Q. This is Lynn Lay from the Byrd Polar Research Center, talking with Mr. David Grisez. Today is May 22, 2000 and we are in his home in Logansport, Indiana. This is for the oral history project sponsored by the National Science Foundation. Mr. Grisez, please discuss why you joined the Navy.

A. Actually I would say that my childhood experiences of traveling with my parents after World War II encouraged me to see what’s on the other side of the mountain. Shortly after I left high school, I enrolled in a Purdue College course. The course I was not fully approved by the FAA at that time. It was training to be an aviation mechanic. They were changing classes around and I became a little discouraged with the schooling and decided that I would rather see the world. I had heard about the Navy, living here in Indiana in the middle of the cornfields, you don’t see too many Navy people around. I had seen them during the war at the local aviation field that they had, but I thought the Navy would be a good thing for me to see some more of the world. So it was that and the possibility of learning a trade. I wanted to be a toolmaker and I selected a course in the Navy, a trade rating, that would give me at least some initial training. So it was to learn a trade and see the world I guess.

Q. How did you get selected for Deep Freeze? Did you volunteer?
A. Yes, all the initial members of the Operation Deep Freeze were volunteers. I was aboard an aircraft carrier. We had just returned from the Mediterranean and there was a notice on the bulletin board about the operation. I figured that being a ship type sailor, that perhaps I would be a member of the crew on the new *U.S.S. Glacier*, the icebreaker that they were building and that was about to be commissioned. So I volunteered. That means filling out a chit in the Navy and submitting it to your superiors. I think many thousands in other ratings probably volunteered. In my particular rating, there’s not too many. Most machinists are happy working in the shop on the base or ship where they are. A Machinery Repairman is basically a machinist, not a Navy machinist mate, there’s was always a lot of confusion about that. A machinist mate is one that services and operates and auxiliary engines and so forth on the ship, the deck winches and auxiliary diesel engines and so forth. A machine repairman is actually one that operates and maintains a machine shop. At any rate, I volunteered; the chief in charge of my shop disapproved the chit. The engineering officer disapproved it. The executive officer disapproved it. Apparently I had been a good enough sailor on the ship that they didn’t want to lose me. So the only person that approved it was the doctor in the medical department. We had to take what was called a submarine physical. It was a rather strict physical and I passed that, so he approved me medically or physically to go. And then I suppose that request was forwarded on. But someplace, somehow up in Davisville, Rhode Island, the Seabee Base, they decided they needed Machinery Repairmen, one at McMurdo and one at the base to be built at Little America. So two of us were selected. I was
a third class petty officer, the other man was a first class. He went to Little
America and I went to the McMurdo area. So basically the Navy kind of selected
from their various ratings the type of skills that they needed for the operation,
what they would need at least.

Q. Why did your superiors on the ship not want to approve your transfer request?
A. It wasn’t that they weren’t disapproving the need, but rather they wanted me to
stay aboard ship, and quite frankly, what consultation they gave me was that they
thought it was a very poor idea on my part to volunteer for such an operation that
would be kind of a “no end” thing with no future in it. This was just a special little
operation and they didn’t think it would be good for my career in the long run.
Actually I think that many people might have been of the same attitude. In other
words, if you’re an aviation officer, to go the Antarctic to spend a year and a half
or perhaps more, how was that going to really further your career of advancement
in the Navy? So many people looked at it as a rather poor choice if you’re going
to stay in the Navy. I didn’t have that in mind necessarily; I just hadn’t been to
the Antarctic and I knew basically which end of the earth it was on, so let’s go.
That’s the way I looked at it. I didn’t expect to go down and stay; I expected to
be a member of the ship’s crew. I had no idea when I checked into Davisville,
Rhode Island that it was to winter over. I hardly knew what a Seabee was, but I
checked in and found out the first day that I was supposed to be one of the
wintering over group.

Q. So what did you do at Williams Air Operating Facility? Later named McMurdo
Station.
After taking the ships down to Panama and enjoying quite a wonderful reception in New Zealand from the people there, we headed towards the ice and got our first sight of icebergs, the ice pack, and the animals that you see. The first problems came up with the task of offloading the ships. This was something all new to most of us. The ships had a lot of heavy equipment on them and the ice in the bay is of varying thickness as it grows out away from the shore. With the danger of putting cracks in it that would curtail flight operations of the planes that we had, ski type planes that we used on the ice to land and take off on, they didn’t want to put a crack someplace that would stop those operations. The planes were involved in actually photographically mapping all the Antarctic continent. That was something that they wanted to do the first part of the operation. So, offloading operations initially were kind of a stop and go thing. There was weather involved as well. When we got wind and heavy seas, offloading could not be done. Eventually though they worked out a system of breaking ice up further toward the base. We started out about 20 miles from our intended base site. There was even some possibility of not being able to build the base at Hut Point, the initial plan, because of ice conditions and build instead at Cape Evans. Finally though, they determined to build at Hut Point and the icebreakers would break a channel, work at that, and haul some of our cargo up. We would offload the cargo from the transport ships on to the icebreakers and take it up so far and then again offload it onto the ice and onto bobsleds behind caterpillar tractors and take it in further to the base site. Of course, our Seabee group involved heavy equipment operators, people that were familiar with all that equipment, but there were a lot of us though
that had been ship-type or fleet sailors, we were incorporated into those groups. I spent much of the initial time driving the smaller D-2 caterpillar, with a couple of sleds behind it, twenty ton toboggans, hauling goods up to the base area. That was rather interesting because a trail had been marked out by our advance scouting party, what they deemed a safe trail. Initially we were twenty miles out and each day that would be shortened up some. I think when we finished up offloading we were only five miles out from the ship to the base area. The trail crossed various sections of ice, in between each field of ice would be a pressure ridge, and when you crossed that you never knew for sure whether you were going to go down or on across the ice. In fact, even the pressure of the sea ice, the ice above and everything would cause puddles on the ice. It was kind of a thrill, being young people, we were confident enough in really what happened, and we did go down through the puddles that would come clear up over the tracks of the caterpillar. Of course we had the lids taken off the top of the cabs so that if something happened, we were supposed to jump out. But that was probably just more thought than anything else. So the unloading operations took longer than expected to begin with. We did lose one caterpillar and a man through the ice. That was Seabee driver Richard Williams, while he was trying to cross a crack in the ice. Actually, from my recollection and notes that I have, they had plans to drive the caterpillar across using what they called plow lines. In other words, the brakes or clutches on the caterpillar could be operated by a man walking a good distance behind it and steer it that way. And if it broke through, they’d just lose the cat, they wouldn’t lose the driver. But apparently in the absence of the man in
charge, Williams decided and others perhaps with him, that they could take it across the crack on some timbers and make it alright, but when he crossed the ice crack, it bounced down on the other side of the timbers, the ice broke and in just an instant the caterpillar and Williams both disappeared in several thousand feet of water. So that was a rather emotional setback for the whole group. But the operation continued after that and everything was moved up to the base area and construction began. I mentioned the flight operations. There were two or three type of airplanes that the Navy used mounted on skis. My understanding was that the Antarctic continent of course at that time had not really been claimed by any nation. It still isn’t officially, but just in case, we’ll say in parenthesis, the United States decided it might be a pretty good idea perhaps if in the photographic operations they occasionally also dropped small pods with an American flag and so forth in it in all parts of the Antarctic continent, just in case someone else, perhaps Russia, made a claim to the continent, we would say that we already had our flags planted. This was during the period of the cold war, so there was some strain there. This even carried on later when the following year when we were going to build the South Pole base, we might mention that now, that there was an effort by the Russians to get to the Pole first. The Pole being perhaps a matter of political importance. It’s not that it’s the most advantageous place to study science, in the Antarctic, but to have a base at the Pole had a great deal of prestige. So when we, the second summer, started building the Pole base or working towards building it, there were setbacks and Russia was heading towards it as well, we received a message from then President Eisenhower, telling us
definitely that we should be there first and get the base built, be the ones to have 
the Pole base. And that was certainly an effort we made.

Q. What activities did you do at McMurdo station after you got set in and worked in 
the machine shop?

A. To build a permanent station to winter over, we had to have warm buildings.
Initially we lived in tents. I stayed in a tent until actually into February of ’56. We 
got on the ice in December and we lived in rather comfortable mountain tents and 
started putting up the necessary buildings to protect supplies and so forth. They 
were prefab buildings and everyone, regardless of your rating or your trade, 
worked on whatever job needed to be done. If it was helping to lay the timbers, 
foundation for the buildings, or put the panels together, that’s what we all did.
And once the building started to take shape, then I worked fulltime with what our 
called the utilitiesmen. It’s a Seabee rating. I had befriended several of those 
fellows and being mechanically inclined, that was work that was appealing to me, 
so we took care of the plumbing, what there was, and the heating equipment.
Electricians and others did their work of course. We had to have snow melters to 
melt the snow for drinking water and washing purposes, we took care of that 
plumbing. We had to have heat and stoves needed installation and we had a 
powerhouse with generators set in it, so we worked on that. Our main supply of 
water was in the powerhouse. We had large tanks there to use the exhaust from 
the generators to melt the snow. We’d dump it in the top of a huge container and 
the exhaust pipes would circulate through that and melt the snow, then pump the 
water into tanks. In the powerhouse, besides the generating equipment, we had the
storage tanks, clothes washers, dryers, and showers set up for the men. Down by the mess hall we had a smaller snow melter to melt snow for the cooks to use. Then we had three heads (toilet-washrooms) that were equipped with tanks and heaters for hot water. We had rather primitive but adequate lavatory supplies and facilities. So I worked with the UT’s for quite a while. After driving caterpillars and unloading equipment, I worked with them actually until the base was complete. We didn’t need repair parts made or many machined items at that point. We had new equipment or new “used” equipment I should say. Then I helped set in equipment for the machine shop. The machinist mate that we had there actually was working with the mechanics more closely than I was and between the two we got the machine shop equipment set in and I made some of the repair parts needed during the winter. Actually I spent most of the time working outside during the winter months, working on the runway construction rather than machine shop work. There wasn’t that much of it to be done. Mechanics could take care of small items, but I maintained the shop as well. I took care of the carbon monoxide indicators in all the buildings. We had them in case there was carbon monoxide from the stoves. I was also responsible for repair of any of the office equipment, like the typewriters and adding machines, and things like that. We didn’t have electronic machines back in those days and everything was electromechanical. So if in the supply building where we had our ship’s store, which was open one day a week, if the man would go in and turn the stove on and plug his cash register in and go to operate it before it was warm, it would immediately jam up and have to be worked on a little bit to get all the mechanical
things working right. So each one of us, myself included, had a number of different chores as the jobs came up. As I said, one of our prime jobs at McMurdo was to build a runway for the following year from which to build South Pole base. McMurdo wasn’t intended to be the main base in the initial operation. Little America V, perhaps at the influence of Admiral Byrd, would be the main base. That’s where the commander Whitney, our officer in charge, set up his headquarters, whereas our commanding officer was a lieutenant commander, a pilot, David Canham, that was primarily because, being a pilot, he would be in charge of the aviation base. We were to build a runway and of course when we left the United States, the powers to be and “experts” in Washington, D.C. and other places, told us that the building of runways would be a minor operation. We would take heavy rollers across the snow and pack it down and then land the airplane on that, wheeled aircraft. Well that didn’t work out too well. We found that snow in Antarctica is kind of like sugar. It’s granular rather than flakes, and you don’t pack it. So they advised us by radio that well, no problem, just drill a hole in the ice, (we had ice augers) and pump water up and of course we had filled the rollers with water as well to make them heavy. But pump that water out on top of the snow and that would make a crust. Well that didn’t work either. And we finally came up with the only possible solution. That was moving the snow off the ice out on the bay to make a runway. There was twelve to fourteen feet of snow on top of twelve to fourteen feet of ice, and we had a few caterpillars. We had what were called D-2’s, D-4’s and one D-8 caterpillar. It became a rather monstrous job with the limited equipment and a lot of breakdowns to move that
much snow during the winter. I think the Air Force, with the transports that were coming the following year, wanted a runway that was two hundred feet wide and about six thousand feet long. So that’s what we had to shoot towards. In fact, we got that done and were working on the parking strip beside the runway in early spring. We were pretty confident that we had the runway job under our belt until it came up a storm that lasted about three days before we got back out to the strip. In fact we had trouble getting in from the strip in the midst of a storm. We got back out to the strip and all that was left, cleared off, was the parking lot. The snow had stayed out of there but it filled the runway back up. So we had to do it all over again. The bay ice, as you might imagine, freezes rather roughly, so it wasn’t suitable for wheeled aircraft to land on. Also, the weight of the snow we had pushed to each side of the runway bowed it up the middle. We had to drill holes in the ice again and pump seawater on top of the runway to make it smooth enough for wheeled aircraft. Saltwater of course was suitable when the temperatures were real low, but in the latter part of the second summer, the runway became rather sloppy because the seawater melted. We had lot of puddles. In later years, they supplanted that operation with the use of a permanent snow runway which is still in use today in on the permanent glacier area. They use a snow runway during the summer months and the ice runway is kept preserved and doesn’t get wiped out. We only had the one runway.

Q. How many men worked with you on that? What kind of a crew do you need to do something that expansive?
A. The total group at McMurdo was 93 men, consisting of 13 officers, 78 enlisted men, and two civilians. We had Army, Navy and Marine personnel. On the runway crew, I suppose there were about 20 or 30 of us, we worked 12 hour shifts and seven days a week during the winter. Once a month we’d take a day off and of course we sometimes had to take a day off due to weather. But once a month during the winter the very enterprising chaplain that we had would organize a party, a little show of some kind. He took turns with the various barracks, putting on a variety show, we’ll call it. If you can imagine 93 men isolated on the ice, what sort of variety it might be. But other than working, we’d have the monthly shows and even after working twelve hours on the ice, we got what was called the big eye. That was the only malady of some kind that we got from being in 24 hours of darkness for four months. It didn’t bother us. It’s just that we didn’t sleep as well. We’d work in the dark for twelve hours and go into the base and sometimes still not want to go to sleep. So we’d watch movies. The operation out on the runway actually consisted of two drivers for each piece of equipment. We had a sled out there with a little building on it. And while one driver would drive for an hour, the other fellow could be inside warming up. We had cabs on the tractors but no heaters or anything like that. They were originally fitted with heaters but with the roughness of the terrain down there, the heaters all broke down within the first day or maybe before they even got to the base. In some equipment we also had radios but that was before solid state equipment. So the radio tubes were broken as well. We had basically no communications at all, no communications even from the sled to the base. We would drive for an hour in
the caterpillar then the other fellow would come out and relieve us. It wasn’t hard
work physically and even though I was trained as a machine repairman, I got to
where I could drive a caterpillar reasonably enough and push snow with it. And
that’s what I did most of the winter.

Q. When you got back to the base, how important was the ham radio in the morale of
the station? You’re saying now you had no communication when you were doing
your job, but then you did have communication with the outside world later on.

A. Yes. The Navy radio operators had their regular radio equipment that could send
our reports and our status back to the states, to Washington, D.C. you might say.
But that was used only for official communications. We got the news that way of
what was happening, but much to my surprise I found out after all the buildings
were put up someone mentioned that yes, we were going to have a ham radio
station. That equipment was put in place, and then, depending on weather
conditions, we could talk to ham radio operators in the United States. They set up
a system where it would rotate through each man, so that each man got a chance
to call home or to someone back in the states. They would get hold of whatever
ham radio operator was coming in the most clearly, and through what was called a
phone patch, he would, at his own expense, call our relatives or whoever and
patch through the phone and we could talk one way back and forth to people back
home. It was a thrill. We rotated through the list of people. We were on the fourth
round. I got to call relatives and family back home four times during the winter
period. That was from late February to first of October, when the first airplane
came back in from New Zealand. So we had that communication and we got the
other news by the radio. I should mention, we found out while we were there in the winter of ’56 that Prince Rainier and Grace Kelley were going to be married. And that particular month it turned out it was the officer’s barracks that the chaplain had selected to put on the show that month. So we had a little mock wedding. Prince Rainier was a civilian man, Howard Wessbecher, a short fellow from out in Washington state. Grace Kelly was Lieutenant Tuck. He was about six foot six and looked quite attractive in his parachute gown that they fashioned. He had an off the shoulder white parachute gown and the chaplain married them right out of his little chaplain’s book. So that was a wonderful show there. We had other entertainment of sorts. We had a lot of movies. Walt Disney was kind enough to send down a photographer and donated a lot of movies to us. So during the winter we watched all the movies forwards and then we watched them backwards. And they were just as entertaining that way. It was fun to watch a whole movie backwards. Unfortunately, the Disney films that were made, we haven’t been able to find. There was a serious effort there but they were put in storage and really never made into a full-length movie or anything. So we’re still trying to find those.

Q. Through the Association?
A. Yes, through the Seabee Association and various people investigating to see if they are buried someplace in the Disney archives.

Q. I want to ask you about wintering over. What was your first day light like?
A. Well we knew it was coming of course, working out on the runway away from the base area which is kind of sheltered with hills. We could see light beginning in
the sky but it was a thrill to see, that sun peeking over the bay the first time. During the winter, it was clear and cold and actually when the temperature went lower, our weather was better. If it got up around thirty below or something like that, then we’d start having storms, high winds and blowing snow. So the colder it was the better it was to work outside, but then the first sunrise and we’d get a few minutes of good daylight each day and that was uplifting. We knew that soon the planes would be coming in and so forth. As far as living it the darkness, people talk about that even today. Some people have a problem with that. But as I recall, none of our people really had a problem there. This big eye that we talked about, that was just perhaps because we were working harder and we were in good physical shape. We ate well, we had good cooks and maybe we just wanted to sit and watch a movie or play cards or something like that. But we didn’t really suffer emotionally from the darkness, no one that I can recall had that problem. We worry about these problems of isolation, and it’s not really that bad. We were too busy to worry about it. We had been told when we went down there that we would have so much free time on our hands, that we’d go stir crazy. They took a lot of hobby things down to make, little leather moccasin kits to sew together and things like that.

Q. Like going to camp?

A. Yes, like going to Boy Scout camp. But as a recall, not many people did anything like that. I don’t think anybody even did any whittling on a piece of stick or whatever. We were too busy with other things. Together we’d sit around and shoot the breeze at our monthly parties. We would look forward to them. After
the base was once organized, our commanding officer, Commander Canham (I’m so sorry he is gone from us now, he was a super, super officer) did much as well as the chaplain to organize people and keep some semblance of a routine going. The Seabees overall, are not as military as you think of, as the regular military. I came from an aircraft carrier where things were very military and organized. The Seabee group is more like a construction company. And I wasn’t used to the lack of military organization and procedure you might say. But Commander Canham kind of whipped us into shape that way and set up the rules and regulations. We got the base organized once the last ship had left with Admiral Dufek aboard. We were kind of happy to see ships pulling out. Then, we knew we were on our own and we could get things arranged the way we wanted. Actually, we were pleased to see all the extra people leave. Commander Canham set up a weekly meeting to keep all of us posted on what had been done and what needed to be done and perhaps what should not be done in the way of things around the base. He also kept us posted on the news of what was happening back in the states. Initially there were a number of meetings where his main discourse was what should not be done. Little habits or things that would get started around the base. So he would say there should “be no more of this”. We quickly named them “be-no” meetings because we joked and said it would “be no more of this, be no more of that”. We got a charge out of that. But he was a very good leader. He was an ex-All American football player and someone that you felt confident with. There were times when we were moving snow out on the ice runway, that we wondered about the safety because with the tons of snow that we were moving, it would
cause the ice to crack. You could hear it above the noise of the caterpillar even. And you’d see what looked like, of course we were in darkness with the light of the caterpillar, the ice started looking like it was wet. And we’d get out and pat the runway there, the ice, and indeed there was maybe an inch of water on it and that gave us a bit of pause cause we’re a couple of miles out from the base, in the middle of the bay there, and we’d asked him about it and he came out and checked things over and made us feel it was quite safe. It we didn’t want to drive, we didn’t have to. But he’d drive and there was no problem. So he gave us confidence really. I think he was by far the best officer and leader that we had down there. We also had a good construction officer. There were several junior officers that I think perhaps were not really well suited for the tasks to be done. Officers and men must have a working relationship aboard a ship or a base. And we were on a very small base, very isolated from the rest of the world, and the officers and men certainly must get along very well to be able to work together. Some of the junior officers weren’t used to that sort of procedure. They had a little bit of trouble adapting to the ways of the base. The construction type people that we had were, as I said, not very military. It was a matter of “let’s get the job done” and sometimes we had disagreements with the officers about the way things should be done, mechanically and physically. But they soon learned that it seemed that if we put our mind to it, we could make life pretty difficult for them. So they learned to get along with us a little bit better perhaps.

Q. What did you do to them?
A. Well we could make life very uncomfortable. There was a rather funny thing that came up. Back in those days we didn’t have the United Fund like we have now, the United States raised funds for the poor or whatever. Each city had what they called a community chest. And when you donated money you got a little red tin feather to put on your hat where you worked, it means you donated money to the community chest. So one day one of the mechanics had, I don’t know, an oilcan or something like that. It was a red can and he cut out a little feather shape and stuck it in his hat and that was the red feather fund. Others thought that was kind of cute, so within a day or two all the enlisted men had little tin red feathers pinned on their caps. Now the chaplain was a fellow that was friendly with the enlisted men, and he wanted to know what that was. And we said, “Well we are all banding together, if you got a red feather in your cap you’ll be safe, but the rest we’re going to mutiny.” Just put out as a joke but there was some alarm among the officers and I think the next day the commanding officer issued sidearms to all the officers and locked up all the rifles. He thought perhaps someone was really talking about a mutiny. It was all just a lark but we had a lot of fun that way. Our chaplain was a Catholic from Missouri, Chaplain John Condit, and he was very good working with the men and had a good way about him. A very enterprising man. Our base was not intended to have a chapel building. We were to have our religious services in the mess hall. There wasn’t space or even material even to build a Quonset hut for a chapel. But “somehow” there was a mistake made in the packaging of the materials and all the candles for the two chaplains, one at Little America and one at McMurdo, all the candles got
sent to Little America with the chaplain over there and our base got all the wine. So Chaplain John could get a favor from one of us by donating a bottle of wine for our efforts. So one day, lo and behold, enough “extra” supplies showed up in a certain area of the base, all stacked up, enough parts to build another Quonset building. They were spare parts you might say. Commander Canham was kind of wondering about that, where all the spare parts, pieces came from, but we did indeed end up with enough material to build another complete building just as a chapel and it was furnished rather nicely, all with donated effort. We had to work on the chapel on our spare time. That was a separate operation. So the chaplain organized those things pretty well. He spent a good deal of time in our barracks. That particular barracks, most of us were all third, second, there was one first class petty officers, but the lower enlisted men, and perhaps he felt that there was some possibility of saving our souls, so he spent a good deal of time. We had good times there with him.

Q. Back to the wine, was alcohol a problem with the crew?

A. To a very small extent really. I was surprised, of course I was a young fellow then, the Navy took along enough beer that every two weeks if we wanted we were allowed to buy a case of beer. If you didn’t want to buy it, you could let someone else have your permission for that case of beer. And most of the fellows would have a beer after work or something like that. You weren’t allowed to drink on duty or anything like that. At our monthly parties, the Navy supplied a Whiskey called Old Methuselah. I think it was made by the Army or something like that. It was probably the worst whiskey that was ever made, but they would
supply that for our parties and then our doctor would be the official bartender. He
would mix 190 proof medical alcohol with fruit juice. And we named that white-
out punch because as you know in the Antarctic you have white-outs. It’s a fog
like condition where you can’t tell up from down or right from left. And after
about two cups of Doc Taylor’s white-out punch, indeed you couldn’t tell up from
down. But that was served at the parties. If you were out working in the cold all
day long, you were entitled to go over to the medical building and they’d give you
a little two ounce bottle of brandy and you could have that to invigorate yourself.
We were discussing the possibility or likelihood of alcohol problems during the
operation there. As I indicated, we were given permission to buy beer every
couple weeks and after hours use of that was permitted, and in any group of
approximately one hundred working men or women, there’s probably going to be,
here in the states or foreign country or Antarctic or whatever, there’s going to be a
few that perhaps abuse the privilege. We had a couple instances of people that
overdid it. Nothing more than perhaps being not fit for duty, perhaps or their
regular work, perhaps a day, but our commanding officer dealt with that as
required, and would get those things straightened out. Now one individual that he
really had no control over to speak of was the photographer from Walt Disney
studio. And I think that particular gentleman had brought along his own supply of
alcohol. And during the period that we were down there, the summer, winter and
part of the second summer, he was often in what you might call, “high spirits.” A
very likable fellow. Everyone loved him. Maybe that’s the reason we can’t find
all those films. Maybe the pictures are upside down or something. But a very
likable fellow anyhow. But as far as the members of the crew, when we had our parties, perhaps a few people would get a little bit out of control. But that was quickly taken care of and there was no real problem. Now, after going back to the Antarctic in ’95, ’96, base at McMurdo now having perhaps up to 1,200 people during the summer months, a lot of construction people and then scientists and fairly young people out of college, all types of jobs, actually we had more of an alcohol problem in 95/96 than we had back in the 50’s. Because alcohol in ’95, ’96 was very much available. They had three places on the base where you could buy it, plus you could make your own beer if you wanted to. That has since been curtailed and I believe that steps have been taken to eliminate any future shipping in of hard liquor. I believe they’ll have maybe beer and wine available and that’s it. And in my own estimation I think that it should be eliminated almost 100%. There’s just no need of it because in cold weather and working conditions, there’s too much work to be done to allow alcohol. And I think they could find enough people that could do without it. But in the 50’s, there was very little problem really with alcohol, other than someone feeling rather foolish the next day. That would be the extent of it. We did have one problem, one gentleman, with an emotional problem. He was a cook that was sent down to the McMurdo base. I think perhaps he was one of the last people to arrive in the outfit, and perhaps he was a little unstable to begin with. But in the first place he couldn’t cook. He wasn’t good at his trade. And he wasn’t well at getting along with others. So in my estimation his mental problem was more or less self imposed. It was an escape from reality. He ended up spending most all the winter in a little isolated room in
the medical facility because he would go completely off his rockers when he’d get out with the crew. So what it amounted to was that somebody had to take care of him. They’d use him to maybe shovel snow out of one of the little cubicles leading into a building, do some little chores like that, but someone else had to take over his cooking duties and he was a load on the rest of us. He should never have been allowed to winter over, but one of those people who kind of slipped through the cracks. But then the other thing that happened was that he was unable to get along with other people, you take one hundred men who have volunteered for this sort of an operation, maybe there’s something wrong with all of us, but we’re a little different perhaps in being sailors, we can be a little rough on those around us that have a bit of a problem. And if you couldn’t take a joke or a little bit of ribbing, then you were in trouble. You had to have a little broader shoulder than that and he couldn’t take any of it. When the moon would come out bright, many of us would bark like a dog and that would put him in the sick bay the next day, when we would howl at the moon. It seems like the moon does have an effect on people and it sure had an effect on him. He had problems, the light bulbs gave out waves that kept him from sleeping. So he would go and unscrew the light bulbs and did a lot of weird things. But like I said, mostly self imposed mental illness. He was the first one to leave on the first airplane the second summer, to get him back for medical treatment. But it was my understanding that by the time he got back to the states, he was in fact quite well and able to assume regular Navy duties. So I think it was the strain of working and being with a bunch of
rather rough and tumble men that took no quarter when it came to ribbing him. He brought it on himself. Most of us got along pretty well.

Q. What are some of your recollections about other people that you lived and worked with? Can you think of anybody in particular that you worked with?

A. I can think of several of them and several of them that now I’m quite close to. I didn’t see anyone actually for 39 years. My address and whereabouts were lost and I didn’t know about any of the reunions with the group. Being a Seabee oriented group, they mainly went through the Seabee channels to always organize their reunions and even though I kept track of the American Legion listings of the unions, I never found out anything about it. Finally, they found me and we have a reunion every three years now and it’s great to get together. Several of us are quite close. We have mini reunions in between. We had one small one here at my house several years ago and one in NY State in 2000 and we have one coming up in June, 2002. There will be seven couples getting together up in New York state, those of us that worked together down there. We laugh and talk about things that happened, that we remember. Actually our wives now are involved with one another as well and I think if I didn’t go to the next reunion, my wife would on her own, because she’s made many friends. Our group has become more closely knit, not especially talking about old times because you can do that only so long and then it’s over with, but we seem to have a comradry or an association just based on the fact that we did spend a lot of time living closely together under rather unusual and harsh conditions. The friends that I have are very dear to me. I might tell you one instance, a couple of them went down on a different ship than
I went on. I didn’t really know them before we went down, but they went down aboard a small yard oiler or YOG it was called. It’s a very small tanker ship used to go around the shipyards and fuel larger ships. It’s not really built for seagoing, but it was towed down there. In fact, two of them were towed down there behind icebreakers. And the two fellows I know were on YOG34. The tales they tell me about before they left the states and on the trip down would put McHales Navy to shame. They were sent down to Norfolk, Virginia to go aboard this YOG and have it towed to the Antarctic. Here was a bunch of Seabees that had never been to sea. Some of them had never seen the ocean yet and they were assigned to go down on this ship and they were also assigned of course a commanding officer. He turned out to be, I believe, a lieutenant junior grade. That’s the next step up from ensign in the Navy and of course ensign is one step up from dirt. And this Lieutenant JG, unfortunately was not a line officer. He was a Navy pilot. Can you imagine, a Navy pilot of low rank, not anything derogatory that way, but he just hadn’t attained any higher rank yet, and he’s a pilot and he’s assigned to be the commanding officer of a little yard oiler with a bunch of Seabees who had never been to sea before. When they reported into Norfolk and went aboard this little tin can of a ship, lo and behold the engine wasn’t there. It was in pieces on the pier. The engine was in total disassembly. So a couple of my friends, being good farm boy mechanics, and another a machinist mate ended up putting the engine back together in this ship, the diesel engine, to the best of their ability, and lo and behold it worked. The cook that was assigned was another very colorful man. They really didn’t have enough supplies either and I think he did things like you
see on McHales Navy. They were able to by, we’ll say “trading”, to obtain quite an extensive galley of food supplies for their trip. They prepared to leave Norfolk and fired up the engine. They had some problems there, almost ran into another ship, because after all they didn’t know front from back or bow from stern on this little thing. But their trip down, the stories I’ve heard were just out of this world, the fun that they had, and of course they had to deal with this Lieutenant JG who was a pilot and not a line officer. As it turned out, he had rather peculiar eating habits and wanted to eat in his own state room. Here is a boat that is about as long as what you see going down the highway now, an RV. He had his own state room to eat in or a little cubicle. But during one of the holiday periods, perhaps it was Thanksgiving, he wanted strawberry shortcake. They had strawberries and they had the means to make shortcake, but the cook had ended up being on the icebreaker that was towing them. They had a period of time when some of the people could be transferred up to the icebreaker. They’d pull the little YOG oiler up into the notch in the back of the icebreaker and some of the men would go up on the icebreaker and spend some hours, have a good meal and take a shower and so forth. And then they’d come back and board the YOG. But they had some rough weather come up and the cook was up on the icebreaker and they were back there on the YOG in rather rough weather, almost ready to break loose from the tow, and the Navy officer insisted that he had to have strawberry shortcake. So a couple of my friends indeed decided that they would make him strawberry shortcake. The strawberries are no problem, you just open them up, but the shortcake they made. They didn’t make it too short and it was more like hardtack
biscuit because they intentionally kneaded the dough extra long. He ate the strawberries anyhow. But they are very colorful individuals, both of them, and can tell you many tales about their experiences, whereas the trip I took down on the cargo ship was rather uneventful. I got assigned to the communication room. Each of us, although we were more like passengers on the ship going down, they tried to give us little jobs and I first ended up in the fire room and that wasn’t where a machine repairman wants to work anyhow. It’s hot and dirty and you don’t get to see what’s going on. So I swapped with another fellow to the communications room and was able to at least hear what was going on and got some fresh air. I would run messages around the ship for them. I did have an opportunity to contribute, when we were down in the Antarctic, and some other officials were aboard, and there was great discussion going on at the map table, trying to determine a method of finding what’s called the point of inaccessibility. In other words, you take an irregular shaped piece of land like the Antarctic continent and find what place on that continent is the farthest from sea. You have a very irregular shaped piece of ground, geometrically or whatever. How do you find that point which is farthest away from the seashore? I don’t know whether my method was used later on or not because now they have electronic means of doing that and satellites. The method I suggested to them, which they seemed to think was feasible at least, was just to shut the lights off in the chart house and spread the map out of the Antarctic continent and take a flashlight out of your pocket and hold it up over the map and raise it or lower it until the rim of light touched three places on the edge of the continent. That made a circle and when
you find three places on the circumference of a circle, you can find the center of that circle. So at least that was one of the methods that was used originally to find the point of inaccessibility. Whether they still do something like that, I don’t know. People that were down there with me came from all walks of life, just as you meet anyplace in the service. Farm boys from Missouri or small town up in up state New York or whatever. A lot of different backgrounds. We talked about our home life and why we joined the Navy and why we decided to come on this operation. For most of us it was just because we hadn’t been there. And we were out to see what was going to be. We had not been given a lot of briefing. I came in the outfit rather late and got no briefing. I knew which end of the earth the Antarctic continent was on, but that was it. As far as what was going to be done, I’d been told we were going to live in buildings but that was it. I had no idea what kind of buildings, what kind of equipment. I was not in the area where they were packing the equipment. I checked into the outfit and stood in front of the door of a Quonset hut and told the fellows what my size was and they threw clothes out at me in Davisville. And I tried them on to see if I could get into them. They said “Make sure they’re plenty loose because you want your clothing loose down there.” I packed the clothes away in a sea bag and that was my preparation for going to the Antarctic. I had no pictures to look at, didn’t know what side of the continent we were going into, what kind of base we were going to build. I was told there was going to be a machine shop and that was about it. The operation was very, very poorly funded in my mind. Much of our equipment was second hand. Our weasels were equipment that were left over from the second world war.
They had been “so-called” reconditioned and cabs put on them. But we had a lot of breakdowns. Our caterpillars were new. All of my machine shop equipment was left over from a factory down in Tennessee. A lot of our equipment was in fact second hand. Our clothing was new and for the most part was very, very good. In fact, it was lighter in weight than clothing they use now. And much warmer. But it did have a tendency to rip easily. It was a fabric with a rubber like coating on the back of it. Working around heavy equipment, it would rip easily or if you got sparks on it, it would burn a hole in it. Compared to the cotton twill that they wear nowadays that are quite substantial, but they are very heavy. But it’s a cost savings. The clothing we used had been developed along with the Korean war. A lot of it was new stuff that was being tried out. We used the first thermal boots, the first time they had been introduced. It’s standard equipment now. They were very, very good. I still have my original thermal boots, kind of patched and worn now, but as long as you moved just a little bit, even at 70 below zero, you were quite warm. Your feet were wet with perspiration at times. But as long as you kept moving, they would keep your feet warm.

Q. What prompted you to work for ASA in 1995?

A. I was making arrangements, plans to go to the reunion of the Antarctic Deep Freeze Association when I found out about ASA and the fact that they were a civilian corporation under contract with the National Science Foundation to maintain the bases in the Antarctic. With the encouragement of a friend, and former McMurdo team member, Charlie Bevilacqua, who has always been very active in following the Antarctic operations and even the organization of the
reunions and that, he encouraged me to go back to the Antarctic. So I called the
proper people and I was given a form to fill out. You have to pass a very, very
stringent physical which I did, no problem there. Passed the physical and I think it
did help to that one of the fellows I was with there in ‘55-’57 had actually
continued to finish his Navy career and in fact became an officer. He was one of
the officers, vice president of one of the companies that owned ASA. And he
agreed to give me a recommendation as well and that certainly I’m sure helped
the people in ASA to decide to hire me. They were interested as well in meeting
me and finding out things about forty years ago, when I was down there initially.
In fact, they asked me to put on a slide show at McMurdo and the Pole Base of
operations in the early days. It is quite different down there now. It’s very
modern. They have flush toilets, telephones, televisions, and radio. It’s not as
exciting in that respect. The beauty of the scenery, the ice and snow and the
mountains and the volcanic formations, that’s still there, but you can see it quite
comfortably. All the vehicles are fitted with good radios and heaters. You work
regular hours and have one day off a week. Other than that, you work nine hour
days. You have the best food in the world. We had fresh bananas. We had better
fresh food than back home, more of it. It was flown in on a regular basis. When I
was down in the 50’s, we of course had no fresh food. We had powdered eggs and
no fresh vegetables at all. Everything was canned, frozen. And we survived quite
well on that. I learned to like those powdered rubber eggs, but now they have
fresh eggs. So living wise, it’s very comfortable there now and there are a lot of
interesting people. Going down to McMurdo now, the first thing I noticed,
besides the three story buildings, when I got off the airplane, was that the ice runway is located about where it was before. When we got off the plane and flew in from Christ Church, New Zealand, I was so anxious to see the base again. It looked the same except the buildings were a little higher and of course there are more of them. They have trucks running all over. They took in to the base in a huge tundra bus, the kind they use to run around on glaciers up in Canada. Very deluxe sort of piece of equipment. It doesn’t belong down in the Antarctic, but that’s what they use. You get to the base and find out that if you want, you can check out a bicycle from the recreation facility there. The streets are just crushed lava rock and you can ride a bicycle around McMurdo now. It’s quite a bit different. In fact, the base area is well scraped out with streets and paths. And believe it or not, they have a dust problem because of so many vehicles moving around. So to keep the dust down on the streets of McMurdo, they take the brine from the water plant. They have a reverse osmosis water plant, so they have a lot of salt brine. They put that in the tank truck and drive around the base, spraying the salt water around so to keep the dust down. I’d say it’s very comfortable now. You still have wind blowing. You have a few storms and summer can be a little disconcerting sometimes, but overall it’s a great place to be. The drinking problems are worse now. There’s more people there. But golly, you’ve got plenty of hobbies. They have a weight room, two lane bowling alley and a lot of things you can do in your spare time. A lot of very interesting people, both the construction type people that are there and service people, in the service positions,
as well as the scientists. Very interesting people, who have traveled all over the world or others have been down in the Antarctic every season for many years.

Q. Does it look like the scientists belong with the ASA people?
A. Yes, there’s some good natured rivalry between them. We call the scientific people beakers. There’s a street in front of the laboratory that’s called Beaker Street. But there’s ribbing and well, let’s face it, some scientific people are so well into the subject that they’re not what we would consider the normal on the street people. They’re deep in their studies, but they are very interesting subjects. And they gave seminars in the scientific laboratory building on Wednesday night for other scientists of course. They were rather involved with the big long words and then on Sunday evening they would give a science lecture in the mess hall, very well attended, and they would brief us on the experiments and research that they were doing in various parts of the continent. So we got a chance that way, as we’re down there just as workers maintaining the base, that’s our job to maintain the facility for the scientific work, but with those lectures we were able to hear about what was really going on. Very strange things that are studied down there and the findings. Dinosaur bones they found and all the things showing at one time the continent was actually a tropical area. So it was interesting to meet them, yes.

Q. Were you treated better in 1995 in comparison to 1955?
A. Treatment – well you’re treated how you treat other people. But as far as living, boy I lived well. I think I may be the only person to go down there after forty years. They treated me well. They called me mister. Maybe because I was older
than a lot of them, but they treated me very well, yes. The working facilities were
great. Overall, any place you go, whatever trade you are in life, I think you’re
treated how you treat other people. I got along fine. Almost went back again, but
it is perhaps a hardship on my wife, although she allows me to do these kinds of
things, I think I’ll probably not be going back anymore. There are other
mountains to cross.

Q. After you left the Navy, what did you do?

A. Well, I was married at that point. I came back from the Antarctic and spent about
a year and a half in New York City. I was on the Armed Service Police there.
And met a lady, a Navy wave, and was married. I was discharged in ’58, we had a
baby on the way. I came back to Indiana, it was during the recession and a couple
different jobs from filling station up to grease monkey to car salesman and finally
a salesman in a factory that produced electrical controls. I spent, I believe,
between fifteen and eighteen years there, selling thermostats, gas and electrical
controls. I was transferred out to a field office and then back to the home office in
various positions, but hadn’t, at that point, been able to get into the trade that I
really wanted, the one that I joined the Navy for, to become a tool and die maker.
So I finally left that company, deciding that I would rather change jobs than be
transferred down to a plant in Tennessee. I went to work for another automotive
manufacturer as a development engineer. And then a second job was in plastic
molding, building prototype plastic parts. That got me started in the tool and die
work and after working there about three years, I then went fulltime in a tool and
die shop and finished my career out there, through married life and so forth. A
couple of changes there, but all for the good. Anyhow, I’ve been retired since. I had a business on the side at one time, a prototype shop, and may get back into that. But now I enjoy work at home and a workshop that I’m building and taking trips to see old Navy buddies and doing those kinds of things.

Q. Do you like retirement?
A. Yes, I do. Fun to do. I’m very busy.

Q. Well thank you very much.
A. Thanks to you and the effort to preserve the history of the Antarctic.