five, yes.

LEVINE: Okay.

HORODNER: "Get on the list," he said, "and move up as I did." As he did. He was with the U.S. Coast Guard for thirty-six years. He started at eighteen years old as a clerk and retired as head of Aids to Navigation Department, U.S. Coast Guard, New York Civil Service. He covered the setting of the buoys and the safety of the ships was his department. He covered the coast all the way up to the tip of Maine, down to about Virginia. That was his department. And he was more or less of a aqua-engineer, water-engineer.

LEVINE: I see.

HORODNER: He knew the surfaces underneath the water and so on, which was important to ships because they could hit a rocky bottom and have an accident.

LEVINE: Now, were you in New York City when your brother Arnold suggested this to you?

HORODNER: Yes. I lived in New York City.

LEVINE: And where did you live?

HORODNER: I lived in the Bronx. And, well, as a matter of

fact, I lived in New York City till about thirty-five or forty years before coming down here. And, uh . . .

LEVINE: I see. Had you been living in New York City when you started at Ellis? You had been living there for some time?

HORODNER: No. Uh, I started taking the exams as he suggested.

I was asked after getting on a list, I took the lowest exams and some of the other high ones, and I took the first thing that came through, clerk's job, immigration, Washington, D.C. Very interesting job, right where all the big shots were. And, uh, as a matter of fact, you see, I was in the printing department there and we did all types of printing for the people that ran the organization there. And while I was in Washington, Madam Perkins, the first woman to become Secretary of Labor came to my desk with special printing jobs she needed. She was a very nice lady. She used to wear those old-fashioned hats with grapes and all kinds of fruit on top of her hat.

LEVINE: Like a straw hat?

HORODNER: Well, they were all fashion hats. You must have seen them somewhere. And this was her marker, you know. But it was nice. It was different. Uh-huh. Although it was a low-paying job, it was a start in civil service. I began, while in Washington I began taking other jobs, higher-paying job exams,

and made the Board of Patrol list, which is immigration. I also made the U.S. Fireman's list. In Panama, the U.S. government maintained their own fire department and police department. So I made that list, too, which was a grade five at that time. After a year of service in Washington I noticed there was an opening for an immigration guard on the bulletin board in Washington. I applied and was accepted from the Border Patrol list. Since that was a higher paying job, I could take a lower grade off of that higher list. Anything equivalent or lower, see. Uh, I learned my job well, and most of my fellow employees were World War I veterans. They were about fifteen years older than me, see. And which is why there aren't too many former fellow employees still with us, you see?

LEVINE: I see. Before you go further, now, do you remember anything about the exams at that time, the civil service exams that you took?

HORODNER: Yeah. They were, they weren't difficult for a fellow who did a little studying. I went to high school, and had a couple of night schools in CCNY, night school courses, you know. And I was interested in what happened around me, and therefore I had an extra little knowledge of exams and so on. Because I took quite a few exams in high school at CCNY. I also went to school here at night to brush up on certain things. The exams

were, how do you say, when you have five . . .

LEVINE: Multiple choice.

HORODNER: That's the idea. I forgot. Most of the exams were multiple choice, and that was easy for me because having done a little reading and studying I could pick out the right ones, see. And that's how civil service exams are. They're not too difficult, unless you're a specialist, a doctor or a lawyer or a scientist. Then you have to answer them, what they ask you in those fields. But these are ordinary exams of just common knowledge. It's not too difficult to get into civil service if you have a clean record and you have a desire.

LEVINE: Great. Okay. So the people you work with, you were younger than most of the people you were working with then.

HORODNER: Yes. We were, a few were younger people. Some veterans of World War II who had been wounded and came back, and they got jobs at Ellis Island as guards. One fellow I remember had a game leg. He had stepped on a mine while in active duty. His name was Griblunis. He was about my age, a little younger. And there were a few others, but we were very few in number. Most everyone else was older. All answers to teachers, and show us the ropes. One man in particular, a fellow named Kramer, a Brooklyn boy, took me in under his wing and showed me

everything.

LEVINE: Now, had most of these immigration guards, had most of them been working during the period when a lot of immigrants were coming through, like the beginning of the century through the '20s?

HORODNER: The older ones who were working with me were in the immigration period. When I arrived there, it was mostly deportation and detention, see. And we had different types of aliens, illegal aliens kept at the island. Mostly seamen who came here on boats and they liked it very much. They got jobs when they were in the city, and didn't return. But, you see, according to the law the boat they worked on or the airplane they might have come in in is responsible for the return of this illegal alien. If he jumps ship, if they don't return him and find him, they are taxed five to ten thousand dollars depending upon the case. So they make a great effort to find these people, and there are informants. Like a fellow came in to Manhattan. He became friendly with the young lady, and they had an argument, and she left. But the next day he was abusive to her, the alien. The next day she called immigration, and the day after that he was at Ellis Island. And these are how these things, in some cases, are done, you see. That's how we find out where they are, see.

LEVINE: Now, what were your duties there?

HORODNER: Very interesting, because I will get to that point here, if I may.

LEVINE: Okay. Go on with your letter.

HORODNER: Let's see. This pretty well covers what we want to speak about.

LEVINE: Yes.

HORODNER: All right. The detainees at Ellis Island were from every country in the world, mostly illegal aliens, many foreign seamen. During World War II it was also a place of detention for enemy aliens, Germans, Italians and Japanese. They were interrogated at Ellis Island before being sent to detention camps out west for the war duration. There was always something going with sometimes two to three hundred aliens in each of the holding rooms. Always something happening. You know, three hundred people together, someone's bound to have a little friction or this and that. So we tried to keep the peace, you understand. German, Italian and Japanese were kept separately from the seamen because the war was on, and there could have been a war at Ellis Island between the enemy aliens and the illegal aliens, which were mostly allied seamen, but from

foreign countries, you see.

LEVINE: Now, why, tell, I'm missing something about the seamen. What, why were they being detained?

HORODNER: Because they didn't have the proper papers. Let's say they came to New York on a ship, and the ship was emptied out and then they've got to leave to New York. A lot of them never came back.

LEVINE: They jumped ship.

HORODNER: They jumped ship. That's right. They weren't bad people, but they loved America and they wanted to stay here. But it was illegal and they had to be deported back to the country they came from until they could get into a quota of their country, and then come back here. And most of the countries had quotas, see. I hesitate for a moment. Allied seamen were kept in larger dormitories since they were in greater number. There were more allied seamen there than any other type of person. As a matter of fact, I won't mention the name because I don't think you want names. There was a seaman there that used to speak to me. We were two guards in every dormitory, in every room. During the day, and I'll explain that to you, during the day we had a play field out there, as big as a football field. And they would play football, soccer, lift

weights, whatever they wanted to do. Two hundred, three hundred men. They had to keep busy, you know. There was also an adjoining inside playroom where they could play checkers and dominoes, etc. And that kept them busy, see. But even there was friction sometimes because they'd argue who won the game, and this and that. They weren't supposed to play cards, but sometimes they did, and we had to tell them not to. You know, these were things, and they played for money, so we had to tell them, "No, that's not allowed." Because it caused trouble, see.

We also had isolation dorms to hold those detainees who did not get along with other aliens. That happens, you know. Three hundred people, sometimes people like to fight and hog, you know. We had three cells in the basement for troublemakers. And sometimes you'd be amazed what can happen if they have a fight there together, you know. The Geneva Conference was adhered to strictly for the laws of detention.

LEVINE: Now, can you remember any specifics of what you needed to, what you always made sure of in detaining them?

HORODNER: Well, I can explain that. I'm coming to it, yes. Let's see, it will be easier this way, I think. No guns were carried by the guards, you know, at Ellis Island, because you're inside, but the government issued blackjacks. You know what a blackjack is, okay, in case of trouble, you'd have to use it to

protect yourself sometimes.

LEVINE: Did you have to use them very much?

HORODNER: One time that I was there I used a nightstick, one time, and I'll explain that to you. We learned and I learned very well oral judo. Do you know what judo is? It's physical. But we used the mouth. We could talk to them, talk them out of problems. Psychology, to keep the peace. And that's why we had, that's why I only used the nightstick one time, you see.

LEVINE: Now, did you get any training in that kind of thing while you were working there, or was it more common sense and learning . . .

HORODNER: Well, I was athletic. I played football for a little while, and till I took my uniform home. My father saw it standing in the corner. We had gone off to play out of town for Theodore Roosevelt High School, and I was on the junior varsity. But that day we couldn't go back to the place we kept the uniforms, a locker room, French Charlie's Field, they called it. So I took it home, and my father saw it in the corner. He said, "What is this, Mark?" I said, "Dad, I'll be very frank with you. I knew you wouldn't allow me to play football because you don't know the game too well, so I signed the slip myself." He says, "All right. You signed the slip yourself, take it

back tomorrow and you're not playing football any more." "Fine, okay, Dad." About two or three days later I was on the soccer team, because I got his permission and he knew about it. He said, "That's okay. You asked me. Fine." So I was captain of the soccer team for three years, and I also played a little baseball there with Tom Elif, who was Brogie Greenberg's original coach. Brogie Greenberg was the great baseball player. I used to field out his hits at Crotona Park. He'd bang the ball out to us and we'd throw it back and he'd keep hitting. He was a big man, a very nice man. Okay. I'm telling you little things about me, if they're interesting to you. All right. We had special dorms at Ellis Island for complete families who were detained. Though many interesting things that occurred while I worked there. Host . . .

LEVINE: Before you leave that, were there many families during that time, or was it mostly men?

HORODNER: Mostly enemy alien families. There weren't too many immigration families because most of that took place at 79th Street office. There's an office that was, there may still be, for immigration. It was north, 79th Street in New York. I've forgotten just exactly. I think Seventh Avenue. I'm not too sure. But we had a large office there for immigration. And that's where those things took place. Even the judges, the

immigration judges were there, see.

LEVINE: I see. Now, were there women apart from the men also that were not families, but were just . . .

HORODNER: We had, women were kept separate. But most of the women were kept with the family area because the facilities there were more for women. (a clock chimes) The other was, uh, double beds, you know, you climb up on top for one, one on the bottom and so on. And many a midnight shift, you know, I had three shifts. I put my hands on top of the top bed that was empty to watch the whole room, two hundred, three hundred men sleeping, snoring, all that stuff. Very interesting. It was hard to keep awake, but we did.

LEVINE: And did you, and were there hospitals functioning at that point?

HORODNER: Oh, yes, yes. The U.S. Public Health Service was the other part of Ellis Island. It was the Marine Hospital for Seamen.

LEVINE: Oh. Uh-huh.

HORODNER: Right.

LEVINE: Okay. Now, were there famous people there?

HORODNER: Oh, yes, yes. Famous, there were all kinds of famous people there, see. But sometimes there were a little of the other side of fame, like, well, Enzo Pinza. Enzo Pinza of South Pacific, he was there at the basso, the famous basso. A very nice man. As a matter of fact, I had to take him out for legal work one time, which is part of the work I'm going to explain to you. He had to go to his lawyer, and he was with his wife. He was married to Mayor LaGuardia's dentist daughter. (they laugh) They are all things you remember, see? Count Lucci. There's a Lucci in Hollywood now. That's probably his granddaughter. Count Lucci was a Hollywood actor, but he was there as an enemy alien from Mussolini's group. Well, they suspected him. I wouldn't condemn him, but they suspected him, and that's why they picked him up, see.

LEVINE: Now, was Mayor LaGuardia there working? Because I know he worked as a guard at Ellis Island very early on.

HORODNER: If he did it wasn't my knowledge.

LEVINE: It was then, you know, during the immigration. He was a translator.

HORODNER: Oh, now that's very possible, probably an Italian translator. A very nice man, by the way. I liked him as a man. We liked him. Gangster Lucky Luciano was there, and when he

was deported and on the boat he went on they all gave him a big party. His friends gave him a big party on the boat, with the knowledge of, well, he was already going. See, he was about to leave, see. So it was all right. It was their territory. It was on a boat, see. And he, I understand that he's not alive, I guess I can say this, that he helped the United States government while he was over there in some ways with his gangster contacts. With the, uh, mostly with Marine stuff, you know, shipping, etc. He was of some help. Sometimes these people, to gain a little favor, will help the government, you know. But as I say there was always something happening. Let me explain to you. I go back. Post A at Ellis Island was about the central part upstairs where the men were kept in the dormitories. And these were the places they stood during the day. I call them dormitories. They were holding rooms. Dormitories were where they slept, okay. It was the governing point from which all orders emanated for the detention department. Ellis Island was controlled from this area by detention supervisors. They would be there to issue orders. In case of trouble they knew what to do and took over. A keeper of the log sat at this station recording all happenings of the day and night shifts. This is just like they do in the navy. They had a log, see. Now, at this post, you asked if anything ever happened, there was a man who always smoked a pipe, and he was a

little fellow, but he was a retired chief petty officer of the navy. And we had a man in the back who was troublesome in holding rooms for troublemakers. Not in this basement, but upstairs, which had no bars, just iron, metal doors. He was as wide as he was tall, and he was unhappy in that room. So with his strength he broke the door off the hinges. Pushed it out, ran out to Post A where this little fellow with the pipe was sitting keeping the log, and he started to grab him and started to punch him. He hollered, "Post A, Post A!" And there was always two or three guards on a break, like lunch or something, and they were supposed to run to the trouble spots from Post A.

So even in the rooms where we had two men we heard it. One man ran also, one man stood by. We got there, and when I got there they were, this guy was so strong, they were hitting him with blackjacks on his head. They couldn't control him. So I realized from my athletic past ability that you can't hit him on the head. There's another way to pursue quieting down. So right next to Post A we had a room that we kept nightsticks. And I said to one of the other boys, "Let's get two nightsticks, and follow me." And we ran back, and we pushed the boys back, and I got on one side, and then the other guy got on the other side, hit him in the shins. "Bing, bing!" Two shots, this big, strong fellow was finished. He says, "All right, all right!" We took him then to the, no, we took him back to his room.

Dr. Evans, who was the Ellis Island doctor, and his favorite for all illnesses was an aspirin. (they laugh) He came back there, he looked at his eyes, and he seemed to be all right. He was, he had a few bruises, but we wouldn't have hurt him if he wasn't hurting our guards, see. And then he said, they took him over to the hospital, looked him over and then brought him back and put him into the cell because he had to be isolated. So that was just one of the things that we had happen. Now, immigration guards had many other assignments besides detaining aliens, such as escorting aliens to their last place of living, the last place they lived if they were in the country illegally, they had to live somewhere, and they had clothes there and things that belonged to them which they had to pick up and was theirs, you see. So we would take them to their last place of habitation.

LEVINE: Now, could that have been anywhere in the country?

HORODNER: No, only the local areas. But other immigration stations would take them, see, because it didn't pay for us to go to San Francisco and so on. But only aliens within riding distance, fifty miles, maybe. Then they also were working while they were here. They had to live, so they got jobs. Restaurants, this, that. We had to take them to their last job to get their last pay before they were deported or kept in

detention.

LEVINE: So how did that work? Was it one guard or two guards when it was one, did you go with the person, or you simply went on your own?

HORODNER: Depending, I would go with the person. You get an assignment, paper, and you'd ask to read the file if you could because you'd get an idea of his background, you know. If he was like this man that broke the door, if I had read his file I would know he was trouble. Because he, because he, in France, when he was on shore leave from his boat in France, he beat up two gendarmes in France, two policemen. He beat them up. That was in his file, and I would have known, you know, or we would have known. But, oh, yeah. I'll do that, yes. Now, we also used to go to prisons to pick up aliens subject to deportation after they served their sentence for breaking the law. Aliens came here, and they also broke the law. They'd steal and this, that, you know. And many had bad felonies, twenty years to life or something like that. But when an alien is in prison, really the government is glad to get rid of them. If he had twenty years' assignment the government would allow him after ten years to be deported. So we had to pick them up, bring them back to the Island. They were interrogated there and all that, and then they were also brought out to get their clothes if they had any,

and so on. That's another job we had. I went to Sing Sing quite often.

LEVINE: Really. And just with a blackjack is the only protection . . .

HORODNER: Well, I wasn't supposed to carry a gun.

(Mr. Horodner's son-in-law enters the room.) David, my son-in-law, I wasn't supposed to carry a gun, but I did carry a .38 of my own. But, to tell you the truth, I didn't have any bullets in it. Because if we shot one of them, we would be in trouble. So they'd look at it, and if they couldn't see there was no bullets they figured, "Let's be happy and let's not give him any trouble." See? So it's still judo, oral judo, see, psychology. Okay. There were so many facets to this job that each day was looked forward to. One of the days, yes, one of my assignments I was called at twelve o'clock noon to, "Mark, you're going to Canada." Okay. I've just had a jacket, you know, this uniform. And it's cold up in Canada, you know. "You've got to leave. Get ready." I said, "All right." So I had the few dollars in my pocket and they pay for transportation and all that. And they assigned six Yugoslavs to us. You know some of these seamen what they look like?

LEVINE: You can describe them.

HORODNER: I'm pretty big. They were big men. Most of them were nice people, you know. And they were patriotic, you see, to their country. And this was the war. This was during World War II. And they were going back on a ship to go back to their country and they were working on the ship. This was their way of getting back, and not to have the company lose any money on them, see. There was a bond on each one, when we went up to Canada, when we were transporting them. So another guard and I and a member of the, um, I just, just a moment, and it will come back to me. He was with the boat company. He was a member, he was their police, the boating police. They had them when they were in port. They'd stay at the boats, you know, and guard them, too. So he came, and I assumed that we were all going to Canada all together. So the other guard of mine, with me, and this fellow from the company, the shipping company, said they'd have to go get the tickets. So we put them in, you know, there's room for two in a railroad car. So there's two, two and two is six, and I would sit right across so I could see all six. And at the back, I was sitting in the back. Now, you know, they got to go to the bathroom, and I'm only one man there, and pretty soon the train starts to move and they haven't arrived back with the tickets. I don't know what happened, but they were delayed somehow. So I figured I've got to stay with them. And before we got to the first stop in Connecticut, a telegram

came to me on the train saying, "We'll meet you in Boston at a coffee pot which is in the central part of the station. Sorry, we missed the train."

END OF SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

HORODNER: So I had them till Boston, six men, and I'm going to tell you that I must have lost about five years, but they were nice men because I was worried. I didn't want to lose a man, see. They were nice fellows. They wanted to go back to Yugoslavia and help their country. They were patriotic.

LEVINE: Could you communicate with them and, I mean, did they have . . .

HORODNER: Yes. Most of them speak a little language. And they . . . (break in tape)

LEVINE: . . . transporting, and you were to pick up the immigrants in Boston.

HORODNER: I got off, I got off at the station, and I was still inside the station, so it was hard. It was easy to control them, but they followed me like I was their captain, you know. They were nice people. We got to the coffee pot and I sat them down and bought them some coffee and cake. And by that time

there's such a thing as a milk train that goes from New York to Boston, one stop. They had taken, our guard had taken the milk train. The other guy didn't even show. He left, and only the immigration guard and I were left. He came, and I said, "Oh, boy, I'm glad to see you." (he laughs) So he told me the other guy left. He said it wasn't necessary for him to go. So we had to transport them up to Canada. At the Canadian border, the Canadian immigration was very, very strict in talking to them. But they knew it was wartime and they were going back to be transported back with our navy around the ships. So they, everything went fine, and we went through. When we got to Canada it was Sydney, Nova Scotia. We got there, it was very cold, and here I am with a jacket. The seamen, they were used to that stuff. But the other immigration guard and I bought sweatshirts and put them under our jackets and we were all right. Young people, it didn't affect us too much. About two days later the group of boats were leaving and we had to watch them for two days. But these, as I told you, they were nice people. I said, "Do you mind if we do some things while we're here? We're not going to run away from you. We didn't yet." So they wanted to bowl. We took them bowling. They paid for it themselves because they had their money that they got off the ship, off the place they were working before they left New York. And they wanted to eat in good restaurants. They did. We paid

our way, they paid their way. So we gave them a good time, and when they left they said, "We hope we see you again when we come back." (they laugh) Fine. It was a nice experience, a nice experience. Now we got on the train, and of course you relax after you put your men on the boat. As a matter of fact, we had to climb up a Jacob's Ladder onto the boat. Do you know what a Jacob's Ladder is? To put them on the boat, and the captain signed the papers that they got the six men, see.

LEVINE: It's the hanging ladder?

HORODNER: The hanging ladder, and this was an ore boat, an ore boat. And when I got to the top, by the time I got to the top my uniform was almost white, and this was a dark black Oxford grey suit. It was very difficult to get that ore out, but I got some of it out. Because you had to climb up and hold onto the ship, you know, against the ladder when you were climbing. So that I remember, too. So I went back and then we were very busy at Ellis Island, very busy. Even fellows like Little Joe who did the messenger work at Ellis Island. He was a guard, but he was five foot tall. Very narrow and thin. A nice fellow, and we used him as an inter-office messenger service, and going over to New York with stuff, to 79th Street and so on. So we got so busy that they had to pick Little Joe one day to go out and pick up a man's clothes with him, too. By himself, by himself. So

who did Little Joe get? Little Joe got a Scandinavian, built like that, and he was always at the weights back at Ellis Island in the recreational field, pumping these weights. And Little Joe, five foot, gets this big guy (he laughs) to take to New York, and he had to take the subway going up. We didn't provide him with a car. So Little Joe, although he was little, was big on brains, see. He had a valise, which was lockable. In the valise he had two bricks. Closed the valise, put the handcuffs on, one handcuff on the guy, and the other handcuff on the valise handle. The guy was compelled to carry the valise. It was just a ruse to make it harder for him to get away. He was being nice . . . (Mr. Horodner's grandson enters the room.) My grandson, Kevin.

KEVIN: How do you do.

HORODNER: To make it harder for him to get away, he had that ruse to do, to make it easier for himself. The subway, he got off at Times Square. You know Times Square, how many people there are up there? They get off the subway, and the moment they get off the subway this alien beat it. Now, Little Joe takes out his identification. He's running after him. The guy's faster than him, and he sees a cop on the horse. He says, "Immigration, the guy just got away! Help me! I don't want to lose him!" You know. The guy got off, he was an Irishman, a

nice guy. He got off. He says, "You hold the horse and I'll chase him." (they laugh) Can you see that picture, him holding the bridle? (he laughs) So the cop went after this guy. This was Seventh Avenue, Times Square. I believe it was near Seventh Avenue. And there are lots of bars there, so he figured that's where the guy's going to go and try to hide. So fortunately he was wearing a red sweater underneath that topcoat, which he wasn't wearing, which was on top of the bracelets, so he wouldn't embarrass. Joe was nice to this guy.

He wouldn't want to embarrass him to show the bracelets. So he went to a couple of bars, and finally he finds the guy there having a beer. (he laughs) So he took him back, and he said to Joe, "You follow me with the horse and I'll handle him." So he went up to the police station in the precinct next, near Times Square. And when we got up there he says, "I'll show you how we transport somebody when we transport a prisoner." He said to Joe, and Joe was very happy about that. Two detectives went back with him in a car, a city car, and one detective was on one side of him, and I was on the other side of him, and the one detective drove the car. When we got back there they'd sandwich him, one in front and one in, he couldn't move. And I was on the side. We got back to Ellis Island, we delivered him, and they signed the detective's paper and he was safe, he was back. But Little Joe had the brick idea, you know. (he

laughs) And we always talk about that. I think that, oh.

LEVINE: Maybe you could say here what the uniforms were that you wore.

HORODNER: Oh. The uniforms, we supplied our own uniforms, our own suits. They were dark, Oxford grey or dark blue, and this is what you wore. The government didn't supply the uniforms. But they gave us the buttons to distinguish us from other people. So . . .

LEVINE: So their buttons on your uniforms.

HORODNER: Onto our jacket and use it, that's right.

LEVINE: Did you have hats?

HORODNER: We had New York Police Department hats with a badge on it, a big, like a detective would show was on the hat, like a badge. U.S. Immigration, and so on. I had the hat for a long time. I don't even know if I have it. I may, but it was all crushed up when we moved here, you know. Now, there were many other things that, stories that I could tell you.

LEVINE: Well, I'm interested in all of it, so whatever you could think of for me. Was it a prestige position? Did you feel like being an immigration guard was, were you proud of it?

HORODNER: I was proud to be working for Uncle Sam, the U.S. government. After all, my brother set the first example. He really reached the top. And I did the same thing. I should have told you that while at Ellis Island during World War II I became a supervisory guard after being a guard at one shift at Riker's Island prison. From whom we rented dormitories for the overflow of illegal alien detainees. Not enemy aliens, only seamen and so on, but not enemy aliens. I then became censor. The reading of all mail was made because of the war, incoming mail and outgoing mail that they wrote.

LEVINE: And what were you looking for in particular when you . . .

HORODNER: It was an important assignment. Intelligence agencies want contacts. Who were they writing to? What were they writing at? What were they writing about? Some of them condemned themselves. I mean, one guy would sign his letters all the time, H.H. Do you know what that mean? We figured it out. The FBI also. Heil Hitler. See what I mean? Things like that were cues that they were looking for. We once found an airplane that an enemy alien had secluded in New Jersey just by reading the mail. He had to have an insight to that type of thing, see. I then became Acting Chief Censor when one of the censors had another assignment, the Chief Censor.

LEVINE: Were there a lot of people doing that, reading the mail at that time?

HORODNER: Four people.

LEVINE: Four people.

HORODNER: The alphabet was divided into four, the alphabet, uh, numerically. You'd have so many, and that's what was assigned to you. And that's how you'd do your day's work each day, with that assignment. We provided information to all intelligence agencies: FBI, naval, army, etc. That was useful. (a telephone rings) It was useful to them from reading the mail, both incoming and outgoing.

LEVINE: Now, say you saw something in a letter that you realized was suspicious. Now, what would you do?

HORODNER: Well, the FBI and all the intelligence agencies, naval and so on, would come to us every day. I'll tell you another interesting story. One time we had two men in the holding rooms that were for troublemakers, both Germans who were in the same room together, but they were suspected as spies. One of them we found out later wanted to get information out, and he somehow heard that there was a letter box at the U.S. Public Health Hospital that's attached to Ellis Island. But

what he didn't know was that the FBI picked up that mail every day, see. So he, we hear a man knocking on the door in the back, and we run back. "Help me, help me." We opened it up, and he had slit both wrists. We didn't know it was superficial, but the blood was running. And on the blackjack you carry is a leather thong to hold it. You slip it over, tie it, and hold the blood so we can get him over to the hospital. In the meantime, we got him onto one of these rolling stretchers, brought him over to the hospital. And we found out that it was only superficial and he'd probably sent his mail out, which was the idea. We didn't stop him. Over there they didn't. But they wanted him to send the mail because they wrote things that we were looking for, see.

LEVINE: Did you have to do first aid or any kind of medical things at the time? Was that part of your job?

HORODNER: Uh, the hospital was so close to us . . .

LEVINE: That you could just get them . . .

HORODNER: That most of us knew a little bit of something. A man would fall and get hurt, we'd keep him, you know, so that if you move him a fracture could become a compound fracture if you move him and so on. That's my medical, (gesturing to someone else in the room) she's a medical girl. Yeah, she's a, she

knows all about medicine. And first aid is something you learn when you're an athlete, and things always happen, a broken nose and this and that. So there was always someone that was available from the hospital. They'd run right over if there was a problem, so they would take care of things that were bad. In this case we brought him over. Because he was bleeding, we didn't want to waste any time, so we rolled him over.

LEVINE: Were the detainees treated well? (a clock chimes)
I mean, if someone was detained during the time you worked there, what was it, a very unpleasant experience? Or how did most of the detainees feel about it?

HORODNER: Well, no one likes to give up their freedom. And I'll be very frank with you. We were incarcerated for eight hours every day just like they were. And we did the time, but we knew we had to go home after it. Part of my job was to try to make them feel that things are going to be better. "Maybe you'll get out after your hearing, maybe you'll come back on your quota, so don't feel bad." But we never mistreated anybody. That was one time that I spoke to you about that I used the nightstick. But I wouldn't push anybody around. We, uh . . .

LEVINE: Do you think most of the immigration guards had the

attitude you had?

HORODNER: The same attitude, most of them. You know, if you were in charge, you don't take advantage like you've seen in the TV recently where they clubbed some people. And we also see somewhere where a woman clubbed somebody yesterday, a woman guard was clubbing a person. So you don't do these things. There's ways, if you have athletic ability you can tie him up, you can make him lay on the floor and sit on him, whatever. Get his hands behind his back or do almost anything. I also knew a few other things to do which I didn't want to do if I didn't have to, see? You learn these things. Oh. (he pauses) You'll have to add to that. (he laughs) Okay. In all, it was one of the most interesting jobs I ever had. And, of course, I eventually knew that out of civil service I could make more money, and I had a family to support. So eventually I did leave the service, but it was good to me. I learned a few words in every language, every language. Nice words, like good morning, good night, how do you feel. In Greek it would be (Greek word) or in German (German words). If there were any Jewish people there, or people from Israel, sometimes we had one or two seamen who were here, jumped ship, you know. (he laughs) "Ah, shalom," and so on. Arabs. "Salam malekem." It's very close to the Hebrew "shalom." French and so on. You

learned a few words in everything, and it made life interesting.

LEVINE: What, I'm sorry. Go ahead.

HORODNER: (he pauses to read) Oh, yes. (he laughs)

LEVINE: Was there a camaraderie among the immigration guards?
I mean, did you feel a real bond with the other guys?

HORODNER: Oh, yes. You protect each other.

LEVINE: Yeah, uh-huh.

HORODNER: You ran when somebody was in trouble. And you were glad to have someone run for you, too, see? So we were like a team. This, playing ball and playing on teams is what really prepared me for all this. So it has some benefit when you're on a team for future life if you do that kind of work. Even if you work in an office, you have to cooperate with the others, you know. So, you know, when there was three hundred men sleeping in the room they changed positions sometimes, maybe twenty-five, thirty times. This side of the bed, that side of the bed. The knees up, the knees down. They snore. Excuse me, they're windy. And, uh, (he laughs) so it was really a show. You could make a movie with just the sleeping part of it. There was one particular fellow, I remember that he had asthma very bad.

He couldn't lie down. He had, we had to provide him with around five or six pillows so he could sleep sitting up more or less. And, (he laughs) once I had the, I don't know how to tell this, it's a little off color. I had to chase a Chinaman out of another Chinaman's bed. (they laugh) The Chinaman, he was a young boy, like. He must have been about sixteen, seventeen, but he was a seaman off a ship, he was here illegally. And the moment I saw, "Get out of there." And I warned him we didn't stand for that stuff, you know. Oh, the Chinese liked to prepare their own food, especially their rice. So they had a pot about that big, three hundred men. And there'd be two Chinese that would go in there before each meal, and they were able to prepare the food that they liked, which we would provide them. They'd eat the other things with the rice, but they liked to make their own rice. They felt that others didn't know how to make their rice, see. We had a dining room there, and we would take the aliens out, and each room would go, and clock them out, how many. And we'd clock them back, make sure there wasn't one missing. It could happen, you know. And each room was taken out at separate times, especially keeping the enemy aliens from the aliens so there'd be no war.

LEVINE: What was the food like? Can you . . .

HORODNER: The food was palatable food, and sometimes I even ate

there. It wasn't bad. I used to take a brown bag with me. I liked my wife's sandwiches better. But it was palatable food. You could live on it, and there was nothing wrong. Sometimes they'd have different country food, you know, like there was . . . (he laughs) This was interesting. We had a Turkish alien over at Riker's Island when we were there. And he was friendly. Are we getting too close to the end?

LEVINE: No, we're fine.

HORODNER: He was very friendly. He would talk, "Hello, Mark. Glad to see you." You know, and I was a supervisor of the shift, you know. So he says, "Hey, how about some Turkish food today, or tomorrow?" I said, "Why? You know how to cook?" "I'm a chef. I was a chef on the ship. I was a cook." "Okay." So we bring stuff in, see. And he'd cook it right there, had a little stove there. And we had, (he laughs) we were treated. We had a treat once in a while, and it gave him something to do. So that was something. But that was not normal, see. Normally you'd bring your own food and you'd eat in the restaurant that the government provided there. They also had a money exchange office. The same man that ran the restaurant ran the money exchange. And people would change their foreign money into American money if they wanted to use it, or change it back if they were being deported, you see, right there.

LEVINE: Were some of the detainees there for long periods of time?

HORODNER: Just until their, they were checked. After their interrogation.

LEVINE: What would be an average stay for a detainee?

HORODNER: You could keep some of them there three to four to five months. Most of the enemy aliens, after they were interrogated they were sent to concentration camps. Because once they were picked up, they were already on the FBI list. I took part in that night, the day before, the day after Pearl Harbor. All the naval, all the intelligence agencies, immigration guards, immigration inspectors, were all assigned to go pick up men. And they were short of men, so we went also. We didn't have time to have them pick up their belongings, and if you did, you'd have a problem because they could. West side apartments have two doors. You know those walk-through apartments? And they used to rent out half of the apartments to other people. So if you took an alien out and you let him go and you didn't go with him he could get out that other door and you wouldn't even know it. You're thinking wait a minute, he's getting his clothes together, or something like that. But that pickup was for enemy aliens, and they already had their list of

who to pick up. They knew who was involved in these things, because informants were in the Nazi organization, the Bund, and the Fascist Italian groups and the Japanese groups also. We had American Japanese. Some work for the government. So we picked them up and brought them over. They were searched, emptied out their pockets, put in a bag, kept for them. And we only let them keep a handkerchief, you know, or whatever they needed, their daily chore, or whatever. And . . .

LEVINE: Now, in other words, you weren't picking up all, let's say Japanese . . .

HORODNER: Only those on the list.

LEVINE: Uh-huh.

HORODNER: Only the ones that were known to be involved in the Bund, or in the Fascist groups, the Italian groups, or in the Japanese groups. They had their own groups. And when we went there, like I went to one or two places, when we brought them back we took some of their stuff with them, and they had the Fascist, the Italian Fascist group emblem, some of them, see. And Nazi Bund had Adolf Hitler's pictures and the swastika. They proudly displayed it in their rooms, you know, where they lived. (he pauses) You know, that's a good question about Enzo Pinza. We weren't always in his room, and at the time, of

course, there were two men in every room, and he was in the Italian room. So we wouldn't know, because nobody ever said it, but I think that Enzo Pinza never sang while he was at Ellis Island. He was like a bird that was unhappy in the cage, see. I would have been happy to hear him. But I did have, it was an interesting assignment to go with him, and he had his lawyer there and he did everything, and signed papers that he was supposed to sign for the lawyer. And his wife was there, and then they had their lunch and we went back. I took him back. He didn't give me any trouble. Only one of us, one man.

LEVINE: Were there entertainers that were brought in? I mean, did the people who were detained there have any, I know when the immigrants came through they had, sometimes, theater or music or . . .

HORODNER: Same thing. A lot of these aliens, especially on ships, they have nothing to do and they strum a guitar or something. They'd make their own music.

LEVINE: Make their own music.

HORODNER: Yeah. We didn't have money for that extra entertainment. The entertainment was a recreational field so they could sweat it out of them. And also the dominoes and the other things they might do. Read, we had books there they could

read. One of the seamen was even a writer. Another seaman, I didn't tell you, before I started to tell you. I went to, about a year ago I had, what do you call it?

MRS. HORODNER: Shingles.

HORODNER: Yeah. I went to the hospital for six days. While I was there they brought in certain specialists to look me over because shingles could affect your corneas. And I happen to have it right here. You might see the residue of it. I'm still not over it, but it's not catching. Only for the six days that I was in the hospital it was catching. That's why they brought me, because they didn't want anybody else in the family to get it, to the hospital. So while I was there I was told to go see a skin man for that, an eye doctor, (Mrs. Horodner corrects him) an ophthalmologist and so on. And I get there, and the man's name, well, I can say it. It's the same as the keeper of the temple. And this man came from an Arab country. A very nice, intelligent man. Apparently he used working on a ship to try to get to America, and he was really a scientist. And when I got to speak to this ophthalmologist, I said, "Your name is the same as a man that was with me at Ellis Island," I said. "Are any of your relatives ever speak to you about being at Ellis Island?" He says, "I'll speak to my father and he knows." So the next time I came back, he says, "That was my uncle, and

he was at Ellis Island." And he said to me, "You know what he did? He was a scientist." They found out, by talking to him, what his background was. And he had a minor part as one of the people working with the atomic agency. That's what his job was.

Because we had Fermi in Italian. We had other people from other countries. But this was a scientist, a Jewish man. And he became very friendly to me because I was a good listener. So it seemed like this was like the cycle, you know. Here I knew the uncle, and here I am with a nephew who's an ophthalmologist.

Excuse me. (he laughs) You know them better than I do. So it was interesting. In life you, I even saw a fellow down here that was an enemy alien. And I go to a restaurant on, it was 27th Avenue. What was the name of that restaurant there that we used to go to, if you remember it? And there he is up on a ladder painting the restaurant. And this was after the war, much after the war. And I look at him. He didn't remember me, but I remembered him, see. He was a German enemy alien, but apparently he was accepted back. They let him out. Now he must have had a family here, you know. People with families they were more lenient with, but still they had to be very careful. If there was any doubt, they kept them. That's why you had very little sabotage here during World War II. Very little. It occurred on the ocean and on the battlefield and all those things, but very little in the United States. Because these

people were picked up so quickly. Otherwise they might have gotten orders. "We have your mother over here. We'll kill her unless you do this for us." And they do it, you know. But still, it was a very interesting job.

LEVINE: I was just going to say I guess it added a richness to your life.

HORODNER: Oh, definitely, definitely. See, I like people. I like talking with them. I hear their story, and I also talk my part, you know. They call me the storyteller here at the house. (he laughs) And I haven't filled in all of the stories because they come to me, they come to me. And as a matter of fact I took a short course in creative writing. So I wrote up some of these things, like Little Joe and things like that. I never wrote anything I shouldn't write, you know, secrets you're not supposed to talk about. There are some at all government agencies, but things in it were interesting, see.

END OF SIDE TWO, TAPE ONE

BEGINNING OF SIDE ONE, TAPE TWO

LEVINE: Wow. If you'd like to let us have those to put on file they would be of interest.

HORODNER: Well, Little Joe, which I explained to you, you have

that. I'll see what else I have, see. I have to look through my files. And I'd be glad, I can mail that. Because I'm going to mail an enlargement of this to you, of this button that we all use as one of the buttons for the guards. Uh, this (?) lady, if you could have gotten in touch with her, she is full of stuff. Full of information.

LEVINE: I'll certainly try to.

HORODNER: Because she, like you say, she's practically ran the island out there. Mr. Foreman was the district director, but she was, the knowledge of a person too, you know. A very nice lady. And you look it up again the way I spell it for you, and please inform me, in my letter, or whatever, if you've gotten in touch with her.

LEVINE: I will.

HORODNER: I also called Bruce Slusser, who was an administrative assistant here, and asked if he knew of any people who were in Florida that worked at Ellis . . . (tape ends)