

EI-993

CLARENCE H. GARDNER

BIRTHDATE: MAY 22, 1917

INTERVIEW DATE: APRIL 11, 1998

AGE AT TIME OF INTERVIEW:

RUNNING TIME: 1:00:43

INTERVIEWER: PAUL SIGRIST

RECORDING ENGINEER:

INTERVIEW LOCATION: WILBRAHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

TRANSCRIPT PREPARED BY: TAPESCRIBE

TRANSCRIPT REVIEWED BY:

COAST GUARD, ELLIS ISLAND, 1940-1941

AGE: 23

SIGRIST: Good afternoon. This is Paul Sigrist for the National Park Service. Today is Saturday, April 11th, 1998. I'm in Wilbraham, Massachusetts, with Mr. Clarence H. Gardner. Mr. Gardner was in the Coast Guard at Ellis Island. He arrived there on November 29th, 1940, and was there until August 9th, 1941. I should also say that Mrs. Gardner is in the house; we may here a little bit of her. And there's also a Yankees game on television, which we have to put the recorder on pause so that we can catch up with what's going on in the baseball game. Mr. Gardner, can we begin by you giving me your birth date?

GARDNER: Birth date? May 22, 1917.

SIGRIST: Okay, I'm going to pause just [tape off/on] okay, we're now resuming. I just fixed Mr. Gardner's microphone. Could you repeat your birth date for me?

GARDNER: May 22, 1917, the beginning of World War One.

SIGRIST: And can you also give me your full name? What does the H. stand for?

GARDNER: Henry, Clarence Henry.

SIGRIST: Henry. And were you named after anyone?

GARDNER: I'm named after an uncle, my father's brother, who was called into World War One, and became an ambulance driver France, and was mustard gas poisoned, and the rest of his life suffered in and out, continually, Veterans Hospitals. I was named after him because my father's parents thought my birth was an omen. Actually, at birth I was called Carlton Gardner, but my name was changed on the birth certificate.

SIGRIST: Is that Carlton, C-A-R--?

GARDNER: L-T-O-N.

SIGRIST: T-O-N, Carlton.

GARDNER: Right, no E, yeah.

SIGRIST: Why was it changed?

GARDNER: My father's parents were English-born, and Carlton sounded too much Germanic to them! And it wasn't! It's an English name [laughs]. But they insisted, and my parents gave in! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Do you know any stories about the day you were born? Did anyone ever tell you about what happened that day?

GARDNER: Not really, no! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Why don't we begin by talking just a little bit about your parents and their background?

GARDNER: Okay.

SIGRIST: You mentioned your father's parents were born in Britain. Talk a little bit about your own parents. What were their names?

GARDNER: My father's name, George William Gardner, Junior. My mother was Katherine Elizabeth Luft before marriage.

SIGRIST: That's L-U-F-T?

GARDNER: L-U-F-T, like Luftwaffe. My father was born in Philadelphia, my mother in New York City. And they met in New York City because my father was an apprentice glass-cutter in New Bedford, I think it was, Massachusetts, and traveled to New York with some of his fellow students to have a wild time, and met my mother there! [Laughs] Had a wonderful time, and that's how they met. My mother's parents were both German-born, immigrants. Now, each side of my grandparents beat Ellis Island. Ellis Island did not

accept immigrants when they came to America, so that they're not listed on the Ellis Island Memorial listing. Let's see, what else?

SIGRIST: Do you have remembrances of your immigrant grandparents on either side?

GARDNER: Of my English grandparents, yes. The Gardners, yes.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things stick out in your mind about them?

GARDNER: Well, let's see, the English grandparents, George William, Senior, and wife Lily—Lily, I can't remember her maiden name—were born, or came from, Birmingham, England. There are still some kinfolk, distant kin, left in England and Scotland that I have no contact with. But the grandfather was a little, typically Englishman, very abrupt, very sharp-speaking, and ruled the roost! And Lily did whatever Grandpa snapped his fingers to get done!

SIGRIST: Was there something as a child that stuck out in your mind about them being different in some way, because they were foreign-born?

GARDNER: Not really. I guess I was too young to realize—to realize there were differences. The other side of the family, the German side, I never did know the grandfather, because the German grandparents separated early, I guess after I was born, or before I was born, rather, so that I never met him. But the grandmother, Grossmom [PH], I knew very personally! [Laughs] During my early years, childhood, even before going to school, we lived in Philadelphia. By the way, I was born in Middletown, New York, and at age two the family moved into Philadelphia. And so it being in Philadelphia, I had a great contact with the English grandparents. But because I was an asthmatic, my mother insisted we get out of Philadelphia, properly so, and move to New York—Long Island. And let's see, what happened? Then I became very close with the German grandmother, and spent a lot of time with her. In fact, while we were still, the family, living in Philadelphia, very hard times. My father became an insurance agent, Prudential Insurance agent, and making up was very, very difficult during that period of time, the early 1920's. I was shipped summer times, each summer, alone on the railroad, from Philadelphia to New York City. Someone would come and pick me up, and put me—and bring me to my grandmother's apartment. She, at the beginning of this period was a landlady on a Hundred and Twenty-fifth Street, New York City. It was part of Germantown then. Now, of course, it's all black area. That little Grossmom used to carry me piggy-back on her back! [Laughs] These are the things I remember! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Were there certain personality traits about your grandmother, or things that she did, that were “typically” German, or old-country?

GARDNER: Of course, she had the accent, very definitely! She vass fery thoroughly Chairmon [PH], and she made the most delicious apfelkuchen! [Laughs] And she taught my mother how to do it, and my mother taught my wife how to do it! Apfelkuchen! [Laughs] So those are the Germanic things I remember. As far as the English food, fun, having two different parental sides, the English side and the German side, our meals at home, in my own family then, became—well, we had the English roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, and on another Sunday we might have roast pork and spaetzles, which is a German noodle-type dish. Delicious! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: You mentioned that you were asthmatic as a child. Were there any ways that that kind of controlled your life when you were growing up?

GARDNER: Very definitely. I was so severely asthmatic that I missed a lot of school, sickness, and again because of the financial picture of our family life. In New York City my mother found Bellevue Hospital had a clinic for, and they were starting to look into, allergies. And this was just the beginning! And so I was dragged quite frequently into New York City, the Bellevue Hospital. And they were discovering allergies, and they were quite excited. They found what I was allergic to: mustard! However, my mother laughed and said, “That’s not what’s causing his asthma.” I have a lifetime of allergic allergy. It could even be fatal to me! It’s hasn’t, though, because I’m very careful.

SIGRIST: What kinds of things were you allergic to, or are you allergic to?

GARDNER: Oh, more recently, an allergist discovered that I’m allergic to twelve out of fourteen test material. Let’s see: dust, dust mites, cats, dogs, grass, trees, wool. You name it, I’m allergic to it!

SIGRIST: Everything that’s around you!

GARDNER: [Laughs] Well, the fun of it is, I lied like hell to get into the service! [Laughs] “Me sick? Allergic? No way!” And I got away with it for five years, until after the war, for the first time, now in California, still in the service, I got full thirty-days leave. So I came back to New York to my then-girlfriend and family, and saved a week, because I wanted to see California, Hollywood especially. And when I got back, I came down with a cold, for the first time in five years. The cold led to asthma. So they turned me in to a Naval Hospital. Now this was after the war, remember, and I had had these straight five years of never a sick day. And the Navy doctor, when he examined me, and tested me, and said I was allergic to everything, because even the neutral reacted! [Laughs] And they were

going to discharge me, and I said, “Doc, don’t! My enlistment runs out in six months. Let me finish the six months; then I’ll go out.” He let me. He let me alone. So I went through my entire period. Except, again, shortly after the war, the Coast Guard was handed back to the Treasury Department from the Navy, remembering that during any war time, the Navy becomes—or rather, the Coast Guard a part of the Navy, an arm of the Navy, and after the war were handed back to the then-Treasury Department. And the Treasury Department was in no way financially able to cope with the enlarged personnel of the Coast Guard, so issued an order that all C-ratings may request an Honorable Special Discharge. So I applied for it, because we were going to be married. And I got out of the service, therefore, six months before my enlistment, second enlistment, ran out. But just that one time I was caught with asthma while in service! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: I thought they might play into each other, the service and the asthma, somewhere.

GARDNER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Before we leave this topic, can you tell me a little bit about how, when you were a kid in the twenties, how was it treated? What were some of the treatments that you underwent at that time?

GARDNER: Actually, back in those days they didn’t have the antihistamines. Antihistamines we didn’t even know about. So, they were so busy trying to figure out the causes of asthma, unsuccessfully! [Laughs] And so there was nothing, really, they could do, except give me a heart stimulant.

SIGRIST: Which, can you explain that a little?

GARDNER: Because I was so badly affected, unable to [loud inhale]—unable to really get oxygen. I would [loud inhale] breathe deeply, gasp for breath! I remember one time as a child lying in bed with a severe attack, crying, and staring at the window that is open wide. And my mother is holding me. And I’m saying, “Mom [gasps] open the window! Open the window!” And here it is, wide open! But I couldn’t get the effect of oxygen; I couldn’t get the breathing. The only thing they could do for me is relax me physically, so that I wasn’t working so strenuously to get the breath! That’s all they could do, until after the war. Then I began, when I would get an asthma attack, first I began to ignore it. I’d say, “Oh, hell, they could do nothing for me in the 1920’s, 1930’s. I’ll just bare it.” Well, I guess the wife convinced me to go find out about it. Now they began to have allergists. So we went to an allergist, and after five years’ treatment—he took good care of me.

SIGRIST: When you said they needed to relax the body, how did they do that? What did you--?

GARDNER: I said they would give me heart stimulants to stimulate the heart, so that I would not have to work so hard.

SIGRIST: Is that a pill, a liquid? What?

GARDNER: A pin. An injection.

SIGRIST: An injection?

GARDNER: Yeah. Injection never bothered me. [Laughs] As a result!

SIGRIST: Well, this is all very interesting. It doesn't have anything to do with the Coast Guard, but it's very interesting!

GARDNER: Right! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Tell me a little bit about your—did anyone in your family, other than this uncle whom you've mentioned earlier, serve in the military in some capacity?

GARDNER: No, he was the only one. Either the brothers and sisters, brothers of that time, were married, as my father was, with children already, and so that he was not called into World War One. Just the one uncle was in. The others were either too young, or married with children. However, my own generation, we had my two brothers and myself were called in, World War Two. And all I know of a first cousin—no, two! Two first cousins were also called into the military. That's about it.

SIGRIST: You said you had two brothers?

GARDNER: My two brothers, yes.

SIGRIST: And their names are--?

GARDNER: Then, two first cousins.

SIGRIST: What were the names of your brothers?

GARDNER: George the Third, and Arnold.

SIGRIST: And were there any other children in the family?

GARDNER: There was a sister, our baby sister. Our baby sister is now seventy-six years old—seventy-five years old.

SIGRIST: And what is her name?

GARDNER: Lily Beth Elizabeth Gardner.

SIGRIST: I see. Can you tell me a little bit about perhaps your father's opinion about the military, and service in the military?

GARDNER: Well, I'll go back and give my own experience again. When I graduated from high school finally, 1936, January of 1936, I was always interested in manual work. I used to have, make model airplanes and so on as a kid, and I had a lot of fun with them. So that I was not interested in college, nor was there any opportunity for me to go to college. My health, for one thing, kept me from attending a college, and working on the side, and so on, so I never thought of that, never wanted it. I never got it. So that I was only interested in getting a high school diploma, get the diploma, get the heck out of high school, and go look for a job! So my father was very much against anything else than getting a job. So when I tried to join the Navy—this again was 1936. I went down and applied, and took the exams, but the Navy turned me down, because I was thirty pounds underweight, and too narrow-chested. And the recruiting officer, because again, I always scored high on tests—the Navy recruiting officer wanted me to do something about it, and come back into the Navy. So he said, "Go to the YMCA, and for five dollars they'll give you a course to build you up." So I came home, and now I was—at this point, I was not employed, being during the Great Depression. I asked my father, "Would you lend me five dollars, Dad?" "What for?" "I want to join the YMCA to build up, so I can join the Navy." "No way! The Navy sailors are a bunch of drunken bums!" So, I couldn't join the Navy, because I could not build myself up. So I went looking for work, and got several different jobs, up until I finally decided, "I'm going to get in the Coast Guard." I picked the Coast Guard because this was early 1940; I went down again to the Navy, and was still thirty pounds underweight. I went to the Army, and I was fifteen pounds underweight. I went to the Coast Guard, and I was only also fifteen pounds underweight. So at that point I decided, "Well, I'll pick the Coast Guard." So I went to my doctor, family doctor, and said, "Doc, what the heck can I do to gain weight?" He said, "The only thing you can do is eat until you're full, and jam more in. And have beer with each meal, including breakfast! But don't overlook the milk. And eat between meals." So I did, and at this point I was working finally—where United Nations building is now in New York City used to be Slaughterhouse Row. And I had a job there as a junior sales clerk, answering telephones and doing various odd jobs. And of course, most of the butchers and the personnel were German, like, German personnel, and restaurants nearby were run

by Germans. It was great, because I would go to lunch, and I would eat like a stuffed pig! And then I would even go over during lunch—during afternoon, let's say three o'clock, and order a side dish of something else! [Laughs] And you know, get on the scale. And once a week, I would go to the Coast Guard Headquarters to weigh myself, "How am I doing? How am I doing? How am I doing?" So I built up familiarity with the personnel in the Coast Guard office, recruiting office. Well finally one day, decided this has to be it—I was getting close. So I went, and I said to the officers, "Let's get it over with now, the examination, physical examination." So there was a group of us at the time. So we went through the physical examination, all but the weighing in. And the doc said, "Lunch time." [Laughs] So at lunch time, I went to a little restaurant, and I ordered milk, and bananas, and milk, and bananas, and milk, and bananas. And I bloatedly landed back in the recruiting office. And they put me on the scale, and I shrunk my head down, so I was only five feet, eight and three-quarter inches, and weighed all of a hundred and thirty-four pounds! And after that, I scooted into the men's room, and lost it all! If they ever called me back [unclear] I would have never made it! But the officer had closed one eye, let me get in. My discharge papers say, on the discharge, I was five feet, ten inches tall, [laughs] and weighed a hundred and twenty-five pounds! [Laughs] But I really loved the service. I would love to have—I intended to be a lifer! But I would never get married while I was in the service. I lost one girl for that reason. So I made her wait! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Well tell me, what was your father's reaction, or your parents' reaction, when you were finally accepted into the Coast Guard?

GARDNER: Well finally, it was a different matter now, because we were going to be involved, there was no question about it, with the Germans, with the Nazis. And my father watched the news, and even he bought Hitler's book *Mein Kampf*, read through it, and he knew what we were going on, what was going on. So he was very much in favor. And because it was the Coast Guard, not the Navy, might have made a difference, too. [Laughs] However, but then I was in the Coast Guard not too long before my two brothers were called in, called up, for the Army, so that all three of us were in right in the beginning, before Pearl Harbor, even. Is that right? Yeah, that's right. They were in. They went in together. I think the youngest brother got his recall notice first, and the oldest brother said, "Well, why don't I go down with you, and we'll go in together?" It's the last time they were together! [Laughs] They even went to different boot camps! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: What about your mother being of German descent? I mean, what did she think of World War Two and what Hitler was doing?

GARDNER: Well, she was very much in favor of our participating to correct this. She had no—she was not in any way favorable to the Nazis. She was anti-Nazi. Now, very interesting—one of her sisters had married a German who belonged to the Bund. Now this, again, is before Pearl Harbor. The German Bund group that was actually financed by the Nazis, and he had pictures in his house of Hitler and so on, and had the FBI call on him, and frightened [laughs] the dickens out of him! Those pictures came down! [Laughs] And I had fun teasing him. Once, while I was in service and during the war, I made a call on them, Aunt Anna and Uncle Henry. And I overdid the announcement of the fun we were having aboard the Campbell, with anti-submarine patrols, how we were really beating, and killing their subs, which was a false story. They were beating the heck out of our ships! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: And I should just say for the sake of the tape that you're pointing to a print of the Campbell, that's C-A-M-P-B-E-L-L. Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt.

GARDNER: Okay, okay, and Uncle Henry never said a word. So I enjoyed kind of rubbing his nose in it! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Well tell me a little bit about, once you got into the Coast Guard, the process that ended you up at Ellis Island.

GARDNER: When I was finally passed the examinations, we were told, the group, maybe about eight to ten of us, were told that we were going to be shipped off. [Telephone rings] She'll answer it. I have a hearing problem, so I don't answer telephones. [Laughs] That's why she answered this morning, for example.

SIGRIST: Am I speaking okay? Can you hear me?

GARDNER: Oh, yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: Okay.

GARDNER: I'm not deaf. It's a problem; it's a connection. One on one is fine, but when there's two, three, four people talking, I can't understand any of them.

SIGRIST: It becomes noise, sort of?

GARDNER: Right, right, right [laughs].

SIGRIST: So after you passed your exams?

GARDNER: After I passed exams, we got the impression that we were going to be sent to Cape May, New Jersey, the Coast Guard receiving station, training station. And for some reason they never told us! But just shipped us—by the way, this was Battery Park recruiting station. And so we just walked onto the ferry, Ellis Island Ferry, and landed just across the bay at Ellis Island. And that was it, so we were shocked to find out we were right here! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: What did you know of Ellis Island prior to getting out there?

GARDNER: Right!

SIGRIST: Did you know anything about what it was?

GARDNER: No! Well, yes, I knew it was an immigration station, had been an immigration station for some time, was not any longer. And it was quite run down, and the Coast Guard had opened up a section of it for the training station. And pretty good, it was ideally situated. [Cat meows]

SIGRIST: The cat might want to go out. Why don't we just pause? [Tape off/on] Now resuming. We were just about to begin talking about getting to Ellis Island.

GARDNER: Getting to Ellis Island, okay. Naturally, it was quite an unusual, unfamiliar situation for me, to be put through such—by the way, I was twenty-three years old at this point. I was not a seventeen and eighteen year older. So that it was particularly hard on me to put up with the stuff that goes on in a boot camp.

SIGRIST: That's why you were taken to Ellis Island? This was to undergo Coast Guard boot camp?

GARDNER: Yes, yes. And interestingly, again, the service, Coast Guard, was so, in a way, unprepared for the sudden explosion of personnel. There was a First Class Petty Officer assigned to our group, called Company A, as it was being formed. And he helped us to get our gear straightened out, and get together in formation and so on. But when it came time to do drilling work, I guess he had other duties to perform, so he asked for a volunteer, somebody who could lead the group in drill work, marching and so on. So I always had good time sequence, familiarity, so I raised my hand, and I became appointed the Acting Petty Officer, still as Apprentice Seaman. I was a boot, [laughs] but I would drill the team, the group, with and without rifles. Even boat drill! We had the old-fashioned lifesavers, manually operated at davits, down to the water, and manually operated oars, and go rolling through New York Harbor! [Laughs] And it was interesting. That duty didn't last long, and it made no difference in my later promotions, but

it was an interesting, to me, experience. And it was the only time in my period in the Coast Guard that I was put on report, because I took advantage of my position. I did not show up at morning exercise! And they put me on report, and they threatened me with a discharge! [Laughs] I showed up every morning from then on! [Laughs] But again, it was very fascinating. And also, it was disturbing to watch, as being in charge, I would have to make up the duty rosters, who's going to have K.P., Captain of the head, and stand watches, and so on—everybody but me. Well, I did it once in a while. But then, as the war neared and so on, and Coast Guard personnel were being shipped to various ships, Company A began to disappear, and then Company B combined with Company A, and so on. But my position was gone, but I was still there for an extended period of time! I was almost, I guess, the last Company A member to be assigned a ship, from that group. And I was [laughs] very disappointed to find, once I got aboard ship, that I was seasick! Oh, hellishly so! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Tell me what are some of the other things that stick out in your mind about your time spent at Ellis Island? For instance, what did boot camp entail? You mentioned boat drills. What else were you there to learn?

GARDNER: Not very much. We had no firing, no range experience, no experience at all in handling a rifle, other than the manual of arms, port arms, right shoulder arms, all that kind of stuff. But no firing of any gun; there was no range at all on Ellis Island, at that time, anyway. And so, the material, training material, was very limited to the manuals, the book. All right, learn your Morse code, learn your flag signaling, and the parading, and so on. The only occasion I remember that was important for parading—this, remember, was still before Pearl Harbor. The then-Mayor of New York, Fiorello LaGuardia, was instrumental in the formation of the USO, and had a rally in Madison Square Garden. Was it Madison Square Garden? I think so. And all units of the various services were asked to send men to attend this thing. And little Fiorello LaGuardia was going to take care of his boys, all his servicemen! He was going to clean up New York City for us! Make sure that there will be no advantage taken of the men in service! We will mark out the prostitutes, and the burlesque shows! Boo! [Laughs] But he did; he did that! He cleaned up New York City! [Laughs] Also, somewhere along the line, I recall we paraded on some occasion. And I had enough recognition, as I was point man, so I had a side arm rather than a rifle, and keeping everybody in march. That's about it.

SIGRIST: Tell me some specifics about your time spent there. For instance, describe the barracks. Where did you stay? What it looked like, and—

GARDNER: It's—how do you describe? A barracks is a barracks, with double bunks, metal bunks. I always made sure I had a bottom bunk—took advantage of

my position again. The food—I don't even remember what the dining room looked like!

END OF SIDE A

BEGIN SIDE B

SIGRIST: How many people were in that one—the area where you slept? How many people slept in that one area?

GARDNER: It varied, of course, from the beginning, when my company was about the first group there, I would say there were about twenty-five of us in that first group. And over the time that I was there, it, the movement of personnel in and out. I would say at one—that finally, it might have reached about a hundred and fifty servicemen. But nothing, nothing great to keep us occupied! The fact that I kept the men--what was left of Company A--kept the men occupied with learning the various skills out of the manual, blue jackets manual, and that's about it.

SIGRIST: What were those skills?

GARDNER: As I said, the—

SIGRIST: Parading—

GARDNER: The flag signaling, and Morse code. I can't remember much else!

SIGRIST: Can you talk a little bit about learning the flagging, the semaphore system?

GARDNER: I was very slow at learning the semaphore system, but there was one fellow—the only guy I remember, whose name I remember: Steve Hargess. He was so insistent that he was going to learn A to Z semaphore system! And he would bother the hell out of me! [Laughs] "Come on, Clarence, tell me again! Is this right?" And I'd have to open the book, look, make sure it was right! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Where would you learn there? Did--?

GARDNER: In the barracks area [clears throat]. We had a lot of floor space, put it that way. But, so we would do this all within the barracks itself. We would do our parading outside, around the buildings.

SIGRIST: And parading, I should just say for the sake of the tape, is just simply marching in a uniform kind of way.

GARDNER: In groups, yes: "Hup, two, three, four!" That kind of stuff. Making sure the turns are nice, and the boys knew how to make a half turn, and so on. Right oblique, "March!" That's about it. You know, it is funny. Once I left the service, in 1946, I had no thought at all, from that point on, marriage and a career. I was so intent on my career, and my marriage, that nothing—I had nothing to do with the service, no memories, no personnel! I had no contact with anybody. My wife had contact with one of the ex-servicemen, but I did not. And so, that's why a lot of the memory of this Ellis Island period is very dim, very faint, in my mind. [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Well, and as you said, there wasn't a whole lot to do anyways.

GARDNER: Right, correct, correct!

SIGRIST: Well, we'll see what's kicking around in there.

GARDNER: It was still new enough—remember, this was before Pearl Harbor. This was—well, I went in a full thirteen months before Pearl Harbor.

SIGRIST: Where did they feed you?

GARDNER: I don't know where, but on the Island, of course.

SIGRIST: Do you remember what?

GARDNER: No.

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind?

GARDNER: Nothing!

SIGRIST: Did anything every happen once while you were eating?

GARDNER: Nothing. Nothing at all! I don't know if I gained any weight, [laughs] or how much I lost from that initial hundred and thirty-four pounds, [laughs]—

SIGRIST: Hopefully not from milk and bananas!

GARDNER: --to get back down to my fighting weight! [Laughs] But all I remember, mostly my memory, is the fact that twenty-one dollars a month. Of course, the Ellis Island Ferry—once we were beyond the boot camp period, we could go ashore every other day, every other evening. And on weekends we were allowed ashore. Of course, we lived, my family lived right there,

in Woodside, Long Island. So that, little subway ride, and I would go home and have meals at home whenever I could. But the fun of watching the public reaction to this nearing world war, nearing war atmosphere. Servicemen became quite popular, again, with the USO, and publicity, and all this stuff. And I can recall one fellow serviceman, very well-built young man, especially in the summer time, he would put his whites on, and make sure they were tight-fitting pants, and stand on the curb from the Ellis Island landing onto the Battery. And when the traffic circled around the Battery, he would stand on the curb, walk back and forth on his feet, exposing himself, you know. And sure enough, always be a pick up. Some car would stop and pick him up! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: The memories the Coast Guard doesn't like!

GARDNER: Yeah! Hey, all servicemen did, tried that! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: That makes me wish to ask you about—what were your uniform requirements? What did you actually have to wear for everyday, as opposed to your dress whites? Can you describe those?

GARDNER: Oh, nothing much, denims, denim trousers and shirt, jeans. But, I even forgot what they call them, the names! [Laughs] Work pants.

SIGRIST: Well, when would you wear the denim shirts? For what?

GARDNER: When it was a work party. Now, we would clean our own areas, sweep and wax and polish the deck of the areas, so that we had work clothes. Otherwise we would have what we called the undress uniform: navy blue trousers and jumper, or white. But again, even in the summer time, the undress uniform would be the navy blue pants, and the jumper. Of course, the dress blues you must be familiar with, the navy color, and the crazy apron-like thing we held on our back.

SIGRIST: The collar.

GARDNER: The collar, yeah.

SIGRIST: What about if you had leave, and were in New York? What would you be required to wear?

GARDNER: Dress blues.

SIGRIST: Dress blues.

GARDNER: The typical dress blues, or dress whites. But the dress whites did not have that striped insignias on the jumper, as the dress blue uniform did.

Although we were issued one when we first went in, we never used it, the white, dress white. The thirteen-button pants! [Laughs] And you learned in a hurry how to open thirteen buttons, when you had to! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Well, good! [Laughs] Was there some kind of an inspection process that the Coast Guardsmen had to undergo while you were at Ellis Island?

GARDNER: Oh, I suppose we did, especially in the very beginning, when we were becoming familiar with the service, being a serviceman: how to pack our clothes in a sea bag. We were issued all these gears, a sack and so on. There's a special way to roll your underwear, and use ties to tie up the rolled underwear, and even socks, and stuff the sea bag. You get one sea bag to carry all your gear! And back then, before the war, we were all issued hammocks, and two blankets. But we didn't sling our hammocks at Ellis Island; we had bunks. [Laughs] When we went aboard ship—when I went aboard ship—finally, in 1941, August of '41, I was asked to sling a hammock. And I did it one night, and one night only! [Laughs] Wasn't worth it! I would sleep on the deck.

SIGRIST: Did you have any personal belongings? Were you allowed to bring personal belongings of some sort with you when you went to boot camp?

GARDNER: You were—let's see. I had a camera. I think that's all. I think that's the only personal gear you had, other than, again, the shaving, toothbrush, that kind of thing, comb and brush. I don't recall anybody else having personal—portable radios were not the thing then, as they are today! [Laughs] So what material could we take? Nothing, really, except the camera. That's about it! This young man who did the drawing of me I showed you in my book had a pad of artist's paper, because he was a young amateur artist. Gee, I wish the heck I knew where he was! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: I should say, for the sake of the tape, because the tape recorder wasn't turned on then, that before we started the interview you were showing photographs of drawings that were done of you by one of your fellow Coast Guardsmen at Ellis Island.

GARDNER: Yeah, yeah. Well, that's the kind of personal gear you're talking about, I presume?

SIGRIST: Yeah, just any kind of—

GARDNER: I don't recall anything else, in the way of outside of service equipment, service clothing.

SIGRIST: Which would have been given to you at that time?

GARDNER: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: Were family members allowed on the Island to visit at any time?

GARDNER: My father shocked me once. During boot camp period, when we were not allowed out, my father showed up! And then let him come aboard, and they sent for me to see my father! He was [laughs]—I was really shocked! “How did you get aboard, Dad?” [Laughs] He just asked! I don’t suppose many parents, friends, wouldn’t think of taking the Ellis Island Ferry, off the Battery, free, to Ellis Island, and come looking for a member of the family! My father did! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Does anything stick out in your mind about your time spent with your father on the Island? How long he stayed, or what you did?

GARDNER: Not really. We were never much of a talking family. My father picked up his father’s abruptness. So we never were chummy [laughs]. None of the brothers or myself—we were not chummy with Dad! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: But that was ambitious of your father, to come out there! [Laughs]

GARDNER: Right, well he did the same thing when I used to work in the slaughterhouses. He was quite curious what I was doing. So I had to take him on a guided tour through the slaughterhouses, up on the floor where they did the slaughtering. And he was very interested in the whole thing! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Do any of your officers stick out in your mind? Not necessarily their names, but maybe a personality, or something that happened once?

GARDNER: Not at Ellis Island, none. Oh, I’ll take that back. Again, I reported that I was put on report once in my entire career. I had to appear before an officer. I presume he was the Executive Officer of the camp—base. And he threatened me with discharge if I, “Ever did this again—not show up for exercise.” I don’t know his name. His mannerism stuck in my mind, just the fact that I was threatened with such thing, for such a silly little thing! [Laughs] But that’s about it. I never had contact—I don’t think I had contact with any other officer, at any time.

SIGRIST: Nothing that made an impression anyway.

GARDNER: Right, right.

SIGRIST: Were there parts of the Island that you were not allowed to go onto?

GARDNER: Not to my knowledge. I never had the curiosity to find out what the rest of it looked like. It was not used, so why would I want to see it? [Laughs] My—none of my grandparents were ever stationed here, ever landed here, so [unclear]. It's not used now. During the week it is a Coast Guard base. I showed you on one of my pictures that non-military men had been on the Island at the time. These were the sailors taken off the Axis ships that were in New York Harbor, just for a short period until they were assigned somewhere else.

SIGRIST: And for the sake of the tape, can you describe what you mean by Axis?

GARDNER: The Axis was the group: Germany, Italy, and the countries that Germany overran. You can talk of the Axis. Allies were England, France, and United States, the allies. And anybody else was "outside". So the Allies, this was the Axis. I keep forgetting, that was [unclear] years ago! [Laughs] But that part of it still seems fully in my mind. "That's my ship! I was there!" [Laughs]

SIGRIST: You're pointing to the picture of the Campbell on the wall.

GARDNER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: Well, when you saw these gentlemen who'd been gathered from the Axis ship—or, I assume you saw them, because you have a photograph of them—does anything stick out in your mind--?

GARDNER: No.

SIGRIST: --about what kind of an impression--?

GARDNER: No, no. I actually had no contact with the men who were pulled off these ships, because by the time—and again, I showed you a picture of my presence on one of these Axis ships while we were guarding it, to prevent any further—these ships had been sabotaged in New York Harbor, by these men. That is, the good Italian followers of Mussolini were not going to let their ships be used by the Allies for any use, so they sabotaged the engines, quite drastically. Were they ever used again, the ships? I don't know.

SIGRIST: I notice in the photograph the men were all reasonably well-dressed, and have suitcases.

GARDNER: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: And they look like they're about to be—I'm pulling out of the photograph now.

GARDNER: Yeah, yeah.

SIGRIST: We're looking at a picture of the Ellis Island Ferry pointed out towards New York Harbor.

GARDNER: That's not the Ferry. That's the Coast Guard tugboat.

SIGRIST: Or, the Coast Guard boat, rather.

GARDNER: Yeah.

SIGRIST: These are the old hospital buildings on the other side. And the gentlemen from the ships look like they're being loaded on to that Coast Guard boat. Where were they being taken? Do you have any idea?

GARDNER: Right, I don't know. I don't know how I happened to get that picture!

SIGRIST: Yeah, because this picture would have been taken out of the main building. It must have been.

GARDNER: From the second floor, and I was never up on the second floor, that I know of. So I must have gotten that, a copy of that, from somebody else.

SIGRIST: Hm, that's interesting. Did you ever have any reason—you talked about the asthma earlier on, but it seems to have not reared its ugly head during this period. Did you ever have any reason to go into the hospitals at Ellis Island, or any kind of medical treatment while you were there in boot camp?

GARDNER: No, none that I can recall. Now, I would have had various examinations, yes, frequent examinations, I assume. By frequent, I don't know what that means, even, to keep track of our overall health. But they were not anything severe that I would—I would have remembered if they did anything unusual to me. No x-rays, no—well, I guess EKG's didn't exist that that time? I don't know! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Would these examinations have happened on the Island?

GARDNER: That I can't—I think—I think they would have to, because I don't recall being taken anywhere else in New York City for a physical. I don't recall it. I think it would have been there on the Island, yeah.

SIGRIST: Did you ever—were you ever offered any kind of entertainment for the Coast Guardsmen? Were there entertainers that came out to Ellis Island?

GARDNER: No, during this period, no. This again, remember, before Pearl Harbor. No. The USO was being formed during that period, so that during our leave periods—gee, the names of—what would have happened when we had shore leave, during the evening? We could go ashore, and we knew that, let's say, there was a USO place we could go to visit. There was a USO place in Brooklyn, the Brooklyn Navy Yard USO, where they had girls. You could dance with them and so on. You weren't supposed to date any of them. I never did; I never cared! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Well, how often were you allowed to have shore leave?

GARDNER: Every other night.

SIGRIST: Every other night?

GARDNER: Yeah, it would depend. Port, Starboard Watch.

SIGRIST: And how would you go about arranging to get shore leave?

GARDNER: Well, really there was nothing to go through. You knew in advance—well in advance—when you would be allowed ashore.

SIGRIST: So you didn't have to go get a pass every time you went, or something like that?

GARDNER: Yes, you did. You had to be issued a—what would I call it? You had an ID card, and you turned it in when you came back aboard. So that you had to go pick up your ID card, so that they would be sorted out for you: this is the Port Watch, this is the Starboard Watch, and your ID card is one or the other. And if you were a part of Starboard Watch, and you went on a Port night, you could [unclear] your ID card! [Laughs] So that's how they controlled it! And if you happened to go ashore without an ID card, and the M.P.'s or S.P.'s stopped you, and asked for identification, you were caught and hauled in. I never was; I never bothered. I had enough going ashore. What could I do with twenty-one dollars a month? [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Is there an occasion when you were having shore leave that sticks out in your mind? You know, something fun that particularly happened once?

GARDNER: Well, I do, and it's very personal. I had a girlfriend when I was working in the slaughterhouses. She was the boss's daughter, and she was some kid! Boy, did she teach me life! But we broke up, and then I went in the service. I had a different girlfriend after that, and then I went in the service. And I get a message, a letter from her, saying she would like to see me again. And so she named a time and a place, and it just happened to be—okay, I could get ashore on that particular night. But I

contacted her—I've forgotten how. Did I call her? And I said, "Look, honey, you realize that I get only twenty-one dollars a month, so this night is on you, not me!" And so she took me out, to a movie, and to a restaurant! [Laughs] That's all I remember! [Laughs] Special entertainment, yeah!

SIGRIST: I just want to make sure I've covered everything here. Tell me a little bit about New York. You mentioned that the military sort of held a special place in New York at that time. People were much enamored with people who were in the military.

GARDNER: Uh-hmm.

SIGRIST: Tell me, give me a little bit of the atmosphere of New York.

GARDNER: I don't think I can do that, because again, being a resident of New York, I always had a place to go: home. So that I wasn't footloose in Manhattan, New York, itself, very often. I would, because it was my "home town" and it was New York that I loved. Anybody could go anywhere in New York City then, safely! [Laughs] I don't go near New York anymore! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Those were different days!

GARDNER: Right!

SIGRIST: Before we leave Ellis Island, does anything else stick out in your mind about that experience? One thing I didn't ask you about, and you did mention: watches. And, were you taught, or did you have to have responsibilities of watching, guarding, the Island in any way?

GARDNER: No, there was really no watchfulness. The guarding would be, the Watch standing would be simply someone always alert, awake, for the group, to receive messages, transmit orders, that kind of thing.

SIGRIST: Does that mean one person from Company A?

GARDNER: Yes, yes.

SIGRIST: I see. And how many companies were there?

GARDNER: Initially, then, as I said, we were the first company. But within days, I think, other companies—I have to stop and think about remembering myself stamping my name on my clothing, and the term boot camp, [unclear]. It was just Company A, that's all that was there. So we were the first company on Ellis Island, and over the course of days and weeks, then there would be other companies being sent onto Ellis Island, and

guards do the same thing. But we were isolated: Company A here, Company B there, and Company C's there, so, and so on.

SIGRIST: And as you said earlier, they weren't merged until later on.

GARDNER: Much later, yes, yes, once boot camp stopped. We were through boot camp.

SIGRIST: Was there a ceremony of some sort--?

GARDNER: No.

SIGRIST: --when it was over?

GARDNER: No. In fact, don't ask me! [Laughs] Nobody told me that I was no longer an apprentice seaman! I went from apprentice seaman to seaman third class. Third class? I don't if there was such a thing! But then, because I wanted to be, belong to the Engineers Corps, I requested a transfer of my rating from seaman to fireman. And I did, so I became a fireman third class, at the time I just left Ellis Island.

SIGRIST: We've got five minutes left, which isn't a whole lot of time, but kind of bring me up to now, in five minutes.

GARDNER: Okay, so then when I finally left Ellis Island, I boarded the cutter Campbell, three hundred and twenty-seven foot cutter, one of seven sister ships built in the mid-1930's. And a beautiful ship! In fact, if you look right behind you there on the shelf, is a miniature.

SIGRIST: Oh, a model?

GARDNER: A model of it, yeah. That's her. Well, here she is again.

SIGRIST: Right.

GARDNER: She was the white ship. That's how I went aboard—how she looked when I went aboard her.

SIGRIST: How long were you on the Campbell?

GARDNER: Two and a quarter years, until November of 1943.

SIGRIST: What was the most significant thing that happened to you while you were on the Campbell?

GARDNER: Sixteen round trips across the North Atlantic on convoy duty! The last one—the last one on the very northern route, coming back to the States, escorting a convoy, we rammed and sank a U-boat. But in doing so, the U-boat cut our skin at the engine room below the water line, flooded the engine room. Knocked us out, so we were completely dead in the water, and had to be towed back in. And my job was in the boiler room, right next to the engine room, with a thick bulkhead between. And when the engine room became flooded, all lights went out, all power went out, and here we are—we had been going full speed ahead at the time. And no communication between the two departments. But of course, the engine room flooded, lights went out, power stopped, and we're fighting these boilers at full speed! And in the dark, we had to control them, so that we didn't blow up the ship! And it was very fascinating. We were there in mid-sub alley for three days before a tugboat came out from St. John's, Newfoundland, to take us—pick us up, and tow us into St. John's. And all this time we were forbidden to go below, to sleep below. We were to get our weather gear on, life jackets on, and take bedding, any bedding you want, and go topside and sleep topside! You were not allowed to go below, because we were right in the middle of submarine alley! But when we came in, towed in to St. John's, the most beautiful sight in the world was to see land! My God! [Laughs] What a horrible land sight, but beautiful! [Laughs] That's the memory I have! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: It's a good one! I'm getting tense just listening to it! Well, what happened after the Campbell? What was the next move?

GARDNER: Let's see. After the Campbell, I was shipped—and again, this is November of '43—shipped at New York—the Campbell came to New York—sent back to Ellis Island! Receiving Station now, not Training Station—Receiving Station.

SIGRIST: So this is what year?

GARDNER: 1943. December, November '43. Is that right?

SIGRIST: Well, we can check it out.

GARDNER: [Unclear]

SIGRIST: The clock is ticking, so—

GARDNER: Yeah, November 18th, 1943, I left the Campbell, and the thirtieth of November, '43, I was stationed—oh yeah, I was given some leave, I guess: Coast Guard Station. So then on December 15th, I was assigned to the U.S. Cepheus, AKA A-team—

SIGRIST: Could you spell that, please, Cepheus?

GARDNER: Huh?

SIGRIST: Spell Cepheus.

GARDNER: C-E-P-H-E-U-S.

SIGRIST: Thank you.

GARDNER: A brand-new attack cargo ship. And that's where I met Ludwig. Well, I didn't know him. In fact, he was not aboard the ship at that time. In fact, we were not aboard the ship at all together. So I was aboard the Cepheus.

SIGRIST: I should say for the sake of the tape, you're referring to Ludwig Rubinski—

GARDNER: Rubinski, yeah.

SIGRIST: --who we've also interviewed.

GARDNER: Right. So that I was on Cepheus, and involved in the invasion of Southern France, August of 1944. And then back to New York, and November, '44, I left the Cepheus, and sent to Manhattan Beach, figuring—I'm assuming—that I must have had enough sea duty; there were going to leave me ashore for a while, near the end of the war. And I didn't like shore duty, so I went up to the Executive Officer and requested transfer to the West Coast, and back to sea. Boy, did I get it! They transferred me across the country to California, and then from California, picked up a troop ship, a Dutch troop ship, to New Guinea, Alangia [PH], New Guinea. That's getting back at me! [Laughs] And then aboard an Army large tug for the last nine months of the war! [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Of course, this is a whole 'nother oral history project! [Laughs] I'll keep this in mind, in the back of my head. We've got about a minute left, and I do want to ask you: how do you think your experience in the Coast Guard shaped the rest of your life?

GARDNER: I can't answer that! I don't know, because once I got out of the Coast Guard, I turned my back on everything military. So I can't tell.

SIGRIST: That may be the answer right there.

GARDNER: Yeah, well, maybe I'll answer it this way. I was a water tender, which means I was a boilerman, all this time in the service, first class boilerman, water tender. And I thought maybe I'd come ashore and get a job in a power station. No such thing! And you start right back down in the bottom

again, [unclear], and getting newly married, so I said, "Forget it!" Instead, I got a job in the Federal Reserve Bank in New York City, doing clearinghouse work!

SIGRIST: You can't get any more different than that!

GARDNER: [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Before we end, let me just—you mentioned getting married. What is the name of the woman that you married?

GARDNER: Ruth Elizabeth Severy.

SIGRIST: Can you spell Severy?

GARDNER: S-E-V-E-R-Y.

SIGRIST: And when did you marry?

GARDNER: We were married September 21st, 1946.

SIGRIST: And did you have children?

GARDNER: We have had five children; four survived. One, premature, didn't make it.

SIGRIST: Can you name all of them for me?

GARDNER: The oldest, Carlton, is now forty-eight. Next one, Mark, is going to be forty-six. And daughter Katherine with a K, she'll be forty-four. And the last one surviving, Eric, and he just had his fortieth birthday.

SIGRIST: Great. And how many grandchildren?

GARDNER: Eight grandchildren, all girls!

SIGRIST: Wow!

GARDNER: And if you ever saw the movie Gigi, with Maurice Chevalier, [sings] "Thank goodness for little girls!" [Laughs]

SIGRIST: Well, that's a good note for us to end on. Mr. Gardner, thank you very much. This has been a pleasure. You're a very interesting man, and some day I hope that somebody interviews you about the rest of World War Two!

GARDNER: Yeah, because it's fun, now that it's all over.

SIGRIST: Let me just turn this off. This is Paul Sigrist signing off with Clarence Gardner on Saturday, April 11th, 1998, in Wilbraham, Massachusetts. Thank you, sir.

[END OF INTERVIEW]