

Joseph Smith: Okay. It's March 5, 2020. We're at the NOAA lab in Beaufort, North Carolina, interviewing Mr. Randy Cheek. Here with us are myself, Joe Smith, Dr. Doug Vaughn, Dr. [Ford] "Bud" Cross, and Dr. Don Hoss. I think Don will start with the first question.

Don Hoss: This is Don. I'm going to start it off with Randy, who's a very old friend of mine. I'd like him to start out by giving a brief summary of where you're from, your education, and how you came to work at the Beaufort Lab.

Randall Cheek: No time limit?

DH: [laughter] No.

RC: My name is Randy Cheek. They all call me Randy here. Nowadays, I go with Randall; everybody calls me Randall. But I answer to both. I'm a Raleigh boy. I was born and raised in Raleigh. I married a girl from Durham. I went to NC [North Carolina] State and got my bachelor's degree and my master's degree from NC State. I worked under Dr. [William] Hassler there at NC State. My main interest was fisheries. I had the good fortune to land a job when I got out of service. Let me back up. I'm getting ahead of myself here. But anyway, my junior year at State, I decided to drop out of school and get in service to try and get the GI bill because they were killing the GI Bill on January 31st of the following year, and I got out of school in the fall. So I worked during that summer. But prior to going to work, I went to the Air Force and applied for their Air Cadet Program. I went through some testing in Raleigh and passed the physical and written test. They sent me down to Moody Air Force Base in Georgia for additional testing.

Ford Cross: Excuse me, Randy. What year was this?

RC: This was in the year 1954. So I passed everything at Moody. They told me at the time that they couldn't give me a classroom assignment because they had guys coming out of Air Force ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] who had just graduated; they had to place them first. So they gave me a three-month deferment and told me if they hadn't called me by then, just to go ahead and enlist, and when they could, they pulled me out. Well, that summer, I worked at the beach with my brother down at Kure Beach. I met my wife. She came down with some friends of the family. So I met her, and I started dating her pretty steady. We knew I was going in service because that's what I wanted to do. The idea was to get married, so she could go with me. As my luck had it, I went up and volunteered for the draft to go in the Army because the Air Force wouldn't take me in the program if I was married; you had to be single. So I went to them and got released and volunteered for the draft. Well, the draft called me the seventh of February, seven days too late to get the GI Bill. I told myself, "Well, I can put up with anything for two years, and I can get out and work a year if I have to or go back to school." I wanted to go on to grad school. That's the reason I wanted that GI Bill. But we got married, and, of course, I got drafted. I wound up in a regimental combat team, which was nothing but the infantry, and we played cowboys and Indians and lived in the woods more than we lived in the barracks. So my wife stayed home. She didn't come with me. She would have been miserable because I wouldn't have been home half the time. Then, I did go back to school. Before I started back to school, after I got out of service, my wife and I moved over to an apartment in Raleigh, and we

were working to fix it up and do a little bit of painting. I went over to Sears to get some paint in Cameron Village. While I was over there, Fred Barkalow, head of the zoology department, was there today, and I bumped into him. He wanted to know how I was doing. I told him I'd just gotten out of service and I was going to come back to school in the fall. He said, "Well, do you have a job?" I said, "No, I haven't even started to look for a job." He says, "Well, come see me this afternoon." So I did. I went out to see him. As luck had it, they had a contract with the Fish and Wildlife Service. Dr. Fred Fish was there from the Public Health Service, and he was working on the effects of pulp mill waste on striped bass larvae – eggs and larvae. This contract they had with Fish and Wildlife Service was to hire an assistant for him. So, I got that job. That's what led me to Beaufort, to come to Beaufort, because part of the time in the spring, we would be at the Fish Hatchery in Weldon, the Roanoke River Fish Hatchery. That's where I met Jim Sykes and his group. So I decided then I'd like to go to work at the Beaufort Lab with the striped bass program. As it turned out when I finished school, Jim hired me, and that's the way I came here in 1961. I came to Beaufort in 1961. Would you like me to continue on some more?

DH: Well, yes, tell us about your work with Jim. But also, one little Army thing you forgot – I believe I'm right in saying that at Fort Bragg, was it, you were the Fish and Wildlife person on the base?

RC: Fort Rucker. Excuse me. I've been a real fortunate person in my life. I don't know that I've ever been turned down for a job that I applied for. But while I was in service, we went on a maneuver down in Louisiana. My outfit got assigned to the Third Division at Fort Benning, Georgia, and we went up there to help bring them up to strength to go on to maneuver. After we got back off of that maneuver,

I said, "I'm getting out of here if there's any way possible." We had a guy in the outfit that had a master's degree from MIT [Massachusetts Institute of Technology], and he was on the lookout. He was the first one in the outfit to land a good job outside of the outfit. It came to be that Fort Rucker, where I was stationed, had been designated the Army aviation school. They needed to clear a lot of land on the reservation for heliports and that sort of thing. They needed some military people to cruise timber. So I was asked if I knew how to cruise timber, and I said, "I sure do," because I'd had a forestry course, and we had to learn that. So I got a job cruising timber. Well, prior to going on that job, I went out on a detail with the wildlife organization on base. There were some circular ponds, old ponds from some era left on the reservation. I went as part of a detail to help clean those out and try to raise some bait (inaudible) in them, and that's where I met a lieutenant, and I told them about my schooling. The next thing I knew, I was the post's game warden. So I got to be the post's game warden for about the last eight months I was in service. In fact, I did such a good job; they gave me an accommodation medal. But I was so happy to get out of that outfit that I was in. The company commander tried to get me back, and he said, "I'll give you a promotion." I said, "No, it's not worth it. I don't want it." So that was the story, I think, Don was alluding to that I left out.

DH: It was. You told me that story on a trip one time. I thought, "My God, I wish I'd have gotten that job." [laughter]

RC: But we accomplished a lot while I was there. The state people came in and worked with me – the state game wardens. They had not had a deer season open there. We got the deer season open. We did enough surveys to get the deer season open and a turkey season. One of the things I did while I was there – the state was into this program raising Coturnix quail. I don't know if you ever heard of those or not, but it was a strain of quail that they could raise, and they were trying to release them into the wild. So I went to Montgomery. I went to state people, and they gave me oodles of eggs to take back and hatch. A civilian hatchery in the town nearby let me use their equipment to hatch these eggs and brooders to keep them in, keep the young chicks in. We finally abandoned them and released them, but we never got any recoveries from them. I don't think they took it anywhere. I don't think the state had any luck with them. But I talked to Fred Barkalow about that when I met with him. He said they were quail that were mentioned in the Bible that migrated over the Mediterranean. He wanted me to let the head of the Wildlife Commission in Raleigh know about my experiences with Coturnix quail. Usually, things like that take hold, or they don't take hold. If they do take hold, they become a menace, like the English sparrow and the starling, those things. That was something that I thought worthwhile to share with you.

DH: This is Don. I'll ask one more question; then we'll go to other people. I know you came here, and you worked with Jim Sykes, I believe. Do you want to tell us what that was like?

RC: Right. I came here, and I worked with Jim Sykes. Right away, they sent me up to Maryland on the Potomac River to work with striped bass fishermen up there. We didn't do a lot of work here in North Carolina with striped bass. I know I assisted (Ruth?) [inaudible] tagging studies. We'd go up to Albemarle Sound and get live stripers with a tank truck and bring them back and tag them and put them in the holding tanks that had been turtle pens back in the old days here at the lab. Eventually, the striped bass program was phased out, and we became an anadromous fish program – which striped bass are anadromous. But we did very little work with striped bass. We were working primarily with American shad. We were trying to start some runs in the Potomac and then the Susquehanna River to see if we could get the shad to come back to those streams. We were trying to get fish to pass through the fishway on the Potomac just outside of Washington. I worked with Bob Chapoton mostly there. We would go downstream and get shad from fishermen, bring them, and put them in the fishway and get them to go on upstream. But I don't think we ever had any luck with that. Now, in the Susquehanna River, we had an entirely different approach. Frank Carlson, who had worked here, became project leader for the program on the Susquehanna River. We were having eggs taken from shad on the West Coast and flown to the East Coast, flown into Baltimore. Then charter planes were picking them up and bringing them to us in the field. We would put them in egg hatching boxes in the river and let the eggs hatch in the Susquehanna River. Then later, during the fall of the year, we worked downstream with nets and traps to see if we could catch any young of the year to see what kind of success we had with that. But that was about the end of my work outside of the state with anadromous fish. After that, we started working with the state fisheries people over on the Cape Fear River, putting fish through the locks, the navigation locks over there, for them to pass on upstream and spawn. We had good success with that. During the summer, I would work with state biologists, and we would sample for young of the year. We were getting good returns from those fish that we passed upstream. That was about the end of my work with the anadromous fish program. After that, they beefed up the menhaden program here at the lab.

I worked in the menhaden program with Bob Dryfoos, and this was a tagging program; we were tagging fish all up and down the coast from Florida up into the bay. We had magnets rigged in the fish plants to recover tags that we were inserting into the fish. We were using metal tags. We had a firm develop a tagging gun and tags that we could inject into the body cavity. We had good success recovering those with magnets in the fish plants. As that wound down, was when Ted – our director at the time, Ted Rice, had the foresight to get involved in this environmental activity that was going on. So he picked me to start going to some of these meetings, and I found out what was in the air, what the lab could do, and how we could be involved. Then, the region developed an environmental assessment branch. They needed a man at Beaufort. So Ted said, "Well, we got the man for you." So that's the way I got into the environmental assessment branch, which is where I finished out my career here at Beaufort.

DH: This is Don. Before we get into that, do you guys want to ask him any other questions about the work he just talked about?

FC: This is Bud. Did you ever work in the blue crab program here?

RC: No, no. Sam Tagatz was the only person – Sam Tagatz and George Rees were the only two people in the blue crab program when I was here.

FC: Okay. Tell us what it was like before all these technological advances of email and all that stuff in terms of just a working environment here.

RC: Well, I'm not sure which way you want me to go here. Of course, we didn't have the telephone capabilities you have today. We didn't have emails. We didn't have fax machines. We didn't have that sort of thing. It was much later before I got a first fax machine here, and I hated it. Because I'd get a fax at 3:30, and Washington would want a response before the close of business.

FC: Everything was done with pencil and paper.

RC: Everything was done with pencil and paper.

DH: Along those lines, you worked with some very interesting supervisors.

RC: Oh, yes.

DH: [laughter] Do you have any particular one you'd like to –? Any oddball things they did?

RC: Well, Jim Sykes was a good supervisor. Paul Nichols – I enjoyed working with Paul. He didn't always see eye to eye with the rest of us, but he would sleep on it a day or two, and he'd come around. But we had one fellow here that I think most everybody had trouble with that worked on that side of the lab, and that was our director.

FC: Who?

RC: Our director, Ken Henry.

FC: Your director. I'm sorry.

RC: I don't think he had much respect for the people working here. If you didn't have a Ph.D. and got all your degrees from three different schools, he'd look down on you. That was the impression I got of him as a director. I know Nick (Bill Nicholson) didn't have any fond memories of him. In fact, Nick told me they were talking one day; he was in Ken's office, and Ken said something about his friends. Nick says, "Ken, you don't have any friends." That's how bad it was.

FC: How bad it was.

RC: The regional director finally came up and called us all in and talked to us. He says, "I promise you I'm going to DC, and when I come back, there will be some changes." I said, "Well, fine. It'll make it a lot easier for me to get up and come to work tomorrow morning." It was a difficult person to get along with.

JS: I just learned something. You mentioned those shads from the West Coast flew back to the East Coast.

RC: The eggs.

JS: That's fascinating because they got to the West Coast on the Transcontinental Railroad, I think.

FC: From the East Coast, yes.

Douglas Vaughan: From the East Coast. Yes.

JS: They spread them on the West Coast, and then these fish got a flight back.

RC: [inaudible] good facility there for taking the eggs, and we didn't have one on the East Coast. So they would fly those things into Baltimore, and then we had a charter picking them up in Baltimore and flying them to the field.

FC: That's neat.

DH: This is Don. You mentioned one other thing. I've been telling people for a long time that when I came here in '58, one of those concrete turtle pens – I think it's the one you used for striped bass – had a freshwater input to it from a spring or something. Do you remember that at all?

RC: I don't remember that.

DH: Well, I'm probably lying.

RC: The ones I worked with were behind the shop [inaudible] building, and there was a row along the road over here [inaudible] going down to [inaudible].

DH: I thought the one on the road – one of them had a spring, but maybe not.

RC: That could have been. We never used those [inaudible].

JS: One other thing. This is Joe again. Randy, you talked about tagging menhaden. But somewhere in there, you tagged a lot of thread herring, Atlantic thread herring, and you and Paul Pristas got a paper out of it. Is that right?

RC: Well, that was a few. We had a boat fishing off of here – North Carolina – and they were catching some thread herring. So Paul and I went out on it, and we tagged a few, and we got returns from those. Paul and I did a small paper.

JS: Yes, that was a nice little paper for the effort you put in it.

RC: That was just a one-time thing. That wasn't planned. It's just something that happened. I think we had the tags and the guns.

FC: Randy, this is Bud. Why don't you pick up with where you were involved with the Environmental Assessment Program? You started here totally by yourself. I don't know if there were people at other labs in the southeast. It was run out of the regional office, I know.

RC: Well, the regional office – when Ted first had me doing this kind of work, going to meetings to see what our role could be, we had one man in the regional office that was responsible for that type of thing. That was Ed Arnold. As you said, I worked by myself initially. I worked a lot with the Fish and Wildlife Service and depended on them to draft reports and things from some of the projects that we went together on, and we concurred on what they did. That was a statement that we'd always put into Fish and Wildlife report: concurred by the National Marine Fisheries Service. Finally, the region established a branch there, the Environmental Assessment Branch, and Dick Hoagland was the chief. Ed Arnold was still there and another man – there were three of them in region, and we set up here at Beaufort, a field office. [inaudible] was initially the only one. We had a field office over at Galveston; (Don Moore?) was over there. Finally, we opened a field office at Panama City, Florida. So we had two on the Gulf and one here. My office here was responsible for North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. So projects that occurred within those three states were what we got involved in. My work then became involved to the extent that we reviewed all requests to the Corps of Engineers for permits to do work along the coast – piers, which were minor things. Usually, piers were no problem. But there was a lot of work being done in wetlands. Wetlands were being destroyed, especially with the highway departments. So we got involved in those things. I think we were very influential in getting some of the methods changed, the way they did the work, to save the wetlands. Finally, even Gordon Thayer worked here with transplanting of wetlands. Sometimes, we would mitigate a project. We would give up some marsh if they would mitigate it at another site by planting marsh. We had people here

at Beaufort that were working in that. Finally, they hired a man, Andy Mager, to come here and work with me. After Andy, I worked – kept expanding. Larry Hardy came over from your shop and worked with us, and then finally, Ron Sechler. Before I retired, it was me, Larry, and Ron Sechler because we were having to cover a lot of territory. But all of the requests for Corps permits we reviewed, the thing I didn't like – EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] would send us all the requests for discharge permits. I said, "There's no way we can make anywhere near a correct analysis of this." I said, "The only way I think you could look at discharge permits in a particular river was to get them all in and look at them as a group, see what the river could stand in the way of discharges, and then go with that." What they did – EPA had to do it. They just set certain standards, and if a discharge was within those standards they set, then they got to discharge. Only then, if you could find some problems down the road, could you get that changed.

RC: Randy, this is Bud. What year did you start with the assessment work?

RC: Well, NEPA, which was the National Environmental Policy Act, was in 1969. So I'd say Ted got me started in about 1970.

FC: That's what I thought.

RC: About 1970.

FC: Over the years, did you see positive results from the passing of more and more environmental legislation that allowed you to do your job more effectively?

RC: Oh, yes, definitely. Yes, definitely. Right. As we got funding and everything – and the people – we had good luck with some corps districts. Like, I had real good luck with the Wilmington Corps District. They hired biologists, as well. They had biologists in their enforcement division and in their engineering division. So we worked hand in hand with those people. We could get projects designed that were environmentally protective. The Corps, prior to my time, was doing a lot of open water disposal of dredge material. I call this spoil, and they like to call it dredge material. I said, "Well, when you can find a use for it, I'll quit calling it spoil. As long as you don't have a use for it, I'm going to call it spoil." A good example was the channel from Cape Lookout inlet all the way to Harkers Island. If you'd fly over that, you could see a spot of sand here and a spot of sand there, all along the way where they'd use the side cast dredge. When they dredged that channel, they just kicked it off to the side. In fact, I got into an argument with some of the old engineers down at Wilmington over that. They said, "Well, Randy, that sand comes in the inlet." I said, "I'll tell you what. I'll bet you a year's salary that every grain of it came out of the end of a pipe." And it was true. That's the way it got there. It didn't come in – it didn't come too far in with the sound. By doing that, they were affecting circulation in the sound, and we didn't think that was good for the sound to change. So we got them to start using bags and put bags in the water and confine the material within these bags, build a spoil island they could use for future use, rather than – we saved them a lot of money up here in [inaudible] Creek. They used to use the side cast dredge in [inaudible] Creek. They'd kick it to the bank and went there every year, dredging it. We told them, "You need to get it out of there. Find some upload spoil areas." So they did. They diked some areas and pumped into

it. They didn't have to go back for ten or twelve years to do it again. So it made sense to do it that way, and it protected the environment, too.

FC: I remember working with you on a project. When you first started, they wanted to dump acid off of Georgia into the Gulf Stream and waste and have it come up. That never got anywhere, fortunately.

RC: Another thing too – let me point out here. A lot of things came up that were beyond my knowledge or capability. That's where the lab staff was really important. If it was a radioactive thing, initially, it would go to John Baptist or somebody to comment on it. That brings up another point. The environmental impact statement came about as a result of NEPA. That's when environmental impact statements had to be written. Well, we had to review those. So when I got an environmental impact statement that covered an area that I didn't have any expertise in, I would get someone in the lab to review it and help me with it, especially the radioactive part and the marsh transplanting, that sort of thing. Gordon Thayer was a big, big help; he went to some meetings with us. We would meet with the Corps to talk about some of these projects. That brought up one point. I was working with a developer over here on Pine Knoll Shores, and he wanted to put a marina in on the sound side of Pine Knoll Shores. So we went over to look at the project. It was a lagoon that had made up into the bank there off the sound, and it was full of marsh. I told him, I said, "No way you can put a marina in here. You'll destroy all of this marsh." He said, "Well, what am I going to do with this property?" I said, "It's not your property." The State of North Carolina claims ownership to everything below [inaudible]." He said, "My god, let's get out of here. I'm losing land." That was the way people were thinking back in those days; they thought they owned that. I said, "No, the state claims ownership to that."

DH: I remember we worked together down on the Crystal River Power Plant.

FC: I remember that.

DH: We all went down one time. [inaudible] was along. We were down there. I was snorkeling around this grass bed, and I thought, "My God, I'm getting paid for this." [laughter]

RC: Another thing was the CP&L [Carolina Power & Light] deal down on the Cape Fear River. You got involved in that, and we had some adjudicatory hearings in Raleigh.

FC: I remember that.

RC: [inaudible]

DH: That was big-time, yes. That scared me to death.

FC: Did you ever get involved with that proposal to dump those nuclear submarines off the coast? There was a hearing up at [inaudible]; Ted and I went to it. I didn't know whether your office commented on that.



RC: Off the coast – I don't even think we would have gotten involved in that problem because there wouldn't be any permits. I mean, the Corps wouldn't be issuing a permit out there or EPA – either one – because it would be outside the federal jurisdiction.

DH: Doug, you got anything?

DV: Not right now.

DH: Joe?

FC: This is Bud. Do you recall any humorous incidents that happened while you were here?

RC: Oh, a lot of them. They went all the way back to the first day I was here, I guess. I imagine you all remember the time that Nick had an accident up in Maryland; a deer ran into him. That was a funny incident. I don't know that I ever told many people about it. But I was traveling. I was going up to New Jersey, or New York, really, to one of the menhaden plants. I stopped to spend a night in New Jersey. I pulled into this motel. I noticed when I got out to go in the office to register [that] one of our cars [was] parked down in front of one of the rooms. So when I went in to register, I said, "I see you've got a member from our lab here." Of course, I recognized that vehicle. He said, "Yeah, he's in room so-and-so." He didn't tell me who it was. So I went down there. I was going to clean up and go get something to eat. So I went down there, and it was Nick. I said, "Nick, let's go get some steak." He said, "Well, I've already eaten. But I've got a friend that lives outside of town, and I'm going to go out and visit him tonight." So I said, "Okay." I went on, ate, went back to the room, watched television alone, turned in, and I went to bed. Well, about eleven o'clock, somebody was beating on my door. I opened the door, and here's this yellow light flashing, going around, and it was a wrecker. He had Nick's car. Nick said, "Come on, go down to the room with me and help me unload my stuff, so I can take this car to the garage. Go get me and bring me back." I said, "Okay." I went down there, and Nick had bought, I don't know how many bottles of wine. He had the back of that car full [inaudible], and we unloaded all that and put it in his room. Then I followed him out to the garage and brought him back to the motel. I don't know if I got up with him that morning to eat breakfast or not or if he told me to go on, but he stayed up there until they fixed the car, I think, and he came back. That was one that, I think, Ken Henry would have liked to have crucified him over. He had Nick worried because Nick was talking about getting the American Civil Liberties Union to represent him.

DH: Yes, that was a marginal one. We're all sitting here waiting for you to tell the big one about your dinner.

RC: Oh, yes. I'll be glad to.

DV: This is Doug. This is one you told me while we were playing Hearts at lunch many years ago.

RC: This one's been around the world, I think. I hope all of you knew Ken Fischler. He might have been gone before you got here.

DV: I knew Ken.

RC: You knew Ken.

DV: [inaudible]

RC: Ken loved to play jokes on people. Anyway, four of us left here one day, going to a meeting up in Virginia, one of the Fisheries meetings. We got into Virginia, and we pulled into a restaurant to get something to eat. We went in, and I looked at the menu and everything. I told them, "Boys, I've got to go to the head. If the waitress comes back, order me a steak." I went on, went to the head, and I came back. Well, all I had was a fork. I think I had gotten a salad or something, and I had a fork. I kept telling the waitress to bring me a knife and a spoon. Well, she just ignored me. She wouldn't even look at me – look me in the eye. I went through that about four times with her, and she never said a word. So finally, they brought the food. I said, "Ken, cut my steak up for me." So Ken cut my steak up for me, and I had a fork; I could eat it. When we got ready to leave, they were putting tips on the table. I said, "Boys, you can tip her if you want to, but I'll not give her a dime." So Ken had to leave a tip for me. I didn't find out what had happened until later. They told me they told the waitress that they had just picked me up from an institution, and I had seizures or something like that, and not to let me have a knife, and so she wouldn't give me a knife. Ken just loved to pull tricks like that.

DH: He was very good at it.

RC: Oh, yes. He was good at it. Another one I'll tell you about Ken. I don't know how many of you know this. But Ken kept a spit cup in his desk drawer. He liked to chew tobacco once in a while. One day, Maxine walked in his office and caught him with that spit cup. She said, "Ken, what are you doing?" He said, "I'm chewing vanilla extract for my wife. We chew this vanilla to get the extract out of it." So Ken had told Joe Higham about it, and sometime later, Joe Higham was in Maxine's office one day. Maxine said, "Joe says ... Have you ever heard of anybody chewing vanilla extract?" Joe said, "Oh, yes, back where I come from in West Virginia, we've got these vanilla factories. They hire these women to sit at these long tables and just chew vanilla root all day." You can imagine pulling that on Maxine.

FC: That is funny.

DH: I didn't know –

RC: I don't think many people knew that.

DV: I've not had it heard.

RC: That was Ken. He was always up to something.

DH: I agree with that. Joe?

JS: No. I've heard some of those Fischler stories. But that's the first time I've heard that one.

RC: If you've heard some, remind me because there's been so many; I've probably overlooked some or overlooked some.

DH: He was involved – the guy sitting next to you, Bud Cross –

FC: Hey, the tape's on.

DH: – conspirator in a lot of them.

RC: Well, I didn't have that much contact with Bud at that time.

DH: Back then, yes.

RC: Of course, I was over on the other side, and you all were over on this side. Joe and Doug were on the other side.

FC: Is there anything else, as you think back, that you'd like to get on the record or talk about? Any aspect of your work that people –?

RC: Well, Nick was one that liked to pull jokes. In fact, at my retirement, if you'd have known me, had been here, you'd have thought I was a terrible person the way Nick tried to roast me in there. In fact, Ann Hall told me later – said, "He did you dirty." But Nick just loved to do things like that. Another thing – we had a visitor here one time. I think he might have been from England. We broke for lunch, and Nick wanted to take him to his house because Nick liked to make beers and things. He wanted this guy to see some of his beers. So he told me – said, "Come on. Go." So we went. I don't know. It must have been two o'clock or after. The phone rang. Somebody called and wanted us to come back to the lab, come back to work. But Nick just kept going on and on with that guy, talking about his beers.

DH: Was it John Blackster? Do you remember the name?

RC: I don't remember the name. But I know he was a visitor [laughter], and Nick wanted his opinion of his beers. Nick loved to do things like that. One of the funniest things about Nick – Joe Angelovic lived just behind Nick.

FC: That's right. Yes.

RC: Nick, one year, went over to Joe's yard and cut him a Christmas tree. [laughter]

FC: No.

RC: Yes. He went over to Joe's yard and cut him a Christmas tree. I think it might have been a pine. He cut him a Christmas tree in Joe's yard. By golly.

FC: I think that back in those days when you didn't have every – like you said, you send a fax, and right away, it comes back to you. It used to be you put it in the mail, and a week later, you get the response. You had time to do something else in between.

RC: Sure.

FC: But in those days, you had that kind of time in between meeting deadlines, and you could do other things. But now, it's just back and forth all the time, particularly with email. And your boss expects you to be at your desk and answer those emails right away like you're not supposed to do anything else.

RC: John Reintjes taught me something I'll never forget. He said, "When you get one of these, don't ignore it. [It] doesn't make any difference what you say but send it back. Put something down and send it back. Chances are, you'll never hear from it again." I often wondered – occasionally, we would get a questionnaire to fill out. It might be twenty pages long. I wanted to take that thing and write there, "Who cares? So what?" and see if anybody reads it. I felt like the things went back and went in a file cabinet, and nobody ever looked at them. Of course, I never heard anything from them.

DV: No.

DH: That's right.

FC: I [inaudible] same thing when you had projects, and we had to do quarterly reports. I don't think anybody read them when they went up there.

RC: Jim Sykes was always working on something, a new plan or something. I said, "Another one of those things?" Jim said, "Oh, no. This is for real." And you'd never heard anything from it. But I think people were doing that to justify their job sometimes. Somebody would come in and say, "What have you done?" They'd say, "Well, here, I'll show you." One other thing I thought of that brought to mind – when I was still early at this work under the region, and Andy Mager was with me, I got a cardboard box in the mail one day. It was full of blank forms. These forms were laid out in thirty-minute increments during the day. He wanted me to put down on that form what I did in each one of these thirty minutes. So I called the region, and I said, "I want to let you know I got those forms that you sent me in the mail." They said, "Good." "Well, I want to tell you what I did with them." They said, "What'd you do?" I said, "I threw them in the trash." They said, "You did what?" I said, "I threw them in the trash. You don't think I'm going to sit here and fill those out, do you?" They said, "Well, Washington needs to know what we're doing." I said, "You tell Washington to come down here and spend a week with me, and I'll show them what I'm doing." So I said, "Now, if you insist that I fill this form out, I'll do it. I'll get it out of the trash. But I'll tell you what I'm going to put on it right now. I'm going to turn it sideways, and I'm going to write in big letters, 'I spent my entire day filling out this damn form.'" [inaudible] throw them in the trash.

FC: I'd never heard of that.

DV: That's what they deserved.

DH: I do remember that.

FC: Do you?

DH: It never stuck with us either. But I remember the discussion.

FC: I'll be darned.

RC: That was ridiculous.

DH: You know how people try and create new ways to do things. Well, this was some efficiency person. They said, "We'll see how busy people are." Well, of course, they're busy now. They're doing what Randy said; they're filling out these forms.

FC: I'll be darned.

DH: I remember just barely. I would have never remembered that.

RC: Then, an embarrassing situation. One time, I went to a meeting in region. All of us would come in periodically. I got down there, and all the other guys from Galveston and Panama City were getting up and giving reports. Finally, it got to me, and they said, "Where's your report?" I said, "What report?" I said, "Nobody told me I was coming down here to give a report." "You didn't get the word?" I said, "No, sir." I said, "If you want me to do something, you better put it in writing and mail it to me." That was a situation – I didn't get the word for some reason. I know I didn't get the word and forget it because I wouldn't have forgotten that. I said, "Well, I'll tell you the best I can what I can, but I didn't come prepared to give a report."

DH: This is Don. Didn't Andy Mager go to region?

RC: Yes, Andy went to region. I don't know when – after I retired, Dick Hoagland passed away suddenly, and I don't know if Andy maybe got to be head of that –

FC: He did.

DH: I think he did. I'm pretty sure he did.

FC: He did.

DV: I think he did.

RC: He did?

FC: Yes.

RC: Andy was a good man. He was a good worker. He got a chance to go to region when Ed Arnold finally retired [and] stepped down.

FC: Yes, when he retired, he told me he was going to apparently join the motorcycle club.

RC: Is that right?

FC: He was going to ride motorcycles for [his] retirement. Yes.

RC: Well, I hope he did, and I hope he's safe. Another thing [to] let me mention to you before I quit here. When I was working up on the Cape Fear River as part of the anadromous fish program, we hired our first Black aide here. I'm trying to think of his name. Good kid, good kid. Ken Henry called me in and said, "We're going to have him work in the field with you." I said, "Well, it might be difficult." He said, "Difficult or not, you're going to have to do it." So I was concerned. I was staying during the week in Elizabethtown over here, a little Southern town, if there ever was one. What I did when I found out I was going to have to take him to work with me, I asked the lady at the motel if she would rent him a room, and she said she would; she'd give him a room. The restaurant where I usually got breakfast and sometimes at night – I'd gotten to know them real well. So I asked them if they would serve us if we came in there, and they said, "Yeah, we'd have to serve you, but if you want coffee, we might give you some left from last week." So Walter Mann was the boy's name.

DH: I remember him.

RC: So I told Walter – I sat down with him and told him exactly how it was. I said, "Now, Walter, I'm going to leave it up to you. There's a Black restaurant in town that's probably got better food than I can get anywhere else. If you want to eat there, it's fine. It's just half a block from the motel. But I'm going to leave it up to you to do whatever you want to do." So he decided to eat at the Black restaurant, so we never had any problems. Because, during the day, we were working on the river. Sometimes, we'd carry something with us, or there was a fish camp down there that would come some, and we'd eat there for lunch sometimes. I didn't have any trouble with Walter, and he was a good worker. He left here and went to Miami. I understand [that] after he went to Miami, he was involved in a bad automobile accident.

FC: In a what?

RC: A bad automobile accident.

FC: He was?

RC: Yes. I don't know what happened to him after that.

DH: I saw him down there later. I think he was crippled for life. I don't know how much longer he worked. He did well down there until he had that accident.

RC: He was a good worker. I didn't have a bit of a problem with Walter.

DH: Well, are we getting there?

RC: It's almost two o'clock, boys.

DH: Yeah.

FC: We missed our nap. [laughter] I don't have any other –

DH: Joe?

FC: – I can think of.

JS: I'm good. Thank you.

DH: I want to thank you very much. I'd forgotten a lot of this, which I'm good at these days.

RC: Well, I'm glad I got a chance to come. I've forgotten a lot [inaudible].

DV: It comes back as you talk about it.

RC: Oh, yes. Right.

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Reviewed by Molly Graham 4/9/2022

Reviewed by Joseph W. Smith 4/17/2022

Reviewed by Molly A. Graham 4/19/2022