

INTERVIEW WITH JEFF FOUNTAIN
BY JERRY FRENCH, MAY 17, 2001

MR. FRENCH: The time is 8:37 [P.M.], on May 17th. I am sitting in a motel room in Albuquerque, New Mexico, and I am going to introduce Jeff Fountain. Jeff has had a long career with the Fish and Wildlife Service. Jeff, you can start anywhere you wish.

MR. FOUNTAIN: Well, we won't cover it all tonight. I was born on September 18, 1942 in St. Petersburg, Florida. We moved to North Carolina early on, and I grew up in North Carolina. I went to North Carolina State for College. I graduated in January of 1965 with a degree in Wildlife Biology. My first day with the Service was a June day in 1962. I reported to Savannah National Wildlife Refuge, as it was then. There, I met Mr. Huelin, one of the classic examples of a Refuge Clerk back in that day. Preston W. Lane, or "Press" Lane, as he was called was the Refuge Manager. He is a legend in that part of the world. The Biologist was a gentleman by the name of Mel Melenger. He was truly a classical type individual. I worked there for the summer, and did a number of things. I remember primarily spraying Alligator Weed with a jeep. I almost turned a couple of jeeps over racing them around the dikes. Also, we went down to Blackbeard Island on occasion. Lawrence Wynland was there at the time as the on-site Manager. Lawrence and his wife had about fifteen beagles, and thirty or forty rabbits, which they raised for food. Lawrence did not have a degree, but he was a biotech of sorts, they changed that title back and forth a number of times. But he was a biotech who later went to Pelican Island. He was truly one of the legends at Pelican Island, he staid there for a number of years. After the summer at Savannah, I went to Chincoteague National Wildlife Refuge in the summer of 1963. Virginia was in Region 4 at the time. Charlie Noble was the Refuge Manager there. Charlie and I crossed paths later, at St. Vincent's Island in Florida. The assistants were Dave Hall, who was a public use assistant that summer; before he got into law enforcement. Larry Calvert was also an assistant. The Clerk was Chuck Harden who was later to become quite famous in two Regional offices. Chuck died on the job much later. I believe he was in Denver at that time. Otho Justice and Harry Wetzel were there as Maintenance workers. Otho was another classical fellow. Then there were a number of the local "Chincoteaguers", as they call them. When I got to Chincoteague, they had had the Ash Wednesday storm, which flooded everything, the year before, I believe. They had just built the bridge over to Assateague Island. There was no Park Service, or National Seashore then. The beach was pretty much closed, and there was a twenty-mile stretch of sand flats behind the beach. You could drive up and down the beach, if you worked for the Fish and Wildlife Service, but not otherwise. The ponies were there but they weren't quite as closely regulated as they are now. They did not have the deer then; the little deer that they hunt, at least I don't think they did. I worked there for the summer and then I worked two weeks during Christmas vacation. They had a rather subdued Christmas party that year. The year before, they had carried everybody home in the front-end loader and dumped them out, one by one. So they were a little reticent to have the same sort of party. However, we did just go out in Tom's Cove and gather up

bushels of oysters for the party, as I remember. At Chincoteague I did a number of things including a Beach Grass surveys and other surveys. I learned a little bit more about Mel Melenger who had been the Manager there at one time. I dealt quite a bit with the Chincoteaguers also. They still at the time spoke an old English brogue. They called me, "Geoff". [Pronounced like Gee-off]. I can remember distinctly at one time, they said, "Look it deem tamp over 'err, Geoff, look it deem tamp"! They were saying, "Look at the stumps". Then they were telling me about old John Smith. They said that "old John Smith was a mighty nice man, but he weren't no Chincoteague". The other guy there said, "Yep, he died the other day, he was ninety-five, but he weren't no Chincoteague, he came here when he was six months old"! Now that is clannish! [Mr. Grover laughs] At any rate, Chincoteague was a wonderful experience as well. The next summer, I worked at Back Bay, Virginia, at Back Bay National Wildlife Refuge. I was stationed actually out on the Refuge. At that time, they had no road down to the headquarters. You parked in a farmer's back yard, got in a government vehicle with sand tires and drove down the beach, roughly five miles below the end of the road at Sand bridge Beach. You went over the dune to the headquarters. While I was there that summer, they had a rain of twenty-one inches, in twenty-four hours, which knocked out most of the dikes around the impoundments. The Manager when I went there was Don Embrosen. He was of the very old school. Instead of taking any vacation, Don took every other Monday off, to use up his leave. As far as I know, he never left the office. The other Manager, the Field Manager at Back Bay was John Fields. John pretty much staid there, but he later went to Pungo National Wildlife Refuge. I think he died on the job at Pungo. He died of old age, but at the Refuge. Another one of the classical people who was there was a gentleman by the name of Romey Waterfield. Romey was about fifty when I was there and a very hard worked. He did everything. Romey was one of the old beach people who was from that area. He used to drive a 1953 Chevy down the beach. He never got stuck. I got stuck frequently in a four-wheel drive truck, but Romey never got stuck. Romey was very proud of working for the Fish and Wildlife Service, and on Friday nights, I staid with Romey. There were two houses down there. Actually I didn't stay with Romey then. That summer I staid in a trailer-house that had a gas refrigerator out front. And due to the location, the rental fee on that trailer, if I remember correctly was five dollars a month, which seems appropriate. It was an outstanding place. But as I said, Romey was very proud of working for the Fish and Wildlife Service. Since I think that he is retired now, I feel like it is safe to say on Friday nights, Romey would put on his cleanest and best uniform. We'd get in his car, we'd drive up to the liquor store and he would go in. They always knew "Mr. Waterfield" because he was in uniform. We would go to the liquor store and he would buy a bottle of whiskey and take a drink. Then he would go to the grocery store, where they knew "Mr. Waterfield", in his uniform, he would also do any other sundry chores that he had to do. Then we would drive back down the beach to the residence. At that time, the residence was an old Gun Club lodge, I believe. It had no insulation what so ever in it. That summer, we also went to the Back Bay Gun Club; I believe it was called, one time. It was south of the Refuge, and one of the famous, old Gun Clubs along that area. While we were there, I struck a deal with the caretaker. On

my next trip back to North Carolina, I picked up a charred, three-gallon keg, which I gave him in return for a gallon of "mighty fine, homemade whiskey". At any rate, Back Bay was also a very good experience. In addition to other things, I hold the Lighthouse Restaurant all time record, of one hundred and thirteen jumbo shrimp, at one sitting, that and a couple of beers. Back Bay was also a Coastal Refuge. We did mostly waterfowl work. We did a lot of work on the dikes, and on the dock to the boathouse. Now, while I was at Back Bay, this was in about 1964, it was not uncommon for us to be out in the marsh and find old wooden decoys. We picked these up and put them in the boat, and threw them in the boathouse. I wish that I had some of those now. But that was not an uncommon thing. In January, as I stated earlier, I graduated from North Carolina State. I went back to Back Bay until about March. During that time, the house trailer was not available and I staid with Romey. From January until March, I lived with Mr. Waterfield, in an upstairs bedroom. Romey said that he didn't like any heat in the shop until the tools started freezing to his hands. He was a tough rascal. At the time, the Back Bay came up almost to the ocean. You had the ocean on the east, Back Bay on the west, and about one hundred yards, in between. My, the wind did blow. As I said earlier, those old gun clubhouses had no insulation; I slept under eight blankets in the wintertime. You couldn't lie on your back because your feet would hurt. But we did a lot of duck trapping at that time. We used the old Ohio walk-ins. That is just great fun because you'd have a line of eight or ten or fifteen traps out in the marsh and you'd put your bands around your neck, and your banding pliers in your pocket and you'd got to each trap and there would be three to five ducks in there. You would band them and move on to the next trap. It was a wonderful way to do it. We did a lot of marsh burning for snow geese at that time. And I believe, at that time there was a new Refuge, I have forgotten the name of it. I'll look it up later. That's where I first met Larry Dunkinson who was the first Manager. That particular Refuge was on the inside of the Bay over in North Carolina I believe. Since Back Bay was pretty close to the North Carolina line. I can remember a couple of nights, when late at night, going down the beach, they had one reflector on a telephone poll, and a big tire that had come off of a barge. If it was foggy, you had a tendency to miss that reflector, and miss the turn into headquarters. More than once, I got almost to the North Carolina line twenty miles down and had to turn around, and find the way back over.

MR. FRENCH: Was that Refuge Mason's Neck?

MR. FOUNTAIN: That's it, Mason's Neck. I believe Larry's office was in a chicken coup, if I am not mistaken. Let me backtrack. When I was at Savannah in 1962, we had just acquired that summer, Harris' Neck. Harris' Neck was an old Army Air Force base if I remember correctly. We did some initial survey work, and wandering around. They did not have anybody stationed there. They did still have, on the property the three-story house that had been there for quite some time. It had an indoor swimming pool. I remember going up to the third story and walking around the old house. While I was at Savannah, I was in a rooming house and one of the gentlemen who stayed in the rooming

house with me said that some ten years before, he used to frequent that house at Harris' Neck. It was a house of ill repute then, and you could buy whiskey on Sunday. The Sheriff had been liberally plied with funds I think to stay away. Harris' Neck at that time, in 1962 was new. In March of 1965, I left Back Bay. I spent roughly two years in the Army. I went to Military Police school, and Jump School at Fort Benning. I was posted to the 97th Civil Affairs Group in Okinawa. Just as a sidebar, during that time I spent the perfect amount of time in Viet Nam. I was the first Lieutenant not to be reassigned to Viet Nam out of my unit. I was traveling from Bangkok, Thailand to Manila in the Philippines on "R and R". I got off at Tonsenut [sic] Air Base. I had a cold Budweiser and they said, "Time to board". That was my entire time in Viet Nam! After the Army, I called Josiah Mahan who was the Personnel Officer. It surprised him somewhat to hear from me again. I think that he thought he was rid of me. I said, "Where do you want me?" After some thought, he said, "How about St. Mark's Refuge in Florida?" So after a bit of time, I packed my U-Haul It, and put it behind a 1963 Volkswagen, Carmingia [sic] and toad my worldly belongings down to St. Mark's. I arrived on a Friday. My brother was with. We left the U-Haul It, and I settled myself in a little trailer out behind the office, with at that time was on the main highway. I went down to the Seabring, twelve-hour races in Seabring, Florida. I returned on Sunday afternoon and reported for work at right o'clock on Monday morning. At this time, I met Mr. Harhy Wambole, he Manager. Mr. Wambole looked at me, and he said, "Are you through playing around yet?" Apparently, I should have started work on Friday, I don't know. But at St. Mark's there was another wonderful cast of individuals. In addition to Mr. Wambole, there was Frank Zantek, the Forester, and Ralph who was the Assistant Forester. Red Giddin was the Biologist. Red is a true classic. I was a Junior Assistant at the time, and the other Assistant Manager, who arrived shortly after I did, was Wayne Shifflett. I hated Wayne with a passion. Wayne was a birder, and got to take all of the birding groups on yours. I was not a birder and I got to paint pipes, and root rake by hand, among other things. Also on the crew at that time was a gentleman by the name of Bruce Crouse, who was the Clerk. Bruce was a wonderful individual and he never once in the year and a half that I was at St. Mark's had a paper returned for any correction. He had the ability to walk in, and within two minutes, find any file on the station. He was very good. Also on the crew was a fellow named Monroe Nichols. Monroe was one of the old, old, poachers that the Fish and Wildlife Service hired I think to get him out of the marsh. Monroe could "mump" alligators, and "mump" them right up to the pickup truck. I remember one time, riding down one of the back roads at St. Mark's at about forty miles an hour, and Monroe slammed on the brakes. It was about three in the afternoon. He backed the truck up, and went over into the woods. He had seen a leaf turn the wrong way on a bush, at forty miles an hour. We went back in the woods and found a doe Deer that poachers had shot and gutted and hung. We notified another wonderful individual, Mr. George Byrd. Mr. Byrd was indeed the first, as far as I know, full-time Refuge Law Enforcement Officer. That's all that George did. Mr. Wambole kept two dogs at government expense. These were "Hog dogs". Back during that era, it was considered the thing to do, and George and Mr. Wambole would go out of an afternoon with the dogs and

hunt hogs. Feral hogs were a problem. I could go on quite a bit more about George, for example: About the first weekend after I went on duty George came by in a hurry on a Friday night, and said, "Get you gun and your flashlight, and let's go"! At that time, for law enforcement, when you arrived on station if you had your own gun, you put bullets in it. You used your own flashlight. They handed you a ticket book and said, "There you go". I can tell you that at a later point in time, we didn't even have six bullets for a gentlemen when he came on board, we gave him five, and a ticket book. Also back during that era I carried a Colt Trooper .357 Magnum. Some people carried a .22 Automatic. Some people carried a 1911 Colt .45 pistol. It was just about the size of a barn. A lot of people carried .38 Specials, including one of the State Agents. We called him "Maizio". At a different point in time, Mr. Maizio did indeed fire his .38 Special at some poachers who were trying to run him down. He managed to dent the chrome ring, under the parking light. And that's about it. He carried that bullet for some odd twenty-five years. We didn't fire them for practice or anything. You just carried it. At any rate, the first weekend I was there, George came by and said, "We've got poachers, let's go!" So I paired up with George. Mr. Maizio, the State Agent was with Red Gidden, I think. We did indeed apprehend two young gentlemen gator hunting. George had a wonderful way about him. We were completely in the dark. As you know, they hunt at night. We had the trucks rigged so that there were no lights, no brake lights, or no taillights, you could switch them off. We did manage to apprehend these two young gentlemen. As we slipped up on them, and shined the light, George said, "Boys, you hadn't ought to done that"! Which did indeed scare the fool out of those two young gentlemen. I remember that another State Agent came up. I think his name was Roy. We searched one of the young men. They had coats on. And about the time we were ready to search the other one, he started twisting and moving rather rapidly. So the State Agent reached out, and tapped him on the head with a six-cell flashlight, which took him to his knees. As it turned out, he had an alligator skin wrapped around his waist, under the jacket. He was trying to pass it to the gentleman that we had already searched. Needless to say, he didn't get away with that one. George used to do quite a bit of patrol on the old Lighthouse Road. They talk about the time that George was on patrol and found a body that had been dumped in one of the small ponds. Fortunately for George, apparently the Mafia had disposed of this gentleman and thought that they had dumped him in the Gulf, in the dark. But they had not. George did not run into the gentlemen when they had the body, and that was a good thing. We chased gator poachers, coming and going. St. Mark's was another waterfowl Refuge. It was a wonderful area. Red Gidden as I said, was the Biologist. He lived down at Mound's Station on the Refuge. Red had three children, two boys, and a little girl. His wife was an English professor. Red, if I may be forgiven for saying so, looked "just as common as dirt". But Red spoke Spanish fluently. He started to get a Master's degree. He took the course work. The professors used to come down and let Red give the tours to the Graduate degree students, of the marsh. Red was a wonderful marsh ecologist. I call very few people true ecologists, but Red was there. After Red finished the course work, he decided that he knew what he needed to know, and never bothered to get his Masters. Red and I used to do a number of things

together. He and Bruce and I used to play ping-pong. We had a table set up in the shop, out behind the headquarters. At lunchtime we'd play a rousing round of ping-pong or two. And in the evenings we would play a game or two. I managed to beat Red once, after plying him liberally with Bourbon. And that is the only way that I managed to beat him. Red and I, this being a different era, and the statute of limitations having run out, used to go to the café at this little place, just up from the Refuge. It was a roadside café with four tables. And after work, we sit there and have a cold beer. Only we did it in uniform, and at that time, Red said, "They'd know who I was if I was naked". I, being quite young and impressionable, said, "O.K., if Red drinks beer in uniform, I'll drink beer in uniform". Times have changed, and I have gotten smarter. At any rate, St. Mark's was a good experience. We did a lot of prescribed burning at that time. Ralph Oliver was the Assistant Forester. Ralph used to mark a lot of trees, for timber stand improvement and for logging. Later on, that was very, very controversial. But I remember Ralph because he finally quit the Service to become a Minister. Ralph, working hard, always carried the tin lunch bucket. Ralph carried two of them, full. He ate both of them empty at every lunch. He worked hard. There was another Forester, and I remember him saying... The Foresters back then wore snake boots. I attempted at that time to get approval for snake boots as part of the uniform, the uniform being fairly new at that time. I was told by the Regional office that the only way I could do it was if the boots could have steel toes. Gokey at that time did not make steel toes in their snake boots. We had Eastern Diamondbacks in the Saw Palmetto that went up to six and a half feet I believe. I remember that one time I had to dispatch a six-foot Eastern Diamondback. I could not get it out of the area to relocate it. So I thought that since Red Gidden used to put snakes in his lunchbox, and surprise people at lunch with them, that I would surprise Red. So I showed up with the dispatched snake and I laid it out on the walk, in front of the shop door, or the office door. We had no Visitor's Center then. I thought that this would give Red a little start. Low and behold, two very nice, elderly ladies came early to go birding. They stepped right across the dead snake, never saw it and went into the office. It gave me heart failure. But we removed the snake after that. Red also, as a sidebar, kept an alligator in his basement in the winter. It was outside during the summer. Even though the alligator was restricted then, and I don't think it was listed as endangered at the time. But Red had one, and he used it for tours and demonstrations and that sort of thing. That was an ill-tempered alligator. I never saw that alligator when it was in a good mood. It could have been just me. Red always kept road-kill in his refrigerator and freezer to feed the alligator. We were always picking up road-kill things to feed the alligator. Later in life, after Nancy, Red's wife moved back up to Tallahassee; Red kept, well no, I think it was before then, when she was still there, they had a pig named Arnold that grew to about three hundred pounds. Red and the boys, and his daughter kept it at their house. I could go on more about Red, but I will move on to another gentleman who worked at St. Mark's by the name of Halley Lawhorne. I wrote about Halley one time as one of the heroes of the Fish and Wildlife Service. Halley started with the Service before World War II. He worked at St. Mark's and had the opportunity to shift over during the War, or shortly thereafter, to the Refuge Manager series. He did not do it. He stayed at St.

Mark's. He was a wonderful gentleman, and I learned quite a bit from him. I often thought about it at the time, Mr. Wambole the Refuge Manager was a GS-12, he had been there about a year, and he was living in a house that was not paid for. His car was not paid for, and he had few friends because he had just moved into town. You contrast that, with Halley Lawhorne who had staid in one spot. He lived in the town that he had grown up in. He said that on Saturday nights, for entertainment, he used to fight. Halley was a wonderful, church-going man when I knew him, and well past the fighting years. But Halley owned his own house, which he had built himself; his pickup truck was paid for, and he was surrounded by friends. I often thought, "Who had the better career?" St. Mark's was a wonderful experience, as were the others. At one point in time, I received a phone call from Mr. Roysten R. Rudolph. "Rudy" Rudolph was a Refuge Supervisor. He said, "Jeff, have you seen the fact that Sabine National Wildlife Refuge, Assistant Manager is on the Green Sheets?" I said, "No, I didn't look at it." He told me that it was open, and nobody had applied, and "We'd like for you to go there." He said that it would be a promotion. I was a GS-7 at St. Mark's. I thought about it for a few minutes, and told him, "Fine, I'll go." So in approximately 1968, I think, I loaded up the family and we moved to Sabine, which is seven miles south of Hackberry, Louisiana. At Sabine National Wildlife Refuge at that time, John Wather was the Refuge Manager. John had been the Manager since 1961. If I am not mistaken, John retired at Sabine at about 1997 or 1998. He staid there the entire time. Sabine was in Cajun country. The Refuge was approximately one hundred and thirty-nine or one hundred and forty thousand acres. There were seven miles of road on it. The rest of travel there was by water. In addition to John, I was the senior Assistant at the time. There was a Clerk, who was another classical Refuge Clerk by the name of Mr. Clyde A. Goines. Mr. Goines was an ordained Baptist Minister who had a Church that he preached at on Sundays. During the week he was a Clerk. He had formerly worked with the Corps of Engineers, and had ridden out a hurricane on a dredge in the mouth of Galveston Bay. When we would get the word that a hurricane was coming up the coast; Mr. Goines, within two hours, would be in central Louisiana on the way north. He wanted no part of that, any more! I will tell this because it is an historical fact; pardon my French please, Mr. Goines was the first ordained Baptist Minister that I ever had, that called me a "Suckass." [Mr. French laughing] Mr. Goines, I think, while he was on that dredge, he thought he was pretty cute when he did that. When he was on that dredge, or at some time, he had lost on both hands, the two middle fingers. He only had the index and the little finger on each hand. It took him about five weeks to type the annual narrative. He typed it with one finger per hand. Mr. Goines also kept the books, as all Clerks did back then. One year, we found out that Mr. Goines had held back \$5000.00 in case he made an error. Needless to say, those were lean budget years, and John, the Manager was somewhat perturbed at finding that out, about one month before the end of the year. John was "old school" the same as Mr. Jerry French, who I am talking to, in that he liked to turn money in at the end of the year. John always managed to turn in a few dollars at the end of the year. John also used to not take his annual leave, he let it laps. The Regional office finally told him to take his leave, because he pretty much worked constantly. Also on the staff at that time, were some

wonderful Maintenance people. Johnny Mouton was the Refuge Mechanic. The Refuge inherited Johnny when they acquired Sabine Refuge in I think, 1935. He had been with the marsh owner, as a trapper and came with the Refuge. The government sent Johnny to mechanic's school in 1936 or 1937, and he was listed as the Refuge Mechanic. Johnny would say, "Oh my, I don't know nothin' about them high speed engines!" He was talking about a six-cylinder Ford pickup truck. Johnny's mechanical skills were a little behind the times, but we would be riding in the marsh and Johnny would say, "It's gonna storm, in about two days." He would know that by the actions of the plants and the animals in the marsh. He could tell those things. He had a tremendous "read" of the marsh. Also on the staff at that time was Dewey Pourche as a maintenance man. Dewey had fought in the Battle of Okinawa as a Marine. He said that he had almost gotten himself killed over there. Floyd Silver was also on the staff. Floyd was another interesting gentleman. He always had a pint of coffee with him. It was actual coffee, but Cajun coffee. It was very black, and very strong. We would meet in the shop before eight o'clock, about fifteen minutes before work started to line out the day. I would see Floyd pouring coffee into his cup. At three-thirty Floyd would still be pouring coffee into his cup, out of that pint thermos. It being Cajun coffee, he only poured about a quarter of an inch in the bottom of that cup each time. At any rate, at Sabine, we really got into chasing gator poachers. In fact, that was most of what I did. That being a different era, we had four boats, including a 1955 Crisscraft with a V-8 engine in it. It had a wooden hull. We had two in-board-out-boards, and we had one out-board, I think. No, we had two out-boards. There was something like one hundred miles of canals, oilfield canals that were as straight as an arrow on the Refuge. The Refuge went from Calcasieu Lake to Sabine Lake. The canals started at Lake Calcasieu, and ran straight for about ten or fifteen miles. Then there was a cross canal. At the cross canals, there was an island in the middle of the canal that had a trapper's cabin on it. Sabine, at that time had a very, very large trapping program. The trappers were wonderful fellows. They often had me sample the food that they were cooking. I think I ate Muskrat, Nutria, and a little of everything else in a gumbo. But it was a good gumbo. When they got through, you could eat anything. Also in the middle of this island, in each of the areas, John has erected a forty-foot Coast Guard tower. These were the kind that used to be along the channels that had markers on them. The towers had ladders to climb and a little parapet at the top. I spent probably one thousand hours, or better, in the three years that I was there, on top of those towers at night looking for gator poachers. I never saw any, but I spent a lot of time looking. The first day that I was at Sabine, John said, "Let's go, I'll show you the Refuge. And you're going to be taking salinity samples, and I'll show you the sample sites." We took off down the canal, and for like three hours, we rode down this canal, and all I could see was the spoil on either side and the brush on the spoil. I had some doubts about my intelligence in taking this job. The in-board-out-board we were in would run thirty-five miles an hour, and John ran thirty-five miles an hour. The canals are about thirty feet wide. More on that later. We went through the canal out to the other end, down to where Jean Lafitte was supposed to have hidden some treasure. It was way at the back, and people had dug for it illegally a number of times. Some old gentleman, a

trapper there in the 1930s supposedly hid ten thousand dollars, and couldn't find it the next day. He was supposed to have put it in can, dug a hole and buried it. People had dug all over, looking for that still. We went out into Sabine Lake, on the Texas border, and the boat would run thirty-five, and John ran thirty-five. The waves were three feet high. Needless to say, I wound up buying a stainless steel thermos, after that event. We went way to the northwest end of the Refuge, and we went back into a bayou, which was not straight like a canal, but it was a bayou. John said that we would take a salinity sample back here. So, we started up the bayou. We went about one hundred yards, and the one hundred-horse motor bogged down in the mud, and over heated. We waited for it to cool off again, and got it up. We went another quarter of a mile and bogged down in the mud again. We did that for about two miles back up that bayou. John said, "Here is where you take the salinity sample." Needless to say, in three years, I never managed to take a salinity sample there. One of the reasons was, back then there was no radio coverage and as John said, "If you're not in the next day, we look for you." I chose not to spend the night in the marsh, back on that bayou to take a salinity sample. We did a lot of marsh management and we did a lot of gator poacher patrol. I can remember that the year before me, there was a man who became a Game Agent, made \$3000.00 in over time on alligator patrol. The Regional office had told John that this was unacceptable. So I patrolled exactly the same amount on time and made no hours of over time. Such was the way it was back then. One night I was on patrol near the road with Mr. Johnny Mouton. We were on top of a trapper's cabin which was about two or three hundred yards off of the road. We could see observe the road, and any action that might go on. We did indeed observe a car coming up. But let me digress a second; While we were sitting there, I swung my arm up through the air, in the dark, and I met resistance to my arm, and my hand. Not an uncommon feature down there, the mosquitoes were so thick, I tell this for the truth, I did indeed meet resistance. I used roughly a case, of foamy OFF a year. [Insect repellent]

It was the only thing that you could put on night after night, and it didn't burn, and eat your skin. While I am digressing, I will also say that when we moved in, we move into a house down at the end. There were three houses. Two of them were wooden, and we were in a cinderblock house. The cinderblock house, and one of the wooden houses had been condemned in 1962. We still lived in them. And this is the truth, at night as dusk fell; we had to turn up the volume on the T.V. because of the mosquitoes under the eaves. Also, I had put a window air conditioning unit in, the house not having any air conditioning, and I didn't put a screen around it. I noticed that some people had screens covering all of there air conditioners. I didn't think much about it. But after three months of running the fan started clanging. I took the case, and there was a solid honeycomb of mosquito bodies in there. So I put a screen over the air conditioner. The mosquitoes were so exciting in fact, that dogs didn't stay out at night. You brought your dogs in. The only cattle that were on the Refuge were Brahmas, which they use for rodeo stock. I have digressed from my nighttime gator-poaching story. Johnny and I were on the roof, and we saw a car come down the road, and it stopped. It would go a little ways, and it would stop. Needless to say, this got the heart going a little faster, and the adrenalin

going. It when down the road again, and stopped again, it when to approximately past us, and up the road a little ways. We could see six, or eight or ten miles north to south of this one paved road. It came up to where a cross canal and a bridge were, stopped and the door opened. We said, "Let's go get them." I was driving, I think, a 1968 Chevrolet straight-drive V-8, with bubble gums on top. We were back down a board road about two or three hundred yards. So we jumped in the car and took off after them. We didn't run over forty-five, or fifty with no lights on the board road, but in order to get to them without being seen; gator poachers being quite aware of their surroundings, we were running one hundred and five miles an hour with no lights down the highway, to come up on them. About the time that we were about five hundred or one thousand yards from them, the lights went off, and the car jerked. And so I put the coals to it. It turned out that they were stopped dead in the middle of the road. I did indeed slide to within ten feet of their bumper. I managed to get out of the car, my knees just knocking pistol drawn. I went to the car and this young blonde lady looks at me and says, "What you say, honey?" [Impersonating a drunken, slurred speech] She was as drunk as a hoot owl. Her boyfriend was passed out in the seat beside her. This being the old days, we did not have a tie-in with the State Troopers; we did not have a tie-in with the Highway Patrol. I said, "Lady, go home!" and got back in my car. As a side bar to this story, about two months later I was in Hackberry, Louisiana paying the phone bill, my wife at the time was with me, we walked in the office, and heard, "What you say, honey?" There she was. The Cajuns are wonderful people, wonderful people. We had, out of one hundred and thirty-nine thousand acres ten thousand acres open for hunting. I used to run the check station at the hunt. One Tuesday, we two groups of hunters on ten thousand acres, and they got into a fistfight over the same pond. A particularly nice pond, as it was, but they got into a fistfight. A number of the other Cajun hunters, I used to check them, and they would come out and there were six or eight of them. They had a little short Lab puppy. They would have to carry it out of the marsh at the end of the day. I will digress again; the marsh in that part of Louisiana, if you were digging a ditch or making a dike, you would dig down with a regular dragline bucket, usually on floating draglines or amphibious draglines. You would dig down and dump the bucket and the mud and soup would run about fifty yards out in each direction. You let it dry and gradually kept dumping. So you had fifty-yard wide dike when you were done. I can remember wading the marsh that was waist deep, the water came to my waist, but the mud was knee deep under the water. You could cover about two hundred yards and would just beat you to death. Back to the Cajun hunters; I would check them, and they would come out with a limit of ducks. They would watch me really carefully. I would count the points on the ducks, and count the ducks and that sort of thing. I would pass them on through and they would nod and go about twenty yards down. Then they would reach into a wader, or reach under something and pull out a bonus skarp [sic] and say, "Gotcha!" and laugh and take off. I remember that once, I was working, and happened to see a truck backed up to a ditch that off from the main highway. The truck was parked right next to a sign that said, "Closed Area." As it turned out, that gentleman had gotten out, and gone hunting back in the marsh, behind that closed area. So I wrote him a citation notice, a "pink slip"

as it was at the time, like everything going to Federal court at that time. I had taken the information down, and as it turned out, he was the nephew or cousin of a State Game Agent. I thought that professional courtesy might apply here, and I contacted the State Agent. I said, "I've got your nephew down there, behind the Closed Area sign, he said he couldn't read." The State Agent said, "Hell no he can't read, book the sonofabitch, maybe he'll learn to read!" So we did. I caught my milkman, also hunting in a closed area on a foggy morning. One Sunday morning my dog took off. He was a Black Lab. He was real smart. He would stay in the water if a four-foot or less alligator was nearby, and get out of the water if a bigger alligator came. This particular dog would also fetch oysters. He would kind of swim along, so his feet would touch the bottom, and if he felt an oyster shell, he'd dive down and get it. He didn't know when they were in season, however. He also spent three years trying to fetch a railroad tie out of the barrow ditch. We'd down there, and you could hear him down there splashing. He would go down, and come up and howl, and go down and come up and howl. He never did get that railroad tie. On another occasion, John Walthour and I were, on a Tuesday morning in the spring, in the office and we heard shots. We had the windows open of course, due to no air conditioning. John had me go in a different truck and block the road off. He went in and came out with two gentlemen in bib coveralls, and barefooted. They had one Merganser with them. The gentlemen were just as nice as they could be, they said, [Mr. Fountain attempts to use a Cajun accent] "You know how it is, my wife, she pregnant. When she pregnant, she get that duck taste. When she get that duck taste, nothin' do but I gotta go get her a duck." That is, if you can call a Merganser, a duck! John said, "Well, we're gonna have to write you up." "Oh my," he said, "Can I pay you now? Oh mercy, can I pay ya?" John said, "No, you're going to have to go to Federal court." "Oh my goodness!" So at any rate, we wrote them up, and four or five months later, they appear in Federal court. This time, they've got shoes on, still got the bib coveralls on, and they are real nice. They were always polite and nice. The Judge calls them up, and they say, "Oh my your honor, can we pay ya?" He said, "No, I want to hear your case. How do you plead?" "We plead guilty, your honor, can we pay ya?" He said, "Well, what do you do?" The gentlemen said that they were fishermen. "We had a bad year last year." The Judge said, "Yes, you can, one hundred dollars, and court costs." At that, the guy just beamed a big smile, walked over to the bailiff, pulled out a wad of one hundred dollar bills, peeled off the money and paid him. It turned out that he owned two, ninety-foot Menhaden boats. At the point in time when I was at Sabine, there were only two or three alligator poachers who were still active. The reason being was that there was a Federal Agent by the name of Rudy Osbolt. He was of the old "catch dog" style of Agents. Rudy went into the marsh and lived there for ten straight weeks, never coming out. He had our guys drop food off for him. What I used to do with John was that we would work from eight to four, go have supper, and go out and patrol from five, until one in the morning. Then repeat the process, day after day. Rudy, on the other hand, thought that we weren't giving enough effort. At one time we almost had a fistfight over it because I had only been out five nights in a row. Rudy was quite enthusiastic about his work. But at any rate, he caught every amateur gator poacher there was. There were two that he did

not catch. One was a man by the name Johnny Boudreaux, and the other by the name of Amos Posey. Now Doug Kershaw who was from Hackberry, Louisiana sang a song called, "Alligator Man." And he talked about Amos Moses. The people that he talked about were a composite of these two gator poachers. Mr. Boudreaux was only caught once, and that was when he was hunting from a motorcycle. They jumped him by the side of the road, and the motorcycle got away from him. As I understand it, while he was in the slammer, the Sheriff had him over at his house mowing the grass and things like that. Johnny later got caught for doing a little armed robbery, I do believe, and hung himself with his necktie, in his jail cell. Johnny never owned a tie in his life. It was never investigated. But Johnny was known to be quite a talker. In fact, Johnny turned in most of the other gator poachers. He told about where they would hunt, and where they wouldn't hunt. Before I get to Amos, Johnny had a sixteen-foot aluminum flat, with a one hundred and fifteen horsepower Mercury on it. The State of Louisiana had a Game Agent by the name of James Nunez. Remember this is 1968, or 1969. James had a racing hull, seventeen feet long with two seats, with one hundred and fifty horsepower racing Johnson motor. It had to be rebuilt every fifteen or twenty hours. Mr. Nunez's boat would run sixty-five miles an hour. Mr. Boudreaux's boat would run sixty-three miles an hour. Mr. Nunez would run sixty-five miles an hour, as would Mr. Boudreaux, at night, with no lights in the canals, thirty feet wide. We ran thirty-five miles an hour, at night, with no lights, in the canal. The way that you knew that you were getting a little off course was that the bushes would start to slap you in the face. You would move back over to the center. Now, James had his people wear a helmet in that boat. James slept about thirty minutes a night. He was pretty famous among the poachers. The only time that James fell in behind Mr. Boudreaux, Johnny had about a five-mile start on him. He hid in one of the bayous and he never got him. But back then, it was a different time and the Cajuns, no matter how the situation was, considered it sport. Our boys jumped Johnny one night, and he happened to turn four aircraft landing lights on, in their faces. They however took offense at that, and managed to shoot one of them out. Which offended Johnny to no end. Generally speaking, firearms were not used. Except John Waltham, my boss, one time fired a shot across the bow of a tugboat to make it stop. It was spot lighting deer at night. They did indeed stop. Amos Posey, the other poacher was not in the same league as Johnny Boudreaux. Johnny hunted, at that time there were two counties in Texas that were open for the legal take of alligator. Johnny hunted from south Texas, from down near Padre Island, all the way to probably Fort Myers on the Florida coast. He would go up and down the coast, at his leisure, which made him quite difficult to come across. But Mr. Posey, at one time, Mr. Osbolt had left and another Agent and as a symbol of the high regard that the Cajuns had of Rudy Osbolt, who wasn't an old time catch dog agent, when he left the Cajun community presented him with a new shotgun. They did enjoy the sport of trying to outwit Rudy. Frequently they didn't succeed. The new Agent was a man by the name of Andy Persley. Andy was on patrol, and John, and I think John would admit this we did not do daylight patrol. Because as John Waltham said, "I can't bring myself to pay two guys to fish all day." If you weren't fishing, people knew right away that you were our looking for them. The

poachers certainly knew, even at a great distance. John wouldn't pay us to fish. So we didn't patrol during the day, and Andy Persley was patrolling during day in one of our old in-board-out-board boats. As it turned out Amos Posey was in a boat with about fifteen alligators and his motor had quit, and they were poling out. It was late afternoon. Mr. Persley gunned the in-board-out-board, and its motor quit. As he kind of drifted over to the poachers, this is a true story, Amos Posey jumped out of the boat. He had an accomplice with him. But he jumped out of the boat, and ran into the marsh. Taking off his clothes as he went. And remember what I said about the mosquitoes. At any rate, we had a gentleman south of us, a large landowner by the name of John Paul Crane, who had a helicopter. Mr. Crane loaned this helicopter in. The State brought a floatplane, Mr. Nunez came in his speedboat and it got dark before they could get there. But they could hear Amos out in the marsh hollering, "James, James!" for Mr. Nunez. Needless to say, they did not catch Mr. Posey until morning. Apparently he was none the worse for wear from the mosquitoes. That was an interesting case. But it was all considered great sport by the Cajuns.

I am going to end this interview at this time. I left Sabine, and Mr. Larry Ivy followed me there. Mr. Ivy was later, I believe at Tishomingo. That is where we lost Larry. [Mr. Ivy evidently died there at Tishomingo] I will tell you a couple of quick stories. I had been at Sabine for quite a while and Mr. Curtis Wilson, who was a Refuge Supervisor then, called me up and said, "Jeff, we're going to send you somewhere. It's either going to be Santee in South Carolina, or Russellville, Arkansas; Holla Bend. I said, "Fine." About six months later, he called me, and said, "Jeff, we think that you've been there long enough we're going to send you to Holla Bend, we think. Sit tight." About four months later, he called me again, and said, "Jeff, we're going to send you somewhere, sorry for the delay." Approximately a year and a half, after they first called me, they called and said that they were going to send me to Santee in South Carolina. With that, I got ready to leave. Mr. Ivy came down and visited the Refuge. He was kind of on a house-hunting trip. They had a small child at the time, and his wife said, "Who do you get to baby-sit?" Well, we lived thirty miles south of Sulfur, seven miles south of Hackberry, Louisiana on a little mound of dirt out in the salt marsh, and we just laughed. Thus endeth the Sabine saga. At the next interview, I'll pick up with Santee in South Carolina.

MR. FRENCH: O.K. Jeff that was excellent. I appreciate you throwing in a lot of names of folks, which would probably be forgotten if people like you don't remember them. People who are pretty keyed on what the Service is today. By the way, for the transcriber, this is Jerry French. I was not much of an interviewer because Jeff pretty much knows his own thing. That's why I thought it would be just a thrill, to sit down and make him do the talking. In the middle, we had one, "Hi". That was my wife walking in. That doesn't have to be part of the transcript. She didn't know we were recording, and she just being the friendly sort, and knowing that Jeff was here, well, that's the way that it. We will call that good for this evening, and we will look next for Chapter Two!