DOB: Today is the 19th of January, 1999. This is Dian Belanger and I'm speaking with Richard Lucier about his experiences in Deep Freeze I at Little America.

Good afternoon, Dick, and thank you so much for talking with me.

RL: It's quite all right. Glad to have you.

DOB: Tell me something just briefly about your background: where you grew up, where you went to school, what you decided to do with your life. I'm interested in anything from all of this that might lead you to Antarctica.

RL: Well, I was born and raised in Concord, New Hampshire, went through various elementary schools there, Concord High School, and finished up in 1996 and joined the Navy.

DOB: Not 1996.

RL: Nineteen forty-six. I'm sorry, 1946. I had childhood dreams from the time I was about eight years old of going into the Navy because I had an uncle who was a first class torpedoman, and I had met him several times during my early years and he more or less swayed me towards the Navy. And I thought it would be a good experience, so I went ahead and joined in '46 and stayed with it until I retired.

DOB: And how many years was that?

RL: I retired after twenty-seven years. I enjoyed it, it was a very good life, met a lot of friends, still in touch with quite a few of the acquaintances.

DOB: Good. How did you find out about opportunities for you on the ice?

RL: Well, initially I was aboard ship and the message came out one weekend calling for volunteers for a trip to the Antarctic. And I thought, oh, that looks . . . I was due to get off the ship at any time for duty elsewhere, and I figured this was a good time to get off. So I thought at first it was hop aboard an icebreaker and go down there and poke the ice for a couple months and turn around and come back to the States. So I put in for it; it turned out to be a little different.

DOB: When did you find out it was not just a quick trip?

RL: I found that out just about two minutes after I reported in at Davisville, Rhode Island, as soon as I got in the Seabee battalion. Of course with volunteer, you could've got out anytime you wanted, but I figured I volunteered, I'm going to stick out with it so I did.
DOB: And you had a family by then?

RL: I had a family. I had a wife and two children at that time. In fact, my son was only . . . let's see. He was born in February and I reported at Davisville in April, so he was very young at the time. That was April of '55 that I reported there.

DOB: So it all began for you in Davisville, Rhode Island.

RL: Right. We started there and I was about, I don't know, the third or fourth person to report in to the battalion.

DOB: And what happened there to prepare you?

RL: I was more or less the administrator, taking care of all the records and accounts and so on. And of course as the people reported in, they had to get their travel taken care of and their pays and get assigned to the divisions, and then they started going on temporary additional duty out from different training spots here and there. Some went to cold-weather labs, others went back and forth to the Caterpillar plant and so on like that where a bunch of our equipment was coming from. And it was just general training and getting everything organized, getting all the supplies in, getting them all put together and locked up and designated which was going to Little America and which was going to McMurdo. You worked in your own rate part-time, especially for myself, and other times you didn't. You did just about anything.

DOB: Like what?

RL: Like helping with supplies, loading, and getting the pallets loaded up and so on like that, different little speeches on how to operate the equipment, what to expect, survival, and so on like that.

DOB: Did you have survival training?

RL: No, I didn't go through survival training because I wasn't lined up to go on any of the trail parties or anything like that. I was basically staying right at Little America.

DOB: How did you happen to be a yeoman?

RL: I had gone to yeoman school back in '46 shortly after I finished boot camp. I worked up from . . . well, from there just stayed as being a yeoman.

DOB: How did you get to Antarctica?

RL: We went down . . . the crew for Little America went down onboard the USS Arneb and sailed right out of Davisville on into Norfolk for a day or two, and then our next stop was down in Panama for two or three days, from there right on into Christchurch,
New Zealand. We were there for I guess four or five days, maybe a week, and then we went right from there right on into Little America.

DOB: Tell me what it was like as you approached the continent.

RL: It was something new. First off, you run into cold weather and rough weather and then you finally smooth out a little bit. Eventually you start picking up small spots of ice, then you get some little tiny icebergs floating around, then they get bigger and bigger. And finally you look on out, and all you can see is 'big white' and that's it. That was Little America.

DOB: And so that would've been the ice shelf.

RL: Yes, that would've been Ross Ice Shelf there at Little America 5.

DOB: How big was that? What kind of a sensation do you have approaching Kainan Bay?

RL: It was awesome. You looked on out, you had your ice shelf. Of course you had to cross your ice shelf and go up an embankment, but on the way you could look on over and see the big shelf of ice out there, I'd say roughly anywhere from 70 on up to 100 feet high. It was quite a distance off. You didn't walk over there or walk up on top and look over the edge, but you could see it from the trail and everything going up there. Every now and then there was a little rising like a little crevasse area. It sort of looked like the ice had been upheaved and formed various formations and everything not too far out from camp. We were good and safe up there.

DOB: You felt okay living on this floating shelf.

RL: It felt okay living on there. Every now and then you'd be sleeping there at night or later on in the evening you'd hear this sound like a crack or a rumble and you think, oh, are we going or are we staying? Then the next morning you knew you weren't going anywhere so that was it.

DOB: But in fact Little America has gone off to sea now, I understand.

RL: As far as I know it went out. I don't know what year it went out in, but supposedly it broke off and there's nothing left there now. It's just completely gone. I guess it must've just stayed with the berg that it went out on and eventually dwindled down. I don't know whether anyone ever tried to go back aboard Little America, you know, by helicopter or anything after it broke off or they just let it go or what the story was.

DOB: Kind of sad, isn't it?

RL: It is, yes. You figure you spent some time there, and everything's completely gone now.
DOB: What's the first thing you did or had to do when you got off the ship?

RL: Oh, the first thing was getting supplies off the ship and getting them hauled across the ice shelf up into where we were going to have our camp.

DOB: And did you help with that?

RL: Oh yes. It was an all-hands evolution. Everyone was doing some work of one kind or another. You're either helping to load or unload at the other end and sorting it out according to each different department or the different type of material, like mechanical stuff for the various vehicles or whether it was going to be medical supplies or food supplies. You didn't mess too much with the food supplies—that was the main thing—and the fuel oil for heating and so on like that.

DOB: So you did all of those . . . ?

RL: You did about everything to get camp more or less established. When we first got there, we were living in and out of tents or some good-size shipping crates or something like that, and of course you had your sleeping bags, until you started getting some buildings up, then you eventually moved into the shell of the building. From there you started running your electrical lines and setting up that way. I worked with the builders for a while, I worked with the electricians for a while and so on like that. But it was fun. I enjoyed it.

DOB: It must've been pretty cold living in a tent.

RL: It wasn't too bad when we first got there. The temperatures weren't that bad. It was later on once darkness starts setting in. Of course overnight when we had the complete darkness, that's when we got the real heavy weather, cold weather.

DOB: How warm was it when you got there?

RL: Some days we had I'd say probably 15 above or something like that. We were out there playing volleyball for a while in our shirtsleeves. Of course we had long underwear on underneath it, but heavy jackets and that weren't required right at that time, although we had them. And of course by that time we were mostly within . . . we had the basic camp up, the tunnels built and everything else, to go back and forth from building to building. That was on the outside. It was before the darkness set in.

DOB: How long did it take to put the camp together?

RL: I would say probably . . . let's see. Got there in December, March . . . it was probably two-and-a-half, almost three months before we got all of the buildings completed and got them up and connected and everything. Everything was all nice and snug.

DOB: What were the biggest challenges in building the camp?
RL: Trying to get it done on time where we could get in there and everyone get squared away with their bunks and get stuff put away for their own comfort and start doing what had to be done on the inside. Of course we had to work on the outside because the buildings were all pre-fab and they were large panels that interlocked and hooked together with splines and clips, and of course covered over once it was all lined up, we more or less banked them up with snow along the sides so there wouldn't be too much cold underneath. It was good. We were all comfortable.

DOB: Good. Well, all the plans and orders for Little America were developed by military people and politicians in Washington, which is a long way from the ice. And once you got there, how good a job did you think they did?

RL: I think we made out pretty good in getting the camp set up and so on like that. We made regular progress reports to go back to the task force commander and so on like that, and I guess they went on into Washington or into the various people, the Antarctic program people.

DOB: Did you find that these people who were doing the paperwork in Washington had overlooked anything or misjudged anything, or did they do a pretty good job of it?

RL: They seemed to have done a pretty good job on it as far as I was concerned. Of course I wasn't in too much of the planning or anything like that back in Davisville, but from what I saw once we got on the ice everything was pretty well established. We ended up, as far as I know, being fairly comfortable. We didn't live in luxury, but we were living anyway, living and eating, doing what we were supposed to do.

DOB: Did you have enough of everything you needed?

RL: As far as I know we did. Of course what we didn't have was fresh stuff—fresh fruits, fresh vegetables—but we enjoyed those later on when they did start coming in.

DOB: I'm sure.

RL: When they first came in, a head of lettuce was very valuable—tomatoes, eggs, and so on.

DOB: But you ate well?

RL: We ate very well, yes. We ate very well. Of course all of our potatoes were dehydrated or powdered stuff, but they were very palatable—it tasted real good. I didn't run across anything down there that I didn't like to eat. I'm a good one for eating. I put on a few pounds while I was down there.

DOB: I think a lot of people did.

RL: I think we all did, yes.
DOB: People ate a lot.

RL: Well, yes. A lot of the stuff I guess had a lot of high protein and high fat and so on like that. I won't say over-high to make you sick or anything, but sufficient to offset what you lacked in fresh fruits, fresh vegetables, and so on.

DOB: My understanding was that Little America 5 was intended to be like the flagship station for Deep Freeze and for the IGY. Is that true, and if so, how did that affect—

RL: I don't really know. I know that when we first started forming up and everything, everyone seemed to be talking, "Little America, Little America." And of course that's primarily what I heard throughout, but I don't know when McMurdo . . . whether that was in the initial planning or not. It must've been because we had ships that went right straight to McMurdo with another wintering-over crew. Of course they built the ice airstrip down there, so later on all the flights going in and out went into McMurdo.

DOB: You made your career in the military, and I'm curious to know how . . . well, the military is a very hierarchical society, and I'm curious to know how lines of authority played out on the ice. It would seem that things would be a little different in such an isolated place.

RL: Well, we weren't a spit-and-shine outfit, if you want to put it like that. I'd say it was very casual, but still everyone was militarily oriented. I mean no one got carried away and started calling officers first nicknames or anything like that. But everything was "Mr. this" and "Mr. that." It was good. We were disciplined. We had no trouble that I know of, and of course I was keeping all the records and everything down there.

DOB: Did you have any civilians that first year?

RL: When we went down, we had a couple of civilians that wintered over with us. One was Lloyd Beebe, he was from Disney, and another one was from the Weather Bureau . . . I forget what his name is right now. Wesley something.

DOB: Twombly?

RL: No. Wait. It might have been. Twombly, yes. He and the Disney man were there at Little America. They worked right in at their own stuff and so on like that. Of course they helped out otherwise also till we got everything set up.

DOB: And now the military is no longer playing a role there.

RL: I understand that. I understand that it only lasted four or five operations or something where the military was involved.

DOB: Until just last year actually.
RL: Until last year? Okay.

DOB: More than forty years.

RL: Well I know the last . . . let's see. When we had a reunion, I think it was up in Newport, Rhode Island, there was a female CEC officer that had been down on the ice and I think she had been designated as the officer in charge or the commanding officer down there. That reunion was in '93, and that's about the last contact I had there because I missed the reunion out in the West Coast out there in Oxnard, California, and then I missed this last one which was out in Denver.

DOB: I was there.

RL: But I did get to the one in Virginia, Newport, Rhode Island, Gulfport, Mississippi, and of course I missed Denver.

DOB: What difference do you think it'll make not having the military having a major part to play?

RL: I don't really know, but I'd say it's a civilian-type and a scientific-type operation, and I understand they're pretty well organized themselves. They seem to be doing pretty good. It's probably a good thing that it was turned over strictly to that type of operation.

DOB: Tell me about your main assignment as a yeoman at Little America. To whom did you report and what did you do?

RL: Well, we didn't have to worry too much about correspondence or anything like that other than the message system, but it was primarily just keeping the records up, copying some news from the people in the radio shack or they'd copy it and give it to me and we'd try to put out a little newspaper or something like that.

DOB: What kind of records?

RL: Personnel records. About the last month I was there, I went from Little America on over to McMurdo. I had all the personnel records with me, so once I got over there I was just updating their records for dependencies, sending out messages and getting them on back for their preferences in next duty station in preparation for making out their orders once we got back to the States where their next station was going to be. That was the hardest part there at McMurdo. We went ahead and cut up all of the orders primarily on the way coming back aboard ship onboard the USS Curtiss, which was a seaplane tender. We all came back on the Curtiss.

DOB: So you had an indoor job.
RL: Primarily, yes. Right. But there were a lot of times I'd get out there, like I said, with the various ones out there digging to find this supply or that supply or helping to break it out and so on. It wasn't just sitting in a chair in the office all day long.

DOB: It seemed that the success of all of the Deep Freeze operations was that everybody did more than what was their job description.

RL: That seems to be it. I know it was with me, and I know we had storekeepers there that were the same thing, we had a disbursing clerk there at Little America which is like a paymaster, so I'm keeping the pay records straight. He didn't have too much to do once we got there other than just log in what this guy earned this month and so on like that. We drew very little money. We didn't need it down there, so he was doing basically the same thing as the rest of us.

We had radiomen. Of course once they got the radio shack up, they were maintaining radio watches twenty-four hours a day, so there were three or four of them involved on just about every watch.

We had the aviation personnel. Outside of Little America they set up like a little station out there for people coming in, the control center, the aviation control and so on like that. We had very little of that traffic, but they at least had it out there in case we did get some planes in, which I think there were a few that came in there, but not like a regular basis, two or three a week or anything like that. Of course you wouldn't have come in there during the dark period anyway. But even during the light period, there wasn't that much air traffic or anything.

We had a pretty good arrangement of ratings assigned down there. We had some aviation boatswain mates, regular shipboard boatswain mate, myself, a yeoman, we had aerographers, air controlmen. It wasn't strictly all Seabee ratings.

DOB: What did an aerographer do?

RL: Weather . . . weatherman. He worked with Mr. Twombly and so on like that on sending out their balloons for the surface and also high-altitude temperatures and wind forecast and so on like that.

DOB: Was being a yeoman for you in Antarctica different on a daily basis from, say, doing that kind of work at some other base?

RL: Very much so.

DOB: What was different about it?

RL: There at Little America you more or less jumped in and did everything, or helped do everything. You helped some of the people in the galley one day, you might be working with the electricians for a couple days, primarily when you were stringing up your electrical
wiring and so on. With the builders you're helping putting the buildings together and
gunking them down with caulking around the different seams so they wouldn't leak later on.
They'd put them up, and some of us who were general service rates, we did the caulking
and so on.

DOB: That's good. I was referring particularly to being a yeoman. Is it different being a
yeoman there than somewhere else? Do you have different kinds of tools or different
kinds of problems?

RL: If you're a shipboard yeoman, you've got the ship's office and you're responsible for
correspondence plus the records, training programs and so on like that. Anything the
division officer wants done, you do it. But down there, I was more or less on my own at
Little America. I knew what had to be done, and I'd get it done. When I wasn't doing
what I was supposed to be doing, I was helping someone else do something.

DOB: Did you report to Commander Whitney?

RL: Right. He was the commanding officer down there, and we had an officer in charge,
Lieutenant Commander Graham. He was more or less the officer in charge of Little
America, and then Lieutenant Commander Canham was the officer in charge over at
McMurdo.

DOB: And so Whitney then was superior to both of them.
RL: Yes. He was the commanding officer of the battalion.

DOB: Of MCB (Special).

RL: Of MCB (Special). Yes.

DOB: I know that at McMurdo, Commander Canham kept a daily log of all of the things that
happened. Was that true also at Little America?

RL: No, we didn't keep one over there at Little America other than radio traffic and reporting
systems and so on like that. But for day-by-day sitting down and having someone recite to
you like a shipboard log or anything like that, nothing like that was kept that I know of.

DOB: Too bad.

RL: Well, Mr. Canham was quite a record-keeper. He liked keeping track of that stuff. In
fact, when you talk to Bob Chaudoin—he was yeoman over there at McMurdo—he was
more or less Mr. Canham's right-hand man over there clerical-wise and so on, so he knows
more about Mr. Canham than I do.

DOB: I should think though that in a position like yours, you'd have been privy to a lot that was
going on in and around the camp.
RL: Well, yes, you know, we were a pretty close-knit outfit down there so if someone was having a good time, you know, raising the devil or something like that, you knew about it. Or if he was trying to slack off or anything, which we didn't have anyone down there that I know of that really did that, but you'd know about it real quick. You couldn't pull too much stuff down there without everyone knowing it.

DOB: I'd like you to share with me some of those experiences that, oh, were just a particular triumph or where somebody exercised maybe particularly poor judgment or maybe there were some ongoing problems. What kinds of stories do you remember from that time that were significant in terms of the way the year went?

RL: There wasn't really . . . I really couldn't say too much on that because like I say, nothing earth-shattering or anything happened there at Little America. I don't know of any . . . well, someone would have a Weasel out or something like that, one of the tracked vehicles and they'd pop the track off it. So whoever it was did that, and after being involved in the repair work to put the track back on, they'd get quite a bit of razzing and so on like that from the rest of the crew. Or if it ever happened, I'm sure that if an aerographer got one of his balloons ready to go out and it blew up on him before he launched it, he would catch a lot of razzing. Anything like that, that was about it. We had a lot of joking and kidding. We all had good morale. As far as I know, everyone got along fine down there. I didn't see or hear of any punches being thrown or anyone really getting mad at one another where you had to sort of restrict them or keep a real close eye on them or anything. We all got along pretty good down there.

DOB: That's remarkable. That wasn't true at all of the bases.

RL: I don't know. Overall I don't know about much trouble that ever went on over at McMurdo either. Of course the people that we sent out from Little America initially to start setting up Byrd Station out there, that was a small group out of our own group and they all got along good. We did lose one man going out there.

DOB: Tell me about that.

RL: His Caterpillar D-8 tractor went down into a crevasse, and they couldn't get it out. There was no way to get it out, so hopefully he's still there probably buried in by now.

DOB: That would be Max Kiel.

RL: Max Kiel, yes. He was a young third class driver, a very nice guy, a very nice fellow.

DOB: How was that handled at the time and how does that affect morale?

RL: It sort of set everyone back, but everyone back at camp realizes he's down there. We don't know how deep the crack was that he went down in, but there wasn't anything we
could do. We couldn't go out and try to get him out or anything like that. They were out quite a distance from the camp, and this was on the crew that was going out to Byrd Land. I guess they had tested this bridge... they had this snow bridge over the crevasse. I guess they tested it and probed it and everything, it seemed okay. But running across it, it just gave way. There wasn't much you could do about it.

DOB: It must have rather spooked the ones who came afterwards to keep going on that trail.

RL: Well, I wasn't on the trail so I don't know, but they seemed to do okay. I don't know of anyone that reneged on taking their tractor across another area or anything like that. They kept pulling sleds and so on like that.

DOB: Aside from the terrible loss of life, there was also a loss of a tractor. Were there enough spares that you didn't notice that too much?

RL: As far as I know, I think it was just the driver and the tractor that went down there. I don't think any sled carrying any heavy gear or any building material or anything like that went down with it. It was just a tractor and Maxie.

DOB: But the tractor, too, was a loss.

RL: Yes, the tractor went down there. From what I understand, I guess it went down inverted. It went down back end so it slowly flipped, I think. I guess they could see it way down in there, but they couldn't get down in there to get it or get him out.

DOB: And not too long after that, there was an airplane crash. An Otter went down with seven people aboard.

RL: Right. Mr. Streich and some of the people, I don't know whether they were going out to look for some other site or whether they were going out for something else.

DOB: They were bringing in the trail party.

RL: Okay. The trail party had gone out. I guess he went out to get them, and they were on their way back and I guess they... I don't know whether they iced or just what the story was, but the plane did go down. They all came back to camp. They walked back into camp. I don't know just how far out. I guess it took them a couple days to get back, survived primarily I guess on trail rations or pemmican. I don't think any of them looked forward to eating any more pemmican right now.

DOB: What's pemmican?

RL: It's a dehydrated mixture of all kinds of material, I guess, high protein stuff. I smelled it one time. I figured I'd have to be pretty darn hungry to eat it, so I'm sure those fellows had the same thought.
George Moss was on that group that was on that. A fellow I know by the name of Levesque, he was a first class driver. He decided not to stay down there. He came back—he didn't winter over. Let's see . . . I think Edwards was a first class driver also on that. Who else, I don't actually remember right now, but I know there were about six or seven altogether, plus Mr. Streich, he came back.

DOB: That must've been quite a scene when they showed up.

RL: Oh, yes. Everyone was pretty happy for that—slapping on their backs and everything like that. They were pretty happy to be back just like we were happy to see them come back.

DOB: Very lucky. So was Max Kiel the only casualty at Little America?

RL: He was the only casualty that we had at Little America, right. I think at McMurdo they had a Weasel or something go through the ice, and I think they lost three or four over there on that. But for any heavy equipment or anything like that or any crashes or anything over there at McMurdo, I don't recall hearing anything about any.

DOB: Well, you alluded a few minutes ago to the coming of the winter night. How long does the night last at Little America?

RL: If I remember, ours was . . . I think the last ship went out of there around the 10th of March, and then the next time we saw anyone come in was probably about the 29th, the tail end of October. So it was total darkness all during that time.

DOB: Totally dark that whole time?

RL: Yes. I take that back. We could just see a little bit of what would normally be like a sunrise or a sunset, but it was very, very distant and each day it got shorter and shorter and then it was finally gone. And then it just seemed . . . there in October it just seemed like pop, it came up, and we were back in the bright sun again.

DOB: Tell me about the long winter. How does that affect the way the base runs and is managed?

RL: A majority of that at that time during the dark period, the majority of the stuff was primarily inside and maintaining . . . the mechanics and that were maintaining and overhauling and checking all of their gear.

We did have to go out occasionally just out in our little supply area, which was right outside of the main compound out of the tunnel. You're out in the open there. You'd have to go out and dig out some supplies. All of our food supplies were encased in the same type of structure and netting that the tunnels were made out of, chicken wire covered with burlap and eventually just about covered over with snow. So you did have access in and out of there to get your food out. The fuel depot was a short distance out; that was pretty
well marked. You'd go out every so often and bring in your fuel for your equipment and also for your heating fuel.

DOB: What would you use for light?

RL: We had generators down there.

DOB: Outside? Were there outside lights?

RL: Yes, we had very few outside lights. The majority of them were all inside, but I think there were a few floodlights from the main exits as you went out of camp at the end of one of the tunnels, where they had some of their equipment inside had like a snow ramp coming on in there with some outside floodlights there in case you were out there working. But once you got far enough out, you had your lights from your equipment that you were using. If you went out in your tractors, they were all equipped with lighting.

DOB: So you didn't have any trouble seeing what you were doing?

RL: No. The only time you'd . . . well, you wouldn't even worry about a whiteout in the dark because you couldn't see it anyway. But the only other time was when we had the full periods of daylight you might run into a little spot of a whiteout for a little while. You couldn't see anything then.

DOB: What would you do?

RL: You'd just stay where you were and wait for it to get over with.

DOB: Did they usually not last very long?

RL: The ones that I was in, a couple of them, they didn't last too long. Probably an hour, an hour-and-a-half. But you just stayed right still. You didn't try to wander back to camp because you couldn't see anything.

DOB: Tell me what a whiteout is.

RL: That's just some weather phenomenon that everything just is . . . you just can't see anything. It's like in a solid fog. Some fog just gets . . . very similar to a fog. You can't see a darn thing out of it until it starts lifting and moves on.

DOB: Tell me about drinking and alcohol use at Little America.

RL: We had beer down there, and you could buy the beer through the PX building, the exchange building down there, along with watches or soap, toothpaste and so on like that.

DOB: As much as you wanted?
RL: No. You were more or less limited. If you got too heavy on taking it on, you just ended up short on the stick at the end unless someone else gave you their rations.

DOB: So you had a specified amount to drink?

RL: Just long as you didn't get carried away, let's put it that way. And then of course on Friday nights we had a party down there where we got a little bit of hard stuff. The doctor was more or less in charge of that. He kept track of the hard liquor. It was only just a couple types of hard liquor you had anyway. You had some of these little two-ounce bottles of brandy, and the rest of it was a rye whiskey called Old Methusalem, and I swear to God, Old Methusalem must have made it. You're talking about rotgut!

But we'd mix up some of the medical 180 proof alcohol. The doctor would mix it up into a big copper, then cut it down with orange juice or grapefruit juice and shovel in a couple big shovelsful of clean snow from outside to cool it off and that was it. It was a good smooth drink.

DOB: Like a punch?

RL: It was more than a punch. It was smooth going down, and if you thought it was too smooth, then all of a sudden it just felt like the big hand reached up and grabbed you and that was it. You went down.

DOB: Was there a name for that?

RL: No, not that I know of.

DOB: What did you call it?

RL: We just said give me some of the hard stuff, you know, the hard stuff with orange, or hard stuff with grapefruit, whatever it was. But the brandy we had, it was good little bottles of brandy. But that Old Methusalem, that was something else. And I've been in some liquor stores since we've been back to the States, and I've never seen a bottle of Old Methusalem in any of them. So I don't know where they got that from, but they must've got a good cut-rate on it from some distillery.

DOB: Well, it had quite a reputation.

RL: It had a wicked reputation.

DOB: Well, in a very different direction, at least the larger stations all had spiritual leaders.

RL: Oh yes. We had a chaplain at each place. We had a Protestant chaplain at Little America, Chaplain Bol, B-o-l.
DOB: Tell me about him.

RL: He was a good fellow and man. I was Catholic, so I didn't attend any of his services, but he seemed to be a pretty good guy around camp. Some fellows got along with him easy. I don't know . . . there was just something . . . I didn't cater too much to him. I don't know. He and I didn't see eye to eye.

DOB: Did he offer Catholic services?

RL: No. No, we had . . . before all the . . . let's see. We had Father Condit. He was over at McMurdo, and I guess before the ships left, he would come over I think once or twice for Catholic services. Then of course we got Catholic services with him once we got aboard ship coming back. But he was at McMurdo, so they had the Catholic Masses over there all the time.

DOB: But he did Protestant services, too.

RL: I think he did do some, yes.

DOB: So I was wondering if Chaplain Bol did Catholic services.

RL: Chaplain Bol didn't do that, no.

DOB: Was that a problem, do you think?

RL: I don't think it was so much of a problem. I know some of us would get together every now and then, the Catholic fellows there, and of course we didn't have a priest or anything, but we'd all get together and say a few prayers or say the rosary or something like that. That was about it for us.

DOB: What about Jewish sailors?

RL: We didn't have any Jewish services that I know of at all. I don't know if we had any people of the Jewish religion down there with us that I recall.

DOB: What do you know about how Commander Whitney thought about all the other leaders that were down on the ice, like Admiral Dufek?

RL: I never heard him express one way or the other whether . . . as far as I know they got along good. But no, I don't know of any difficulties between them or any harsh words spoken or anything like that, not that I recall. And I heard none of the other officers that we had there with us—we only had a few officers at Little America with us—I didn't hear any of them speaking ill of any of the officers on the task force or the admiral himself or anything.
DOB: What did you think of all these people, let's say Herb Whitney?

RL: I liked Commander Whitney. Of course I was with him up in Davisville. Like I say, I was about the third guy or the fourth guy I guess that checked into the battalion, so I had met him right away. Then I worked with him just about constantly up there on a day-to-day basis, during checking people in or introducing people to the skipper and so on like that. He always struck me as being a fine person. I didn't have any trouble whatsoever with him.

DOB: How about Admiral Dufek?

RL: Admiral Dufek, I didn't have too much relations with him. I saw him in camp a couple times and that was about it. He'd come up off the ship every now and then and just wander through camp and talk to all the guys, ask them how they were doing or just what they were doing and so on like that. He seemed all right with us, or he did to me at least. I didn't have any trouble with him. As I say, I wasn't in daily contact with him or anything like that. I probably saw him four times or so on like that before the ships finally left down there from Little America.

DOB: Did you ever meet Admiral Byrd?

RL: I saw him there at Little America. We had a memorial service for Max Kiel, and I saw him a couple times aboard . . . he went down, I think, on the Arneb. And then while we had the memorial services, he came up to Little America and went out to the memorial service out there. It was sort of funny to see him because he had his old sealskins on.

DOB: Really.

RL: Yes, he wore them.

DOB: Would anyone else have worn sealskins at that time?

RL: No, no. This was from his previous expeditions, I guess. I don't know if it was South Pole or North Pole, but he had them on. I wouldn't want to be dressed in that all the time.

DOB: Why?

RL: I don't know. They just . . . of course they were dark in color, sort of dry and that. Every now and then you'd look down where he had been standing or anything, you'd find little bits of sealskin or little bits of hair laying down there falling out from it. But that's the only time I had any contact with him. Of course we were all in formation at that time when they brought him out.
DOB: Did he speak?

RL: He said a few words down there, yes. Of course he was quite a bit older—

DOB: Aside from those who were in leadership positions by virtue of being officers, who would you name as the real leaders at Little America? People who just led by example or . . . ?

RL: We had several that we all sort of looked up to. Lieutenant Mehaffey, he was our supply officer down there and disbursing officer.

DOB: Why?

RL: I don't know. He just seemed like a very nice person, you got along with him real well, he'd kid with you, he'd come on out in the evening and play cards with the people and wander around and so on. If you asked him anything, you always got a good answer from him, a little help one way or the other.

We had a warrant officer by the name of George Purinton. He later died once we got back to the States in an automobile accident up in Massachusetts, but I believe he was the equipment officer or so on like that. He was primarily down around the garage area, maintenance officer and so on like that.

We had another warrant officer by the name of Vic Young. He was always jovial down there, always ready to joke and kid with you. He still is, the last I saw of him. The last time I saw him was up at Biloxi, I think it was. No, Newport.

And of course we had several chiefs there. There was Chief Moss, the chief surveyor. Chief Aldrich, he was the hospital corpsman. Chief McInvale, of course we all knew him because he was our chief cook, or our chief steward. Yes, chief cook.

DOB: What was his name?

RL: McInvale. He lives over in the Orlando area now. We had Chief Arndt, he was the chief photographer. If anyone was trying to take any pictures or had any problems, he was a problem solver for that. Let's see. What was the other . . . ?

DOB: Well, the people that I'm asking about don't necessarily have to be leaders by title, but I'm just wondering about people who gave you confidence that everything was okay.

RL: I'd say any of the dealings I had with just about any of them down there, they were confident, they knew what they were doing. Like I say, everyone got along fine. They all
knew just about what everyone else's job was. I had worked with them one way or another the entire time we were down there.

**DOB:** Was there any one particular person that you met on the ice that you were really glad to have there? Someone who was important to you personally or that you really admired?

**RL:** No, not really. I'd say those few that I mentioned, plus there was a Chief Stroup, he was very good person. He lives, I think, over in Gulfport, Mississippi. Let's see... we had a reserve Coast Guard officer down there, Jack Bursey, lieutenant commander. I think he had been down there either once or twice before. We had Lieutenant Streich who was aviation officer. He stayed there at Little America with us, along with a Lieutenant j.g. by the name of Seay, S-e-a-y, Wes Seay. As I understand, he's dead now.

But we all sort of looked out and helped one another along with whatever they were doing that you could jump in and help them and that was it.

**DOB:** Were you ever truly scared for your life?

**RL:** No. Of course we had a few of those cracks every now and then and you'd wonder, you know, am I going to be around here later on? But right around camp and everything you didn't have anything to worry about. Even on shipboard you didn't have anything to worry about there. We'd go down on the ice shelf every now and then. Of course there wasn't too much to worry about down there. There wasn't any big crevasses. It wasn't breaking up at the time we were going down there either. That made quite a difference, too. And even over at McMurdo, I didn't have any worries over there.

**DOB:** I want to ask you about what I'm going to call mechanical problems, and I'm using that term loosely. Sort of the non-human things that would be aggravating, like power outages or tracks falling off of tractors. What were the most troublesome parts of that sort of mechanical world that you lived in?

**RL:** That's kind of hard to say. We had our gear operating almost all the time. We didn't have any big heavy radio blackouts or anything because of equipment failures from that. There'd be a while that we couldn't receive or send anything because of atmospheric conditions, but even so, when the... we thought quite often about if the generators ever went out or something like that what would happen. They provided us with the electricity.

Of course we had individual space heaters in each one of the barracks down there, each one of the buildings, and they were run by fuel. So you hauled your fuel in, like the old kerosene stoves that we used to have, only it wasn't kerosene, it was regular fuel oil. We had no big equipment or material failure there at Little America, and everything seemed to be running pretty smoothly, other than that loss of Max Kiel and the loss of the tractor down there.

**DOB:** Sounds pretty good.
Richard Lucier Interview, January 19, 1999

RL: Yes, everything seemed to be smooth operating.

DOB: Perhaps one of the most important things that happened during the long winter night was the effort to get ready for the tractor train operations to establish the new station at Marie Byrd Land.

RL: Yes, well that started out—I didn't go on the trail or anything, I wasn't with the group that went out there—but when they left camp, they pretty well had everything they needed building-wise and food-wise, and they had a couple wanigans that they carried out with them on the big sleds. They were pre-fab buildings for sleeping quarters and also for their small galley that they had going out there. And as far as I know right there, they didn't have any trouble.

We had everything pretty well marked prior to shipping, whether it was going to stay there at Little America or whether it was going to go out to Byrd. Of course once we got there, it was all segregated to make sure that all the stuff for Byrd was set off to one side and wasn't mixed in with our stuff. We wouldn't have to go out later on and dig through hundreds of boxes of crates looking for it. It was a pretty smooth operation. They all went out of there real good.

DOB: Did it take a lot of effort during the winter to make sure that everything was well planned?

RL: No, because by that time we were pretty well established. Like I say, most of the stuff that was in our supply area out there was pretty well marked, staked out and so on, and the same thing with Byrd. We didn't seem to have too much trouble at all. Now if they had trouble with, say, one tractor or anything like that, I didn't really know too much about that. That was strictly between the drivers and the mechanics. I don't know of anything off-hand.

DOB: There were a few people who complained about the fact that the South Pole Station, which was being set up from McMurdo, got all of the press and all of the attention of the politicians, and the popular opinion seemed to have followed the South Pole story rather than Byrd which had its own challenges.

RL: Of course everyone was concerned. All they have to do is to say to someone "the South Pole operations" and right away their ears perk up and they're very interested to find out anything they can about it. I guess that was one of the primary purposes going down there was to get to the Pole area and start setting a station up or setting up an area. Of course it's pretty well improved now from what we had down there.

DOB: Did the people at Little America and Byrd feel like, hey, what about us?

RL: Well, we sort of felt like we were left out in the back field somewhere down there, because primarily everything was coming in and operating out of McMurdo, and we sort of felt left out. But everything worked out.
DOB: Tell me about Christmas.

RL: [Laughs] It wasn't very much to it. It wasn't real special. We had regular good meals and everything like that, a few little get-togethers for some song fests to sing us some carols and so on like that, and that was basically about it. Some of the people brought some of the wrapped-up presents down with them that their wife or their mother or father had given to them, so they held onto those and opened them up at that time. But otherwise, it was pretty low keyed.

DOB: Was that a difficult time for people?

RL: No, because we got there at Little America I think around the 22nd or 23rd of December.

DOB: So you were just there.

RL: We were just there and we were busy hauling stuff up onto the ice shelf at that time, across the shelf and up onto the plateau up there to set up camp. And of course the following year, the people were back in there. It was light then at that time and we were more or less working up to clean up any odds and ends so the relief crew could come in and get ready to take over from us, and we were getting ready to leave out of there.

DOB: So you spent two Christmases on the ice.

RL: Yes. We got there in '55 and the Christmas of '56.

DOB: Was the Christmas of '56 different?

RL: It was a little more relaxed, I think, than what the first Christmas was because we were pretty well established in camp. Everything was built. We had all the buildings up and everything was pretty secure compared to what it was a year before that. We were sort of passing one another going back and forth to the ship getting freight and so on like that, getting all of our stuff up on the shelf.

DOB: It must've been kind of crowded when the new summer came.

RL: When the relief crews started coming in, I was over at McMurdo then because I'd gone over there about the last month I was there, or a month-and-a-half, I guess. They had separate buildings put up for them so that when they came in, it wasn't like on submarine duty where you double-bunked or anything like that. They had their own buildings. We set the buildings up, had them right there for them so they just came in and moved into the buildings and that was it. They were doing all their operations coming in, and we were sort of wrapping up things so we could get ready to go out.

And of course with a new mob coming in, a lot of the guys that came in on Detachment Bravo were known by the people that spent the winter there because they had served with
them probably in a different battalion or something like that. I think it was an easy
operation transferring from getting us out of there and getting them in. And I'm sure the
same thing happened at Little America, but as I say, at that time I was over at McMurdo.

DOB: There would've been some nice reunions then.

RL: Oh yes. In fact, when I left after I got out of the operation, I was out on Guam several
years later stationed out there. Of course we had battalions coming in out there at Guam,
and being a yeoman I knew the yeoman down at the naval base where they were coming in,
so I had an advance list of the names of the people coming in. I'd go down through it,
and as soon as they came in, I'd go down there, pick them up, bring them up to quarters,
we'd barbecue out in back or meet them over at the chiefs club or something like that. I
came across quite a few of them.

DOB: Let's talk a little bit about daily living. We have already, but for example, who did the
housecleaning?

RL: Just about everyone took care of their own barracks for cleanliness. You went along, it
looked pretty good and that was fine. If it looks dirty, everyone started cleaning up in
their own building.

And we had a couple of people who were more or less on permanent fuel detail for
bringing fuel in to all the different stoves in there. We had our regular reveille in the
morning and regular taps at night, regular chow call. Of course we didn't have to worry
about mail call, there wasn't any mail until October. But it was always a game whenever
they got ready to serve the meals to see if anyone could beat Lieutenant Commander
Bursey to the chow line. He was usually first in line, and second in line was usually
Chaplain Bol. But it was always a joke, you know, would Bol beat Bursey or how many
days would Bursey win.

DOB: How do you account for that? Just liked to eat?

RL: I guess so. Neither one of them had any real . . . I don't know of any real duty that
Mr. Bursey had assigned to him, other than, I don't know, just being an observer or
something like that. The chaplain did very little physical work or anything like that, and
Mr. Bursey was the same way. So I guess that was primarily one of the first things they
looked forward to was eating.

DOB: Did that irritate other people that here are these guys that don't have anything to do?

RL: No. We expected that. We expected some of the people didn't really have too much to
do once they got there, or once it was established. Initially they did. They went right
along and helped get set up and everything like that, but once they got set up, there wasn't
really too much that . . . neither one of them were mechanics or builders or electricians
or anything like that, so that was about it.
The chaplain would roam around all the time. He'd always be in different buildings at different times of the day. Or if you were out on a work detail, he'd come on out and see how you were doing. The same thing with Mr. Bursey. He'd come around. Occasionally if you're out there digging away or something like that, pulling stuff out, he'd give a hand on that. I won't say they were completely idle, but they didn't have any real specific work assignment, let's put it that way. But they did help out there when we were first setting up. Everyone was working at that time.

DOB: But you weren't just too excited to see the chaplain come by.

RL: He'd come around. I don't know. He'd usually come around and start telling these kids about this and that and how good everything was and so on like that. And I figured, you're not around, you don't know what's going on. He was a good old guy overall.

DOB: What happened when something needed to be sewed or there were all these duties that would've at the time been considered gender-specific?

RL: We had one fellow down there, he was a builder, but he also did quite a bit of sewing. I don't know whether he had his own sewing machine or whether the battalion bought one for him. But he was more or less . . . you know, in case our uniform or our outer clothing got ripped or anything like that or too big or anything like that, he'd go ahead and take it in or add to it or patch it.

We had two . . . there was one guy that was a mechanic, Willie Burleson, and he was more or less the barber. If you needed a haircut or anything like that, you went to see him and he'd sit you down in an old field dental chair and do the best he could. I never had to worry too much about my hair. [Laughs] George Moss, I guess, clipped a few hairs down there, but Willie was more or less the known barber, and Hayward was the known tailor. If you had any troubles there, that was it.

DOB: Did people get a haircut very often?

RL: Yes. I always kept mine fairly neat. Some of them would grow beards. None of them really grew long locks like the kids running around with nowadays way down over their ears or neck-long or anything like that, no. We all kept decent haircuts. A few of them grew beards and mustaches. But as soon as we hit New Zealand or Australia on the way coming back, they just about all came off because they started itching and sweating and everything else. It was fairly warm there in Australia when we came out, so they were sweating quite a bit under there. They'd go get them shaved or sheared off one way or another.

DOB: What did you do for fun?

RL: We had a lot of card-playing down there. And of course we had—
DOB: What kind of card games?

RL: Well, the guys would play Crazy Eights or stuff like that. They played poker every now and then, but I never saw any money on the table. They were just kidding around like that. I guess a few of them played bridge. Quite a few of us, we played cribbage down there.

There were one or two ping-pong tables down there. Of course we didn't have . . . we had record players and a bunch of records. We had a movie projector and some movies that they sent down with us that had seen their better days, and by the time we got through with them, I guess everyone had seen them about four times. Of course we didn't have VCRs or anything at that time like they have now.

They had the intercom system, but that was used primarily for any messages or trying to get ahold of someone or sounding chow call or reveille or so on like that.

We did have a ham radio set down there where we could get in contact with people back in the States through another relay station we could get through every now and then. I guess just about every one of us had a couple chances to talk to our wives or talk to their mothers or something like that. We had bad weather sometimes and not be able to get through for a couple of days. I think our primary contact there from Little America was with this fellow up in Warwick, Rhode Island. He had a good-sized setup. His call letters were W1BCR. He used to call himself the Big Crazy Rat.

But I did get through to my wife several different times. Of course she had to travel one time I think about thirty miles away to Rochester, New Hampshire, where a fellow finally made contact. And a couple times I had to relay from the station over in New York, and then of course they would try to send as much of the message as they could via Western Union over to Concord, New Hampshire where my wife was, and the American Red Cross picked up the bill on that.

DOB: Really.

RL: Yes. I was surprised.

DOB: How often were you able to do this?

RL: No set schedule. You know, if you talked once, you'd try to set a schedule up, like I'll try to get ahold of you next week or something like that. Sometimes it worked, you could get right through, and sometimes it didn't because of weather conditions or something like that. Sometimes, depending on the weather, I think our signal wasn't even reaching the end of camp. But you could talk back and forth . . . you'd talk and then they'd talk, you'd talk, they'd talk.
I did get through to my wife I guess four times, something like that. And of course she was telling me how the kids were doing, how the garden was doing. There were a couple times she asked what the temperature was, and at that time it was colder in New Hampshire than it was right down there in the Antarctic at that time of the year.

DOB: Was morale a problem?

RL: Not that I know of. Everyone seemed to get along fine with one another. Like I said, I don't know of any heavy arguments or scraps or punches thrown or anything like that.

DOB: In terms of loneliness.

RL: Every now and then you'd see someone and he'd say, 'I'm thinking of my family,' or something like that. So you pull them off to the side and you get to talking with them and joking and kidding and sort of pull him out of it and so on like that. But it wouldn't last for days or weeks or anything like that. You know, probably a certain time of the year close to the wife's birthday or his birthday or one of the kids' birthdays or Mother's Day or something like that, you sort of feel it a little bit, but overall it was all right.

DOB: Somebody did a psychological . . . a psychologist did a study comparing being in the Antarctic to being in prison. That doesn't sound like your experience.

RL: No. I don't think I was penalized or anything like that, comparing on that ground, compared to being in prison. Of course the prison system back then was a little bit different than some of the prison systems are now. I didn't feel that way, and I don't think any of the guys down there that I knew of . . . of course you'd joke and kid, 'Why did I ever sign up for something like this?,' you know, but they're joking and kidding about it.

Of course while you're in the service, you just left the best duty station in the world and your next one's going to be better than the one you're at right now, so it's just a constant evolution of one place to another, you know.

DOB: Okay. Before we pass this, you mentioned earlier about reveille. How was this done?

RL: Well, it came out of the radio shack. They had the player down there, you know, tape recorder. Of course it was all taped. And whoever had the so-called duty down in the radio shack, they just knew that at such-and-such a time you'd better play it. Or you had it yourself. You'd probably get the duties three or four days in a row, and you'd be in charge of the record player to play reveille and sound off taps.

DOB: So it was recorded.

RL: It was all recorded, yes.

DOB: Did people have musical instruments?
RL: Very few musical instruments down there at Little America. I guess one or two probably had harmonicas or something like that. But as far as anyone having sax or trumpet or trombone or drums or anything like that, no. And there wasn't any in supply either.

DOB: Okay. When you were in Antarctica, how much were you aware of affairs in the rest of the world and how concerned were people at Little America about, say, the Russians or whatever?

RL: We weren't really too concerned about the Russians or anything. We were able every now and then, I'd say three or four nights a week, to copy news broadcasts out of . . . I don't know if it was out of Australia or out of New Zealand. Of course a lot of it was Australian and New Zealand news, but we did get stuff in that pertained to the United States also. They seemed to relay some of that down there. And then between the chaplain and I, we'd go ahead and whip up a little newspaper and run it off on mimeograph and pass it around, go in and throw one on everyone's bunk. We didn't care. If they wanted to read it, fine. If they didn't want to read it, it was scrap.

DOB: What did you put in the newsletter?

RL: Whatever we could find in there that was halfway interesting. If you happened to read something pertaining to a certain state or politician or some bill that they were passing that looked interesting, you figured someone might be interested in it and you went ahead and printed it on up, and stuff like that. They had a pretty good rundown.

Of course we'd get the ballgame scores probably a day or so late. You couldn't follow it actually day by day, but if they gave you, say, every now and then you'd be able to copy the complete standing of the different leagues, whether it was baseball or football or whatever it was. Go ahead and print that in.

Or you might run something in there about a terrible winter in the Midwest, they're getting a lot of snow and ice or a cold area. You know, oh, too bad. [Laughs] But that was about it. And we'd get a little bit every now and then of international news. Something might be going on in England or France or even Russia.

DOB: What would've been the big issues of the day?

RL: Not really too much of any one special item I know of. Of course around election time, state elections or so on like that, they were probably interested in what their state was doing. I think before we left we were all provided absentee ballots for any elections that were known about. We couldn't vote ahead of time.

DOB: You would have been there for the 1956 presidential election.
RL: Yes. I'm pretty sure we had absentee ballots for that where if anyone wanted to cast, they could cast before they left. Of course once we got down there, there was no way to get them out. That was in November...well, they could've come back but they would've been late. They'd probably have to send them in earlier or something like that. But not too much worry about stuff like that while we were there.

DOB: Did you have any interactions with people from other countries when you were down there? There were many other countries busy on the ice at the time.

RL: On the ice there at Little America while I was there, none. But once I got over to McMurdo, they had a New Zealand camp just a couple miles, I think, from McMurdo Sound. We went over there a couple of times. I met Sir Edmund Hillary over there—he was there. At that time they were in tents, and I think there were five or six of them at that time. He seemed like a very nice person and very interesting to talk to. And of course he'd led an interesting life to start off with. That stuff was old hat to him compared to some of the stuff he'd done, I guess, but he was very interesting to meet. A very nice fellow.

DOB: Did anybody worry in the 1950s about polluting the Antarctic environment or landscape?

RL: Not that I knew of at that time. I think that all came up a couple years afterwards.

DOB: What did you do with your garbage?

RL: Most of our stuff as far as I know was dug into the snow out there, and some of it was burned, but the majority of it I guess was buried probably in some small crevasse somewhere outside of camp, you just dump it down in there and later on push a little snow over it and go to another one and that would be it.

DOB: Out of sight, out of mind?

RL: I guess that was about...well, that was at Little America. Of course McMurdo was on ground, so I think they had more of a problem there than what we did on disposing of stuff. I guess in later years they started hauling all the trash out that they made while they were there. They started compacting it and hauling it all out, brought it back to the States, I guess, for disposition or maybe Australia or New Zealand, I don't know. That's what I understand, that they started enforcing that quite a bit more so.

DOB: Did anybody worry about the living resources—the penguins or seals or whales?

RL: Well, we got the word when we first got there...I know when we got to Little America, there was a lot of Adelie penguins up on the ice, up on the shelf where we first came in. You could go down and if they'd come close, you could go ahead and pet them and so on like that, but you weren't allowed to bang them or hit them or chase them or anything like that. Word was put out on that that was a no-no.
And as far as I know, probably the same word held over at McMurdo because I know
when I got over there, they had some of the emperor penguins over there. You could get
fairly close to them, but you didn't try to wrestle them or chase them or anything like that.
But they wanted to stand out in the supply area. They stood there until they got ready to
move. No one tried to chase them out or push them out or anything like that.

DOB: And did they? Did they come around and say, what are you up to?

RL: No, they'd just come up and just . . . the little Adelies, I mean they'd come right up to you.
I sat there on the ice many times and had a couple Adelies in my lap just patting them,
and they'd just lay there like a chicken or a duck or something like that until they got ready
to move and then they'd get up and off they'd slide.

DOB: That's very tame.

RL: Yes, you could get up to them. Some of them wouldn't do it, but some would.

DOB: Do you have a picture of that?

RL: I don't right offhand sitting down with them or anything like that. I've got some of them
riding on some of the ice on the way going in there. And of course down on the ice shelf
we had the Weddell seals would come up through there. You'd go down there with them
and take pictures of them. Of course they would be flopping, going like that around.
You didn't try to push them or jump on them or anything like that. Everyone fairly well
respected them.

DOB: Did you have dogs at Little America?

RL: Not at Little America. They brought a couple dog teams, I guess, down and had them
over at McMurdo. While we were forming up in Davisville, Rhode Island, they got them
from Wonalancet Kennels up in New Hampshire. Of course I lived in Concord,
New Hampshire, and there were a couple times that they had . . . let's see. They had a
couple officers, Master Sergeant Dolleman from the Army was up there with the dogs,
Ensign Tuck, and I think it was Ensign Baker were up there for the training and running
and exercising and so on like that.

There were a couple times when I went home on a weekend, they'd ask me if I'd take a
Navy pickup and haul some stuff up to Wonalancet on my weekends. I had the truck
and I'd go ahead and deliver the material and visit the first thing the next morning, I'd load
the wife in the vehicle and we went up to the kennels and spend the day up there and take
up what they had and just look at the dogs. We didn't mess with the dogs or anything like
that. They had all the dogs over at McMurdo.

DOB: Well, today tourism in Antarctica is becoming a big issue.
RL: Oh yes. I see every now and then some ship going in there or some advertised cruise going down there.

DOB: What do you think of that?

RL: I guess if they want to go, they can go as long as they don't mess around with what the scientists are doing down there. I don't think they should be . . . they're figuring on they'll go into this base and we'll get this, we'll get that because they're not all equipped for that to start off with. They shouldn't treat the bases that are there, say McMurdo or South Pole Station or anything like that, as a tourist attraction, like a resort or recreation area. We'll go up there, we'll have our picture taken at the Pole, we'll do this or we'll do that either. I think that's wrong. But then again, if it's allowed, it's allowed, but I don't think it is. Or it wouldn't be if I was in charge.

DOB: Why not?

RL: If you're running an operation, you've got highly trained people down there to do specific jobs and so on like that, not to coddle the people coming in and give them guided tours or something like that. If they want that, they can watch some of these documentaries that come out occasionally on putting the camp together. National Geographic or PBS or something like that puts them out on educational channels, fine. But to make it like a Disneyland or Busch Gardens or anything like that, you know, oh, I rode in a tractor or I rode in a SnowGo or something like that.

DOB: Another thing that's very different today in Antarctica is the presence of women.

RL: Yes. I don't know when they started that off.

DOB: I think in about the '70s.

RL: It must've been from the mid-'70s sometime. When we were up in Newport, that woman CEC officer came over. I know they had women down there, but I didn't know just how many. I know the civilian scientists and so on like that were there, that there were women down there at that time.

DOB: What do you think of that?

RL: Well, if they're qualified and so on like that . . . it's lonely enough down there sometimes for individuals as they are. Of course a woman I guess is . . . all depends on their emotional state. If they're willing to go along with the program, then fine. If that's what they want, let them do it.

DOB: Would you have thought that in the '50s?
RL: No, not in our outfit, because we were down there more or less setting up and building and so on like that. Of course that train of thought wasn't really anticipated in the '50s that I know of. We had some WAVES in the service or you had people in the Army or the Marine Corps, women, but nothing like that. We didn't think anything about even sending them aboard ships for duty like aircraft carriers or deployed ships or anything like that, but they're doing that now. It's not for me to say.

DOB: But it's still important to know what you think.

RL: Oh yes.

DOB: In 1959, largely as a result of the success of the International Geophysical Year, which is what you were there to set up, all of the countries that had participated signed the Antarctic Treaty, and the idea was to set aside Antarctica for science and for peaceful purposes. Do you think that it's possible that that can keep going indefinitely?

RL: Let's hope so. They started out what, '57, and this is '99 now so it's been there for a few years, and as far as I know nothing has gone on. I guess you had Russians come into American camps and vice versa, Americans going into Russian camps down there. The same thing with Australia and so on like that. I guess Chile is down in there. I don't know whether France or England have any spaces down there or not. There's no reason why it can't work.

DOB: What if somebody discovered some valuable resource down there?

RL: That would be something for the powers that be to work out. I imagine there's some type of mineral deposits down there. I don't know whether they're valuable now. Of course later on they might be. I don't really know.

DOB: What effect, if any, did your polar experience have on later directions you took in your life?

RL: Not really much. Like I say, I enjoyed my tour down there, but changing my lifestyle or anything like that, I don't think it did.

DOB: And decision on future directions?

RL: No, not really. I had figured on making the Navy a career when I came back, that was in '57. I didn't get out until '72. I mean it didn't make me want to jump right on out and sign onto some contract or something like that to go down as a contract worker or anything like that. If I had the chance I probably would have had I been out, but I was still in.

DOB: So you haven't been back.

RL: No.
DOB: Would you go back?

RL: I'd like to go back myself, yes. My family wouldn't think much of it.

DOB: Would you go back for a shorter time?

RL: I'd like to winter over again down there. The conditions down there now are quite a bit different than what they were when we were there. They've got more or less plush living compared to what we had.

DOB: What's your best memory?

RL: Just the idea that I went ahead and did it. I don't feel it was lost time in my life or anything like that. It was lost time of being away from my wife and kids, but otherwise, like I say, I thoroughly enjoyed it. I met a fine bunch of people down there.

DOB: What's your worst memory?

RL: I don't really have any worst memory from down there. No, I was fairly content all the time I was there, going and coming. I wouldn't trade it with anyone for any other experience. If people want to go to the moon, let them go to the moon. They can go. I don't want to go to the moon. I'd rather go back to Antarctica through New Zealand and Australia. I love the area down there. Australia and New Zealand I think are beautiful.

DOB: Did you go there on the way back?

RL: Yes, we made a quick stop in New Zealand, then we spent several days in Sydney, Australia on the way coming back. On the way down, we stopped at Christchurch, New Zealand for four or five days, maybe a week. That was nice there. That was our last sight of any civilization other than ourselves for quite a while. It was nice.

DOB: If you were an artist and you could paint one picture of what Antarctica meant for you, what was just the essence of that experience, what would you put in that painting?

RL: I'd want to show the vastness of the area, the vastness and the isolation or desolation, whatever you want to call it. Many nights there I'd be standing outside of camp or something during the dark period and just stand there and not see anything. Even during the full daylight time, you'd stand out there sometimes by yourself and just look around and just see nothing but desolation. You'd think man... man is really insignificant as far as I can see right there. I'm just like a little tiny pinpoint in the atmosphere and that's it, compared to the overall picture.

DOB: When you were on the ice shelf, could you see mountains?
RL: Not there on the ice shelf, no.

DOB: So it really was just one vast plain.

RL: When we first got there it was just nothing but snow, just like the top of this table only it was white, and that was it. Whatever you had later on, you had to put up yourself and you had to bring in and do it yourself.

DOB: So your painting would be very white—

[End Side B, Tape 1]

[Begin Side A, Tape 2]

DOB: You were finishing up your story about the painting.

RL: It would probably be something like looking at a piece of white paper with a pencil point in the middle somewhere or down in the lower corner or something like that. There wouldn't be really much there to paint. Once you get over in the McMurdo area, you could see a couple mountaintops over there. You could look out occasionally and see the effect of Mt. Erebus. Of course you could climb up on top of Observation Hill and get a little better view there. But there in Little America there wasn't anything like that to climb on or anything to see. About the biggest thing you'd see other than the vast whiteness of it was to go down to the ice shelf and look at the ice itself. Forty, fifty, eighty foot of nothing but sheer ice floe. It was all snow-white.

DOB: When you go to a party and somebody finds out that you've been in Antarctica, what's the story that you trot out the oftenest. Your favorite to tell them what this was all about.

RL: I basically just tell them what we did, why we went there or why I went there.

DOB: Do you have one particular story that just seems to be what you think of first?

RL: No, not really. I just . . . if someone happens to say, oh, were you in the Antarctic? Do you want to talk about it? Sure. Why not? I'm not afraid of it. It's not like a bad marriage experience or something like that.

DOB: It could be a good story.

RL: It was good duty. I really enjoyed it. I can't say anything bad about the whole tour down there. I just enjoyed it. Of course it was a new experience and an experience that a lot of people in their lifetime would never see or never do. I was perfectly satisfied with it.

DOB: I was looking for a good story, not necessarily a bad one.
RL: No, I don't have any of these blockbuster stories like they have on *Entertainment Tonight* or *Hard Copy* or anything like that. It was just nice. I can say that. I would say overall it was probably the best duty I ever had, and I did four years up in Alaska and I loved that place. But between the two, Alaska was a little more activity going on up there. You've got good hunting and good fishing. You didn't have that in the Antarctic. But then again, you don't have the experience in Alaska that you had in the Antarctic either.

DOB: What would make the Antarctic more special than Alaska?

RL: Nothing really because there wasn't anything there. But the duty within the camp, once you got your camp set up and with the people down there, it was good. Of course Alaska was beautiful, too. I really enjoyed Alaska. I was out there on Kodiak and it was beautiful out there.

DOB: Did you go anywhere else besides McMurdo from Little America?

RL: No. Just Little America and McMurdo. I wasn't on trail parties or get out to Byrd or get out to South Pole Station. I guess they had some go out to Beardmore Glacier, I think it was. I think some of them went out there from McMurdo. Ellsworth was another one. But that was primarily it. Little America and McMurdo. I'm sure I would've enjoyed the others just as well.

DOB: I bet you would.

RL: I think I would.

DOB: Paul Siple, who of course spent the first year at the South Pole, wrote that the Antarctic has just a profound effect on character and personality and that practically nobody comes away from Antarctica the same as they went there.

RL: To me, it's just . . . I don't know. I can't really explain it, but I really enjoyed it.

DOB: Do you think it changed you in any way?

RL: I think it probably made me realize a little bit more how small an individual is in this world compared to the rest of it or in a certain community or neighborhood or something like that. I think so. The solitude gives you a lot of time to think and a lot of time to read.

DOB: Did it make you more of a thinker and a reader?

RL: I think so. I love to read anyway. I think it made me more so. Just about any time you looked around down there, someone was walking around, they just about always had a book in their back pocket. I'd sit down and eat and read a few pages and dog-ear the page until the next time. I think so. I really enjoyed it.
DOB: What kind of books did people read down there?

RL: Some of them brought a bunch of their own books. I took along with me a bunch of naval correspondence courses. I worked on those quite a while.

DOB: Did you finish?

RL: Yes, I finished. I took I think about eight or ten correspondence courses down there with me. I completed them all.

DOB: On what?

RL: Oh, just naval subjects, naval leadership, seamanship, administrative courses and so on like that. Just something to occupy your time. That was the main thing. If you didn't have anything to do, to me, you're wasting time. I'm the kind that likes to stay active just about all the time. Right now where we're living in here, there's a lot of elderly people. I can say elderly, they're older than I am. I'm seventy now, but a lot of them just seem to come in here and just want to vegetate. Just sit and not do anything. I like to get out around, mess around out here, do a little bit of woodwork here and there, run around here, run around there, get out and ride a bicycle around.

DOB: You came away from the ice smarter and more experienced?

RL: I think so, yes. I think it gave me a broader outlook on life altogether. And I was thankful for it. I can't say I regretted it one bit. The only regret I have was being away from my wife and two kids, but I made up for that when we got back.

DOB: Well, what haven't I asked you that you just really wish I would?

RL: I really don't know. Probably there's the reason why. The reason why? I don't know, it just came up. And once I found out you could get out of it because it was an all-volunteer outfit, once I found out all you had to do to get out of it was to say I want out and you got out. I figured I put in for it, and I had too much pride to say I wanted out. And I'd have stuck with it if I had to stay down there three years, I think.

DOB: Really.

RL: Yes, I think so.

DOB: Out of a sense of principle and honor?

RL: Just personal pride or honor, whatever you want to call it. I just felt I obligated myself to it on my own, it wasn't something that was forced on me. You went ahead and you always looked on the brighter side of it. That was it.
DOB: Would you have volunteered if you'd known it was where it was and for the length of time that it was?

RL: I probably would've just for the adventure. Just to say I did it. Someone says, why do you climb a mountain? Because the mountain's there. Or why do you swim in the ocean? Because the ocean's there. Not too many swim across the ocean, but . . . .

DOB: Anything else?

RL: No. Like I say, we get together at these different reunions, banter back and forth basically the same way as we did when we were down there, and that's what? Forty-five, fifty years later. Everyone still has a good sense of humor. There were very few of them down there that would, you know, cause trouble or anything like that, cause any hate or discontent or anything like that. Everyone seemed to be a jovial bunch.

DOB: All right. Well, it sounds like a wonderful experience.

RL: I think it was.

DOB: And thank you very much for talking with me.

RL: That's quite all right. Glad to do it.

[End of interview]