

Preuitt.Gene1

Tape 1

Mon, 4/18 12:34PM • 17:14

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

Shipyard, rigging, work, ship, shop, remember, tanks, play, call, elementary school, park, apply, passed, parades, guess, easy, stadium, cavalier, middle school junior, living

Interview Particulars

Date:	March 16, 2022, Wednesday
Time:	09:25-09:55 AM
Location:	IC Norcom High School TV Production Set
Interviewee:	Gene Preuitt
Interviewer:	Savian Rowe
Camera/Tech:	Robert Edwards
Instructor:	Jasmine Painter

00:00

Interviewer: Good morning and thank you for participating in our history project. I'm Savian Rowe and today I'm interviewing about your life story from childhood to adulthood, your Shipyard career and lastly after retirement. Could you please tell us when and where you're born?

00:22

Portsmouth, Virginia.

00:26

Interviewer: What was it like in Portsmouth at that time?

Coming up I guess it's just like every, you know, every individual. You go to Sunday school, play. Elementary School. My first elementary school was Mount Hermon Elementary. Then we move to Cavalier Manor which made it Cavalier Manor Elementary. Moffit. W. Waters. Cradock. That's where I graduated from in 1972.

01:02

Interviewer: How was like having two parents that work in the Navy? Or worked for the Navy?

01:05

Well, yeah, one my father, he worked for the Navy. He was actually in the Navy. My mother, she was at Naval Hospital as a nurse. She was working there. So, you know, all in all pretty good.

01:24

Interviewer: So I read that you had five siblings. What was that like?

01:28

Big family. A lot to share. A lot of sharing. Especially dinner

01:41

Interviewer: So, which sibling did you like the most?

Which what?

01:44

Interviewer: Which sibling did you like the most?

I guess I was closest to my oldest sister. You know, we did things together hung out together. But all in all, we got along pretty good as a family.

01:59

Interviewer: Which part of town did you grow up in?

02:01

The most part Cavalier Manor.

02:08

Interviewer: What was the neighborhood like during this time?

02:09

Pretty good. Playing basketball. That was mostly everybody's main thing. We played at W Waters. And people would come from all over the neighborhood to play.

02:24

Interviewer: Who were some of your childhood friends?

02:25

Well, that I still keep in touch with Calvin Roberts. Nathan McCall. Eugene God, but he's passed now.

02:43

Interviewer: What were some of the places you'd like to visit as a kid in town?

02:48

Well, we would go to the movies. Come downtown, go to the movies and Ocean View. The park. Ocean View had a park, roller coasters, you know, different rides and everything but they're gone now. Yeah. You don't know before your time.

03:16

Interviewer: Can you tell us what you remember about your elementary school and middle school?

03:20

Well, the elementary school I think most remember was lunchtime. Pig in a blanket. That was our favorite. And then when we get to middle school or junior high, cheeseburgers and pizza.

03:45

Interviewer: What was high school like for you?

03:48

Pretty normal. I wasn't just catching the bus and if you missed the bus you had to walk home.

03:56

Interviewer: How'd you feel when Cradock High closed?

04:00

Well, kinda iffy if you know what I mean. Because we had we only had like a couple of class reunions before that, you know when it closed. And you didn't have a lot of people there that you know attended or participated.

04:25

Interviewer: Can you remember anything from attending any Portsmouth local events. Like concerts or parades?

04:33

Yeah, concert, Earth Wind and Fire at the stadium. Frank D. Lawrence Stadium, which was probably before your time. Yeah. That is used to be on these grounds Frank D. Lawrence Stadium.

05:00

Interviewer: What is one of your favorite memories about your time living, living in Portsmouth.

05:05

Living in Portsmouth. They always did parades. You could come and Norcom was the band. I. C. Norcom band. Everybody lines on the streets that see them. Memorial Day parades and Fourth of July.

05:26

Interviewer: What are some of your strongest memories growing up about your family's life involving the Shipyard?

05:33

Involving the Shipyard I guess we had every now and then we would have the banquets at the Shipyard and I played you know tennis in the Shipyard League and every year we had a dinner for you know, you could bring your family

05:55

Interviewer: What was the Shipyard summer program like?

05:59

Summer Program that's where I started in. Yep. It was called the 700 hour program, if you know what I mean. Which you worked there during the summer or your time off for school. And I had three of those appointments. So actually, when I graduated then I went to the Shipyard permanently.

06:21

Interviewer: How did you transition from a summer program to becoming an actual employee?

06:26

Well, I applied. I had had three previous appointments so you know, I had got to know quite a bit of the people so when I applied I guess they knew me too. So yeah.

06:42

Interviewer: How much were they paying at the time and did they encourage you to apply?

06:47

Yeah they encouraging. I think they were the minimum wage was like \$3 something or \$4 something. Yes that was \$3. Yeah it's gone up quite a bit.

07:11

Interviewer: If not what made you what made you apply? Was it a difficult process for you going to the Shipyard and applying?

07:27

No it wasn't difficult. The only thing was the traffic, you know, lining up trying to park in the Shipyard. Which you did have passes and everything to get in and park but in the years the parking got limited so you had to park on the outside.

07:48

Interviewer: Could you describe the first job you ever held at the Shipyard?

07:53

Yeah first job was equipment cleaner. I think that's what they had. And it actually was going in the tanks and cleaning the tanks of the ships and the Shipyard. Tanks. Yeah, you know ship Yeah, I mean the ships has tanks that they have fuel and everything you know, have the fuel and then they will pump them out. And they had people call equipment cleaners who would go in there and clean them out. Yeah, yeah. Right.

08:31

Interviewer: Were you nervous when you first started? Cleaning the ship tanks?

08:35

No, not really. I got used to quick.

08:39

Interviewer: Was it easy?

Not too easy. What it was is you know the tanks were so big, you know what I mean, and you had to climb down into the depths of the tank.

08:50

Interviewer: How many people were down there?

08:53

About ten, Ten went in a tank at a time. And you know they had people to, what they call gas monitors, had to go make sure the tanks were clear and then they had people on top to stand over and watch, make sure nothing happened to the people while they in there or if they did they could call for assistance.

09:18

Interviewer: What other jobs or duties did you hold at the Shipyard?

09:22

Wow. Including the 700 hour I was in quite a few Shops. I was in Shop 11 which is the tool shop. They work on sheet metal. Well 17 was sheet metal. 26 welders. 26. Shop 11, 17, then I went to Shop 72 which I stay for 33 years. That was rigging shop or rigger shop. Riggers is taking, moving heavy equipment off the ships, pumps and motors yep, as well as working on the cranes.

10:12

Interviewer: How are you able to move up in a company within a company like that?

10:16

Well just keep applying. Apply for different jobs that came open.

10:25

Interviewer: What was a day like as a rigging supervisor at the Shipyard?

10:29

Well, rigging supervisor. You had to take on the responsibility of everybody you had rigging. You know if they made a mistake then you had to answer for it. That was the most thing. But I had a group of good people, you know, they knew their job, they were safe with their job, so that made it easy for me.

10:53

Interviewer: What were your shift hours during that time?

10:56

When I started I was on what they call the third shift graveyard shift. Yeah, 11:40 to 7:40. And then they did away with that shift and I had become to days and it took me a while to get used to it. Yeah, the night shift felt like you know, it was easy. you know what I mean? Not a whole lot of conflict going on. That's right. When I came the day shift, wooo, getting up at five o'clock in the morning and then just going through the different channels with all the different shops you know, everybody wanted a rigger. I need this I need that so...

11:48

Interviewer: Did it take a while to start sleeping at night?

11:49

Well yeah, it took me a couple of months to get used to it.

11:55

Interviewer: How did you spend your lunchtime?

Eating. Yep, that's it, you know I mean. Sometimes I guess what they call do the times, put in the time for the employees.

12:19

Interviewer: As an African American were you ever treated different?

12:24

Not that you would actually know about. Nope. I didn't personally. No, I didn't never had that problem. Thank you.

12:35

Interviewer: What was the best and worst part of your job?

12:38

Oh, the worst, worst part was working on the cranes out in the cold rain because the motto was it don't rain, snow, or get cold in the Shipyard. Yeah. And you'd be out there in freezing weather, you know, you had to put the brows on the ship as it came in because other Shops depended on, on the riggers. So that was about the worst, dealing with that cold and rain.

13:14

Interviewer: What ships did you work on it?

13:18

Mostly carriers. A few subs every now and then. But my main job was the carriers.

13:31

Interviewer: What is was like working on ships? What was it like working on subs? Was it hard?

13:34

Confining. You know what I mean. In subs they had small spaces that you have to get big objects out of these small spaces. So you had to measure and make sure everything would go accordingly to get it out, wouldn't have to be broke down. Or you get to a spot and, nope, can't go any further.

14:00

Interviewer: So the carriers like, what did you work on in the carriers mostly? Like they put you to work on the carriers, what did you use?

14:09

Chain falls, mostly chain falls and cranes because we work the flight decks. We had to do the blast doors, change them out. Mostly rigging. but it'd be sometime it'd be large rigging and equipment chain falls. Two ton, 5 ton, 10 ton to know what you have to remove.

14:37

Interviewer: Were you ever given an award for your work at the Shipyard?

14:41

Yes, quite a few. And I forgotten most of them.

14:52

Interviewer: Who was one of your favorite coworkers and why?

14:56

Well, Perniel Debro. He's passed now but he had a vast knowledge of the rigging skills and he would show the younger guys, you know, the tricks of the trade. So like I said, when you got get good people working together, it makes your job easier.

15:24

Interviewer: What's your most memorable day, memorable day at the Shipyard?

15:31

Probably with the, on the carrier. You had to build a ramp for the forklifts and everything to go up to take the equipment up and down. And there's certain carriers that you got to do certain things, or you're not gonna set them up. So they had the, I think it was the Eisenhower. And we had done it before, but I guess the guys just forget. And they couldn't get this ramp up. It took them all day. So my boss told me, say, "you go over and help them get it up". And they told me man, we've been working on this thing for eight hours, and you come over here, and in 20 minutes we're finish. Good, thanks. Okay.

16:32

Interviewer: Can you remember any difficulties at the Shipyard and how you overcame, how you overcame them?

16:38

Any difficulties? Ah none come to mind right now. Yeah, I mean, you know, it wasn't easy. You had to plan it out. So if you made a good plan, you know, nine times out of 10 everything would go but if you just jump in, and hey, I can get this out, you're gonna get to a point, uh oh what we do now. And everybody's looking at you.

17:08

Interviewer: What kept you, what kept you at the Shipyard when things got tough?

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Tape 2

Mon, 4/18 12:30PM • 12:07

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

work, Shipyard, ship, hawaii, stay, remember, portsmouth, steel, pay, drive, people, shots, crane, hammer, bus, place, italy, guess, cavalier, memories

00:02

Knowing that I had to get a paycheck. So whatever came up grin and bear it, stuck to it.

00:14

Interviewer: How was family life like during your Shipyard career?

00:17

Family was pretty good. I had a son, wife, I mean wife and son. He went to Morgan but he didn't finish so. I said easy to spend somebody else's money; as long as I was paying he was good.

00:40

Interviewer: What part of town did you live in towards the end of your Shipyard career? Did you move or stay in Cavalier Manor?

00:47

Stayed in Cavalier Manor and then after I got married moved to Deep Creek, bought a house in Deep Creek. Which is where I'm still staying now.

01:03

Interviewer: Did you ever bring your kids to work with you?

01:05

Nah, rigging is no place for kids you know what I mean because you dealing with heavy equipment and you can easily get hurt.

01:17

Interviewer: Any other Shipyard memories are funny stories you wish to share with us?

01:23

Not really.

01:28

Interviewer: What made you decide to retire from the Shipyard?

01:32

I guess things were change in the Shipyard, kinda of quick, you know what I mean. They were getting more paperwork you had to do. They was just paperwork orientated and I guess I just got tired of it. Oh, that's it. Time to go.

01:53

Interviewer: What do you miss about working there?

01:56,

The people. No doubt the people. Have a lot of good people work at the Shipyard. People that can do mostly any trade, anything you needed you know, you had somebody there the Shipyard they can do.

02:14

Interviewer: What have you been doing since your retirement?

02:18

Working up at the Church. The Church's daycare. That's what's keeping me busy right now.

02:28

Interviewer: What are your hopes and dreams for the future of the Shipyard?

02:31

Well, I hope it continues because the Shipyard has a lot of job, a lot of good jobs, you know what I mean. They supply to the people as well as the community. They do different things in the community. So I hope they can sustain.

02:54

Interviewer: What is some advice for people interested in working there, at the Shipyard?

02:59

Well, I used to tell people if you can't work at the Shipyard, you can't work anywhere. Because back when I started, I said I will use to tell them what job is gonna make sure you get to work. They will pay for you to get the work. I don't know any other job that would do that. So that's why I say if you can't work at the Shipyard you basically can't work anywhere.

03:28

Interviewer: In your opinion, how has Portsmouth evolved over the years?

03:32

How has it what?

03:34

Interviewer: Evolved.

03:36

Portsmouth they moving along. Might be slowly but they're striving?

03:47

Interviewer: What do you think they more of in Portsmouth, like what do you think they need to do?

03:50

Well, I can't really say because I'm not really a part of Portsmouth anymore. You know, I'm staying in Chesapeake now. So I really don't keep up with. Mostly when I come to Portsmouth I'm visiting relatives or friends.

04:11

Interviewer: Where do you see Portsmouth and the Shipyard 20 years from now?

04:15

Still rolling along, supplying jobs and, like I said. make it good with their community.

04:27

Interviewer: Is there anything else you'd like to share with us before we finish?

04:32

Ah, no that's about it, I mostly forget most of it.

04:39

Interviewer: I have a question. You mentioned something about they would pay for you come to work?

04:45

Yeah, they have buses back then that, say that you were in uh Cavalier Manor, and they would have, say if it's 100 and some people, they will send three or four buses. Each bus holding like 36 people. They meet at a certain place. Get on the bus. And they drive you to Shipyard. Get on the bus after work, and they drive you back home. And they had this in all the different cities. If you came way from Newport News and Hampton, they had a way, they would drive you to work. Did you know any other job do that? I tell you.

05:30

Interviewer: Especially right now with gas prices.

05:32

But then, that was back when. They cut that out because of that.

05:38

Interviewer: That was my next question, do they still do that

05:40

Nah, they cut that out.

05:43

Interviewer: Did you take advantage of the busses?

05:46

Nah, at times when I had to. Mostly, I did catch it a few times or a few weeks. But I got to just goin' when I want to go, you know, I might have some stops I had to make along the way. And they didn't do that.

06:14

Interviewer: I think you mentioned you got to work on I think the Wisconsin at one time or the Eisenhower.

06:21

Eisenhower. They were the different carriers. Eisenhower, Truman, Kennedy all of those.

06:30

Interviewer: Did you ever get to travel anywhere?

06:33

Yes. Went to Hawaii to do a job with 56 and Ship 38. I think it was we stayed two months. But yeah, you had they had a program where you could go different places to work on the ships too. Like some guys, they love to go to Italy. Italy and Hawaii was the two most famous places and I think that was because they paid the higher per diem. Per diem was they paid them to stay and to eat.

07:15

Interviewer: How much were they paying?

07:17

I think when I went to Hawaii, it was like \$100 a day per diem. And I never went to Italy so I don't remember how much Italy was. So that was you know, the \$100 plus your pay your hourly pay, so couldn't beat it.

07:44

Interviewer: How did you get involved with that program? Was it hard to get in or something?

07:47

Nope, sign up for you know, the mean, and they have, I forget what they call the list. You would get on this list. And most of the people they had, like I said, they may need 20 people but 50 people would sign up when they going into Hawaii or either Italy. Now they have a certain, I guess a group, that picked the different people.

08:20

Interviewer: So that sounds like fun.

08:23

Yeah, it was.

08:24

Interviewer: Do you have any specific memories from your Hawaii trip? I mean, did you get the, is it, is it only just you know, is it people from different Shipyards around?

08:33

Well, yeah, they might have some different Shipyard, but you traveling just with your Shipyard to do a specific job. You know, so. But most of the time the people that you go with, the people you work with right there at the Shipyard. So you know you still have fun. And Hawaii the place to go was Tony Romo, a rib place, that's where they ate.

09:02

Interviewer: I know you mentioned the Shops earlier. Could you list those ones that you work for? And then maybe just the difference between the two, well not two, but the difference between the Shops or if there were any differences between Shops where you worked?

09:19

It was different like I said. Shop 17 was the sheet metal shop. Shop 71 painter shop. Shop 11, they were a steel shop, they would make the steel almost what I call steel carpenters. You know, because they worked with the steel instead of the wood. 26, they were welders. And, where else, did I work for a time 56. 56 was pipe with the pipe shot. And yeah, ep, that was about it that I remember

10:03

Interviewer: Trying to get everything but I know you talked about a couple so I wanted to know about that. Did you ever work with the Hammerhead Crane?

10:21

Hammerhead? Yeah.

10:24

Interviewer: What was that like?

10:27

Tiring. It moves so slow, but it could pick up. Wow. I can remember. I think it was 200 tons you know and the reason cuz you had to use such big gear. You know what I mean? It could really pick a ship out of the water and set it back in, you know. Just depended on what they do. But the Hammerhead crane. Yes sir.

10:59

Interviewer: Do you remember any ship that that you worked on using the Hammerhead Crane? When that would have been?

11:04

Nah, I can't remember. Because, like I said, I worked the third shift. So, most of the time they had the Hammerhead Crane work they wanted to do it the day time and the only time we had to work if it's carry-over, if they didn't finish something, you know. We would come in and tie up the loose ends so to speak. But actual ship at can't remember one. I just look at the one that you know, fascinating to me. They pick up a whole ship up out of the water. Set it in crates that they built. Do what they have to do, and then go and put it back in the water.

12:01

Interviewer: Okay, that's it. Thank you for coming, thank you so much.

12:05

Oh, okay.