

Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

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The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program (SPOHP) was founded by Dr. Samuel Proctor at the University of Florida in 1967. Its original projects were collections centered around Florida history with the purpose of preserving eyewitness accounts of economic, social, political, religious and intellectual life in Florida and the South. In the 45 years since its inception, SPOHP has collected over 5,000 interviews in its archives.

Transcribed interviews are available through SPOHP for use by research scholars, students, journalists, and other interested groups. Material is frequently used for theses, dissertations, articles, books, documentaries, museum displays, and a variety of other public uses. As standard oral history practice dictates, SPOHP recommends that researchers refer to both the transcript and audio of an interview when conducting their work. A selection of interviews are available online here through the UF Digital Collections and the UF Smathers Library system.

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PCM 018

Interviewee: John Schmidt

Interviewer: Amanda Noll

Date: July 1, 2010

N: Alright, I'm Amanda Noll with the University of Florida, the Samuel Proctor Oral History Program. It's July 1, 2010 and I'm here with—

S: My name is John Schmidt.

N: Great.

S: The full name is John E. Schmidt, Jr.

N: And, thank you for agreeing to talk to us today and I'd just like to start off with maybe your early life. Tell us a little about your family and where you grew up, and then get into how you came to the Panama Zone. [The Panama Canal Zone was a 553 square mile (1,432 square kilometers) unincorporated U.S. territory that was created on November 18, 1903 and disestablished in 1979 which includes the Panama Canal and the land immediately surrounding it.]

S: Well, Amanda, I suppose that my reason for being here today obviously is because I had some connection to Panama and the Panama Canal. It wasn't, not too many years ago that in looking at my father's diary, of many, many years ago, he made an entry in 1928. The entry was simply, I plan to go to Panama. Now, I didn't know about this entry when my pop was alive, but my sister who had the diary made a copy of that page. I never had really any idea why he wrote that in 1928, other than, when he was a young man in 1928, that would have made him being 25; he lived in Baltimore, Maryland where he was born. He shipped out on an oiler, a tanker, and the tanker eventually ended up in France

and then back in Baltimore. I don't know how many days that was but I do have a record of the ship's voyage when he left Baltimore. He was signed on as a deck hand. It's very possible, now that I think back, that something happened on that voyage that made him think that Panama would be a good place to go to. 1928, he was 25, and I believe he was married shortly after that. I can't remember the dates now. But, to shorten up the story, he went to Panama in 1934. So 34 and 28, that's six years that he didn't go, and for whatever reason I don't know. But, he went to Panama in 1934 to work for the U.S. Army Signal Corp in the Canal Zone. [The Signal Corps develops, tests, provides, and manages communications and information systems support for the command and control of combined arms forces. Under the major reorganization of the War Department, effective 9 March 1942, the Signal Corps was one of the technical services in the Services of Supply, organizing components served both the Army Ground Forces and the Army Air Forces.] Well, my mother and my sister and I, who in 1934 was just three years old, were living in Baltimore. In August of 1935 we, my sister, my mother, and I, arrived in the Panama Canal. Although I don't have any specific memories of that particular day, or the fact that I was not quite four years old, but I do know we moved to an Army post called Corozal, on the Pacific side. My father being working for the Army, evidently they gave him quarters, a house, to live in. I think it was obviously temporary because the house was nothing more than an old paint shack. But I can remember it very well being right in the middle of an army post with barracks all around. I have a photograph of that building,

and it truly was just a little square paint shack, and I have a picture of me standing in front of it in an army uniform. You couldn't tell it was army, but it was a khaki uniform, so that was the Army's uniform. I had little second lieutenant bars on my shoulder. Well I was four years old, and I suppose that might have had some connection to my future because I spent my adult life in the military. So, there must have been some connection there. Well that was 1935 and I remember that we lived in several homes, houses, apartments, for a couple of years. I don't have the dates down specifically but I do remember one place we lived in Balboa was a twenty-four family house. A twenty-four family. You know you think about that they were actually apartments, but a lot of houses in the Panama Canal Zone were either single units, duplexes, four family house, twelve family house. This was a twenty four family house. I remember that we families shared a bathroom, and I remember that was probably three, four, or half a dozen families shared one bathroom, so it wasn't very convenient. I do remember that. I remember the fact that it was a multi, multi-family place to live. We soon moved to Pedro Miguel. Pedro Miguel was a lock town, because that's where the Pedro Miguel locks were. You probably heard that. But, it was a small town, not more than three blocks long. If you look at the main road that goes in front of the town, and if you look at the map, there's probably only three blocks in that whole town that goes around in kind of a little circle around the Pedro Miguel Lake, and the locks being right across the road. Well, my father worked for the Pedro Miguel locks then he worked for the Panama Canal Company. [The

Panama Canal Company was an owned and operated U.S. company created by Executive order 10263 on June 29, 1951. The Company operated the canal until the Panama Canal Commission took over in 1979.] I remember moving there, and I think I was just I can remember five years old, maybe six years old. That is my best memories of being a young boy in the Panama Canal; living in the town of Pedro Miguel. The friends I made there are friends today. Here with me today. In just a few moments I'll be meeting with a group of the same people that I grew up with back in the early 1930s in the Canal Zone. Pedro Miguel was a—being a lock town during the war—was extremely active with the military. We had barrage balloons all over the town because it was protecting the locks. [A barrage balloon was a large balloon tethered to the ground with metal cables designed to defend against low-flying aircraft by making the attackers approach more difficult. It was popular during World War II.] We had anti-aircraft positions on the hills around the town because they were protecting the locks. There were smudge pots, which were nothing more than smoke pots. I suppose they are similar to what is used in orange groves to protect, in the winter time, to protect the fruit. I don't know where I got that from, but anyway, the smudge pots were used to set off smoke screens around the canal, the locks. In those days, long before we had any other new modern technology, that was considered adequate—to hide by smoke. Well, when the smudge pots were set off, around the locks around our town, it was not the most happiest time for the ladies. My mother, I remember, rushing out to get the clothes off the clothes line because the smudge pots would

leave soot all over the clothes that were hanging up. But the kids, we never thought about that. We thought it was fun and we liked to run behind the truck and hide in the smoke and play. Of course when you think back now, certainly it wasn't healthy to be running and breathing all that burning oil, whatever it was really. So, it was exciting as a little kid, being just ten years old when the war started. And it was exciting to look and see the ships coming through the canal, all the soldiers and all the activity around the locks with the military. I became what is known as a mascot. Now a mascot at Florida State University of course is our beautiful horse.

N: Yes [laughter]

S: I can't think of the horse's name right now but—Renegade, Renegade.

N: Um-hm

S: And Renegade is a mascot with FSU and of course the Gators are the mascot over at University of Florida. But, I was a mascot with the Army Anti-aircraft Unit because close to where I lived, in the town of Paraiso was a headquarters for this Anti-aircraft Unit. [The unit he's referring to is known as the U.S. Army Coast Artillery Corps, which was tasked with protecting U.S. coasts and harbors between 1901 and 1950.] And, the 906 AAA Battalion, I remember it very, very plainly, they had a patch made, which I still have, and I used to wear that on my shirt, which was my uniform. During the days I would help out at the unit by either working maybe in the dining hall, the mess hall, they called it, or helping out on pay day when soldiers came through to get their pay. I'd sit there with the First

Sergeant while he got the people to sign the roster and the Captain would hand out the money. I had little jobs to do around. It was exciting, being a part of this anti-aircraft unit. That was 1943 and it was 1978 that I decided to try to contact somebody from that outfit. I saw, I remembered the names because I had them written down in some program or something. So I found this same name in California and I called and it was the same person that was the commander of the headquarters battery. We talked and he was very surprised that I remembered, and that I could find him especially. Of course he was quite old, but he and his wife were on the phone and they were thrilled to death that some little kid from way back in 1943 would remember him. But, it was fun. I enjoyed my life in the Panama Canal. Of course, as everybody who basically grew up there or were born and raised there, their whole life was shaped by what we saw and what we learned and how we lived. And that fact that even today, sixty-, seventy-plus years ago, we still know each other, see each other, stay in contact with each other. An extremely cohesive group of people. For me, it was my future life, having grown up there and having watched the military grow, watching the Air Force up in the interior of Panama at the airbases Chame Field and Rio Hato. It was sitting on the sides of the field as a little kid and watching these airplanes take off and land, and the exercises and the training that they did. Never thinking about it then, but it shaped my life because I joined the Air Force after graduating from high school in 1950. And then I spent the next thirty years on active duty with the Air Force. So when I think back, of how I became to be what I am today,

I think it had to do with what you were when. You know, I was there and what you were when is a takeoff on you are what you were, when. In other words, in 1940s, that's the way life was, and that's part of the way my personality is shaped. I'm very proud of it, and extremely pleased to know that I grew up there and the friends that I made. I married there. I married the daughter of the superintendent of Gorgas Hospital, Colonel Blicht, and had children born there. So even though they didn't have the long tenure that I did living there, they're very proud to think they were born in the Panama Canal [Zone]. I went back again after in my service life, twenty years after I had left, on my first assignment, because I had enlisted there in 1951. In 1973 I went back for another tour of duty back at Albrook Air Force base. After being twenty years, it was great to be home again. I enjoyed my tour, and since then, I've been back four or five times on trips, either on a cruise or on a flight. I always look forward to going back, although it is nothing like it was when I was growing up. We always remember that even though the lake that was behind my house, not more than thirty—fifty—feet away from my house when I was a little boy, to me looked like a massive lake, and it actually was really, really quite small. But when you're small things look big, and when you're older they look much smaller. So when I go back in recent trips, where I lived is no longer there. Houses are gone, replaced by other houses. Streets have been renamed. The place is very familiar because you don't forget some things. But, it's sad in a certain way when it's no longer the Panama Canal Zone, it's Republic of Panama. Be that as it may, it's still fun to go

back. It's always a pleasure to remember growing up in the Panama Canal because it was just such a close-knit group of people. With only two high schools and one junior college, there's just a remembrance and an appreciation of friends that you just take with you. All of my schooling took place in the Canal Zone and that also is another thing that is worth saying, is that the people who went to the Panama Canal schools were far and ahead of most other high schools in the United States, or schools. In advancing the knowledge that they got from those schools. In fact, when kids would come down from the States, to the Canal Zone to go to school for the first time, like maybe grade school or junior high school they usually had to go back a year because they were not quite up to speed with the rest of the levels in the Canal Zone schools. So I'm very proud of that. I can only say as although the memories are extensive and I've only covered just a few things in the twenty-five years I lived there, I believe I am today a very lucky person to have grown and lived in the Panama Canal. My friends that I made are still with me in the majority of cases, and my family has a major connection to the canal. So I continue to think when someone says, where are you from? I might have been born in Baltimore, Maryland, but I always say I'm from Panama, the Panama Canal Zone.

N: Can you tell me a little bit more about your parents? Did they retire in the Panama Canal Zone?

S: My friends?

N: Your parents.

S: My parents—pop unfortunately had a little medical problem in about 1966 and he had to retire, medically retire. So, Mom and Dad left Panama and settled in Maryland, basically where they both were born, but leaving behind my sister and my brother. My sister was working for the Inter-American Geodetic Survey. My brother was working for the Panama Canal Company. They both married there and stayed there for a number of years later. My sister probably left—I think she did—in 1973 with her husband and two children. They retired in Kerrville, Texas, where they currently live. Now my younger brother, Douglas, he married—and I cannot remember the exact year—but he married a local girl, actually Sharon Booth was her maiden name. She's a fourth generation Zonian. Fourth generation. That's how many grandparents and parents were involved in the construction of the Canal. Now Doug, my younger brother, was born there at Ancon in 1936. He stayed there until he retired from the Panama Canal Commission, so he was probably there for total of, like, 59 years, after he retired. And he also lives in Kerrville, Texas. Mom and Dad are both gone. But, you can walk into my house, or my sister's house, or my brother's house and you immediately know that there's some connection to the Panama Canal.

N: Can you tell me a little bit more about your school experience? Maybe, did you play sports or anything like that?

S: You know, I was not much into sports primarily because before I got into high school I had twice hit my head in play, enough to give me a brain concussion. Minor, but enough for the doctors to say it's not advisable to get into contact

sports. So, my involvement with sports at the high school level was in the school student manager's type work. Helping the team, working with the team. Although, I didn't play football or basketball, I was the student manager for both of the varsity teams. That was kind of neat. Even though I didn't play, I got to share in some of the glory of the teams. It led me to be allowed to be inducted into what they called the Letterman's Club, because I was part of the varsity team.

Carrying the water bucket or whatever it was, but I was still part of the team. Now my activity in sports in a younger time frame, when I was ten and in that area, was swimming. And Pedro Miguel, as in all of the towns, we had our own pools. So, that was a major activity, swimming. So when I was young, ten, eleven, twelve, I was really active in the swimming teams of those towns. But that didn't carry on into high school. I was active in high school in music. I played in the band and in the orchestra. Mostly, probably my most active part in high school was with the Junior ROTC program. In high school, at Balboa High School, the Army ROTC came to the Canal Zone schools in 1948. I was in the first class of the Junior ROTC Program, and I was a junior at the time. So the way they start the junior programs is those students who were seniors will be the Cadet Officers and those who students who were juniors would be the Cadet NCOs, the sergeants. So I was a junior, so therefore I was a Cadet Sergeant. In fact I was a Cadet Master Sergeant. This is an interesting thing, and I'm glad you asked this question because it's really worth—I tell me grandchildren about it—when I was a Cadet Master Sergeant, as a junior in high school, I let my grades slip and they

went to the point where the ROTC said if you didn't have a certain grade point average you couldn't hold a cadet rank. So, they took my Master Sergeant stripes away. Well, people might think, that jeez, that's no big deal, that was just high school. But, it was a big deal. The fact that they demoted me because my grades weren't good enough, it made a major change in my academic thinking. So the next six weeks I got my grades back and I got my rank back. And from then on—and this was an early part of my junior year—and so my graduation in June of 1950, my grades were high enough that I made the B honor roll four or five times. Never before in my school years did I do that well. It was all because I wasn't going to let that happen to me again, regarding my grades being inferior. So when I started my senior year in 1949, I was promoted to the rank of Cadet Lieutenant Colonel, which was the head ranking cadet officer for the Cadet Corps. And, for the remainder of the school year, I was Cadet Battalion Commander and that was a significant honor as well as a magnificent incentive to maintain good grades. I'm really proud of that. My grandchildren—it was a story I tell them because, think about it, when they take away something you really like, not only is it embarrassing in front of your peers but it's also something to think about, is that what I want in life? And so, 1950, when I graduated as a ranking cadet, it wasn't too much to decide what I wanted to do with my life; and so therefore when I enlisted in the Air Force just less than a year later, it was, I guess pre-ordained that that's what I was going to do.

N: Did you and your family travel at all when you were younger?

S: The only traveling that we did was back and forth from the Canal Zone to the States. We got there in 1935. I feel certain we made a trip in 1936. I know we made a trip in 1938 because I've got the ship's manifest showing that our family traveled back to New York. And, of course, that was the days you went from the Canal Zone to Haiti, and you stopped in Port-au-Prince for a half a day and then you continued on to New York. From New York, what we would do, would take a train down to Baltimore, which was where we spent our vacation, a good two or three months anyway. I know we did it three times. I never traveled, and mom and dad were not the traveling type, out of Panama other than going back to the States. Now, everything we did was there or back to New York and just for summer vacation.

N: How was returning back to the States? Was it difficult at all? Was it exciting?

S: To go back to the States?

N: Uh-huh

S: Well, it was kind of interesting and exciting because having been raised—I wasn't born there now, but going there when I was not quite four, that's almost living there your whole life—it was exciting to get back to the States, because primarily for the change in weather. Even though it was during the summer time, that we would go—at school vacation—it was always exciting because first of all I liked the boat trip. The boat trips were always a lot of fun for me. My mother, of course, was not at all happy and she was very, very sick on the boat. But, I was young enough that I didn't think too much about it. I enjoyed it. Getting to the

States, seeing my relatives in Baltimore, was always exciting. And it was the only connection we had. My father had seven sisters and brother, and lots of cousins, in fact twenty-one first cousins live—and some still there—in Baltimore. Traveling on the boat was a lot of fun. I don't remember what year it was, and I was by myself, so I think it must have been coming back from the States—New York to Panama. I have a feeling that it was probably 1950 because when I graduated from high school I decided I was going to go to the States and make a living in Baltimore working for my uncle who was an electrical contractor. I left Canal Zone in June of 1950 and traveled to New York on a school boat—lots of my friends, it was a wonderful trip because all my classmates were there. Those that had just graduated were going to go to the States and continue with college and I was going to go make a life for myself in Baltimore. Well, in June it probably wasn't a couple weeks later that I'd decided I'd made a mistake—that I didn't want to live there, and I really, really wanted to go back home. So I called my pop and I said what I wanted to do and he said, well I'll send you a ticket and get you on the next boat. So in August of 1950, just couple months after I left, I boarded a ship in New York to come back to Panama. This has to be the trip because I've tried to determine—and no one else can remember—the ship's nurse died, and when she died evidently she had left in her will that she wanted to be buried at sea. I remember distinctly the fact that she died, that was notified right away, and that the ship would stop and a burial service would take place with the nurse. I can't remember her name. I remember all of us going to the side of the ship for

the service. The ship was dead in the water and they buried her at sea and then we took off again. And that had to have been August of 1950. I'm sure that if I could find somebody from the Panama Railroad Company who had involvement with the ship, that they could precisely date that and give me the name. That's the traveling that we did and I remember that particular trip.

N: So that summer, in 1950, what made you decide that it wasn't the place for you to live?

S: It's probably because I just was not happy enough in Baltimore and not comfortable enough working and starting off a whole new life in very strange surroundings. Maybe it was that I just wasn't ready to leave home. I was, in 1950, I was nineteen. That should be old enough. God knows it's old enough for people to be at war and get killed and so forth, but I wasn't ready to leave home. So I wanted to go back to Panama, back to the Canal Zone. And I did. I immediately went to work for the Panama Canal's Navigation Department. I was going to learn how to be a signal man out at Flamingo Island where they would signal the ships as they come towards the canal. I think I worked out there for about three or four months and realized that I could get a better job. I went to work for the Navy on the west bank of the canal at Rodman Naval Station. Went to work for the Navy in a refrigeration shop. That was a good job. I was learning a good trade. Then a friend of mine, who I had grown up with in the Canal Zone, Jack Budreau—we had known each other for many years—he came out to my house and he said, I'm going to join the Air Force. Why don't you come with me? And I

said, well, I'm working. He said, yeah, but you can quit. I said okay, and so I did. I quit my job at the Navy and went across the canal at Albrook Air Force Base, on twenty-seventh of April, 1951, raised my hand and became a United States Air Force Airmen. So going back home was pre-ordained, and then I started my career in the Air Force. I can't think of a day—can't think of a time—that was regretful. It was a wonderful life and I don't think there are too many people that can disagree with that.

N: Did your siblings, they stayed in the Panama Zone as well?

S: Who?

N: Your siblings?

S: Well, my brother and sister stayed there just until they retired. I think Jackie left in [19]73 when her husband retired from The Panama Canal company. And Doug stayed until—I think it was—[19]90. It could have been [19]89 or he was there during Just Cause, and I believe it was shortly thereafter that he decided to retire. So he retired to the States. I have no connections there at all, and of course no one lives there from the family. But, I still have the—well, as I said, it's the greatest of memories and the fondest of times in my life.

N: Can you talk a little about the culture growing up? Would you say that it was a pure American culture? Was there some mixture there?

S: Well that's an interesting thing, because where I lived in the town of Pedro Miguel. Pedro Miguel was right next to a "local rate." That's an expression, local rate meant the people who were Panamanian citizens, they weren't American

citizens, they weren't white, they were black, they were Jamaican, mestizos. The town was called Red Tank. Red Tank was right up against the town of Pedro Miguel. It was only separated by a few hundred feet. And actually, there was no gates, no nothing, but Red Tank people lived in a town by themselves but they came through our town either walking to work at the locks or walking to work, into the town where I lived, at different things. I don't ever remember there ever being any animosities whatsoever to anybody in some other race or some other ethnic group. The only thing that I can remember is being a little concerned for my safety when I would go into the Republic of Panama. And by that I mean, they were not necessary always the friendliest towards the gringos. And so when I was younger and probably a little more concerned about my safety, I would feel a little apprehensive if I was going to a movie downtown in Panama, which of course was nothing more than walking across the street from the Canal Zone into the Republic. Once again there was no gates, there were no fences, or anything. I sometimes had a little feeling of concern for my safety. I did not have this when I went to the interior of Panama. When I was in the interior, in Santa Clara or Gorgoña, and El Valle and all of the towns up into the interior, never was there any concern for that because these were just a whole different kinds of people. They may have been Panamanians, they may have been other than white, and they were more country folks. They were just great people. They were friendly and invite you in the house and be more friendly. The only time I had any concern, major concern was in November. In November was when the Republic

of Panama had their elections. And whenever they had an election it was always a very difficult time because they were a little bit out of control. I loved the Panamanian culture, mostly in the interior. In the cities it was not very clean and not as friendly.

N: In school and at your house, was there any Spanish-speaking going on?

S: Of course in the school Spanish was one of the major classes. I took Spanish for a couple of years, but I was not too good a student at that time and so I didn't learn. But what I learned in the way of speaking Spanish and the language was just living there. It was kind of when you're immersed into it just becomes part of your nature. Even today I'm always honing my Spanish. Even though I can't start talking to somebody in Spanish, I can understand and comprehend what's going on by listening to certain words and phrases. We had a Panamanian lady as a maid. We never had anything other than someone who would come and clean the house. That's all. We never had a cook, like some people did. We did have somebody who would come and—when I was growing up—and would help my mom in the house and she spoke perfectly good English, as most people did. Just Spanish, I think, would have been wonderful had I been more conversant. Some of my classmates that I'm with today speak Spanish just like it was their primary language because they took more advantage of learning than I did. But when I see somebody speaking Spanish I don't hesitate to—if it's okay—to participate so I can keep my Spanish sharpened up.

N: Did you experience any anti-American feelings when you were over there? Did you experience any of the riots?

S: You know I don't recall anything truly anti-American. In fact, just the opposite. When I left on a permanent basis—I left in 1976—when I was assigned back to the United States and coincidentally I was assigned to Panama City, Florida. I was coming from Panama City, Panama to Panama City, Florida. And that's where I retired from active duty. But when I went back again, it was 1999, and I went back and I remember in the hotel El Panama—which was a very large hotel, in fact it was the hotel that when I was married in 1953, it was where my wife and I spent our honeymoon, in that hotel—so in 1999 I remember going back to the hotel and of course things were just about to turn over from the United States to Panama in the year 2000. And in 1999—it was June—and there was only six months left of the American connection and then it was going to disappear. I can remember distinctly people in the hotel people saying how sorry they were and how fretful they were that the U.S. connection was going to be gone forever. Now obviously these were people in the service industry and they recognized the American dollar. As anybody would here if an Air Force base was going to close in Biloxi, Mississippi, wow, that would be disastrous for the community because of the money. I think the Panama people may have thought that the same. But, you know what, I don't ever remember having any nationalist feeling of hate. Ever. I mentioned a few minutes ago that I did have some concerns for my safety and that may have been because the hot headed nature

of the Panamanian police as an example. And especially towards the military it was not good. But no, I never experienced anything personally. In fact, it was just the opposite most of the time.

N: Can you explain your feelings about the operation Just Cause?

S: I think Just Cause, of course, was a definite requirement. There's a point in time when America and the United States has to stand up and say no. Stand up and put your foot down and stop something that's ongoing, that's not right. I was very concerned on the twentieth of December when this took place. I can remember my brother called me from Panama. It was close to midnight and I remember him saying, I don't know what's going on. But something is happening. There's gunfire all over the place. He said I'm really concerned because Sheryl—that was his daughter—is coming back from the states and she was arriving that night, coincidentally, from Miami on a flight. And he says, I'm really concerned because I have to go out to the airport to pick up Sheryl. I have to say that my major concern was for the safety of my brother, his wife, and his child. I had no other family there at the time. And so once Sheryl arrived safely, and once she and my brother were home, back home in the Canal Zone safely, I was relieved and then sort of excited. Because 1989 I had, of course, been in the service for quite a while and I had spent a year in Saigon during the height of the war, and so I was a little bit interested in that my brother, here he was, a civilian, in a combat zone. And not only in a combat zone, but in my old town, and in my old high school. So, I think it was a very justified—Just Cause—to do what they did, to bring down the

corruption. Unfortunately, people die in combat and innocent people die in combat. But I think it was necessary to do. It was also an exceptionally—well I don't know if that what I want to say—it was a way to hone the efficiency and proficiency of military technology as well. We learned a lot in that war. We learned a lot has to do with communication between groups of people that we found were not working good and certainly had been corrected. As to the cause and the reasons for it, I think we did the right thing.

N: Can you talk about, maybe, your feelings about the U.S. turnover in general? How you think the future of Panama is looking in the Canal?

S: You know, when I lived there—and I can remember very clearly my father's helper. When you're a mechanic, when you're a tradesman, you're not sitting in an office but you're working on telephones, or working on cable splicing, or working at the machine shop, those are crafts and all the Americans had a helper, and those helpers were Panamanians. I remember my father's helper was named Caballero. Caballero, which means gentleman. Caballero. Yes, means gentleman. And Caballero was my father's helper, and I can remember watching dad work and working with his helper and how incredibly Caballero depended on my father to tell him what to do. He couldn't necessarily do it himself on his own initiative. But when he, I can remember my father asking for something and he would know what to do, he just had to be told. So, I guess that was somewhat ingrained in my thinking, as a lot of people that lived there. So, when we left—when the Americans left—and when the United States gave away

everything that was American—and I truly mean gave away. That's my major objection to the fact that the Canal was given away. They didn't pay one penny for anything.—I thought as a lot of people that Panamanians, and the Republic of Panama, would not be able to run the canal. In my opinion, I didn't think they would have the competency to do it because I watched them build buildings. I watched them build apartment complexes and hotels and over the years I would see those hotel and buildings start to fall down because they never maintained them. They never took care of them until they fell down, then they just let it fall down. So I thought, along with a lot of other people, that they're never, ever going to be able to run the Panama Canal locks. I'm wrong. I'm the first to admit it and I have no hesitancy to admit it. I was wrong. They are doing a good job. They may not necessarily count things the way we do. They may not necessarily have a counting system that is equal to ours. The example is that they may say that we have fewer accidents than the Americans do. They may say, oh yeah, we're doing so good cause we don't have many accidents. I'm talking about ship accidents in the canal. Well, and they may say that, but it's because, yes, they may have had the same amount of accidents, but they call them differently. They have a category that's not the same as the Americans. And so therefore, if we had a ship hit the locks that would be an accident, or run into the wall, that would be an accident. But maybe Panama doesn't count that as an accident; maybe they have to wait until they do it three times before—and so therefore, they have less numbers. I think they're doing a great job. But there may be some things that

maybe not equally accounted because we called it different than what they called it. I am in contact, even today, with the people who are running the Panama Canal Authority. I have—ever since I have been in the military especially—I have always been an advocate of the Panama Canal and the operation of the locks. And so therefore, when my brother was there in a position of responsibility and authority, he would provide me with the current information about the operation. I would use it in my speeches that I gave in the military. At the Air Force Academy I was called upon a number of times to speak to professors on the operation of the Panama Canal. I continually do that, even today, here in 2010 I'm still giving briefings on the Panama Canal. So, as recently as two weeks ago, I received the most current version of the PowerPoint presentation on the expansion of the Panama Canal. I have it with me now and I intend to show it to my classmates during our reunion here. Our classmates are having our sixtieth reunion from Balboa [High School]. So I have current information that I'm going to pass on. People ask me, even today, that I know and know me, questions about the canal because I continue to maintain currency in what's going on. So when I say they're doing a good job, I really believe I'm saying that from some sort of honesty and some sort of forthrightness because I see what's going on and I think they're doing a good job. I haven't found anybody who will tell me differently. They think they're doing a good job too.

N: What do you think draws you to keep that connection with the Panama Canal?

S: You know that's also a question that I've often thought about, and I have to go back that you are what you were when. I think my whole life was shaped by the fact that I was raised in that kind of wonderful environment, of the significant engineering feat ever of history, the Americans who built the canal, who engineered it who felt that the way to go was the way it ended up, were able to take early concepts of construction and turn it into such a marvelous engineering feat. Now I'm not an engineer. I have nothing even close to that kind of academic background. But to think what they had to do to build the Panama Canal in 1914 when it opened. It's just always been so ingrained in my pride that even today I feel it's important. Just, I don't recall when it was—but within the last week or so someone said something that had to do with water or something—I mentioned the canal and its association with water, and, well, the conversation ended up with talking about the Panama Canal. You know, so many people—a few moments ago I mentioned I used to talk to the engineers at the Air Force Academy—in the Department of Mechanical Engineering—it was amazing how many of those full colonels and those officers really did not have a full understanding of how the canal worked. And I just reveled in the fact that I could tell them how it worked. It's amazing. The construction that's going on now that the Panamanian Panama Canal Authority says will be completed by 2014, it will be—I hope my life will last long enough to see this happen—because it's going to be amazing what they are going to do. And they're going to do it without the help of the United States. You know, we're not there. And we're not involved in this

expansion. So what they're going to do is proof—when I say they're doing a good job—I think it's proof because they're making a new canal.

N: Yes, do you think this legacy of pride over the canal has continued into further generations, like with your grandchildren that you've mentioned?

S: You really have some soul searching questions because, you see, even though I have two children born there—but they were so young when they left they don't have the connection that I do. And even though I have everything in my house that reflects my youth and my connection to the canal—I don't find any of my grandkids really excited about that. Maybe the oldest who has just now entered the Academy at FBI up at Quantico, Virginia, he just recently—this past month—became a student at the Academy—he has an interest. An interest to ask questions and when he sees things he'll ask for clarification and things about the canal. But, I was teaching Air Force [Jr] ROTC for fifteen years after I retired from the Air Force, so where I was teaching in high school I would ask questions like, do you know where the Panama Canal is? It was shameful the number of students that didn't have the background and education—these were freshman—to tell me where the Panama Canal was. They had no idea where it was. Then I always liked to stretch their mind by having them think. I would say, show a map of the Isthmus of Panama and show them how in the morning you could see the sun coming up in the Pacific Ocean and setting in the Atlantic Ocean. Now, if you lived in the Canal Zone, when the sun came up out of the East, the way the shape of the Isthmus of Panama is, it would actually be coming up in what you

considered to be the Pacific Ocean. Because that's what you lived next to. And it set over on the other side, which would be the Atlantic side. The Atlantic has to be East, so I mean you think that way. And I would ask these cadets and ninety-nine percent had no idea what the answers were. They couldn't follow it. And I don't really think that has a thing to do with maybe there's a lack of interest in the Panama Canal. I think it has to do with a lack of education that's been provided to our children over the recent years and why we're so far behind in Math, Science and Engineering. It's scary. So as to whether there may be a continuing interest in the Panama Canal, I'm not happy about that. I don't think there is.

N: Well, is there anything you'd like to add? Maybe one more happy memory about the Canal?

S: I'm trying to come to that. I honestly can't put my finger on one thing other than the fact that my youth—and I have to say this would be from the age of eight to about fifteen, sixteen—had to have been the most exciting time of my life. Thinking back where I lived, and the fact that everything was so open and free and so unencumbered with thoughts or concerns about your life being in danger. Knowing that you could leave your house and walk to school and then stop by the clubhouse and have a milkshake—or go to the clubhouse and go to the movies—and walk up into the jungles in just a few blocks and spend a day at swimming holes, go home and start to work on a kayak that I was making under my house. You know a lot of houses in those days were built on stilts and they were built on stilts to keep the, you know, animals and insects out of the house.

Well, you know, because the stilts were creosoted so animals, birds I mean the insects. The point when I say under the house is there was always an openness to the house, and so I was building a kayak. My father helped me. I remember covering it with canvas and painting the canvas a gray paint and when the paint dried it made the canvas waterproof. So there we had this little kayak. It couldn't have been more than eight feet long. We would build our own and then go out on the lake. So trying to put together a single moment of truly wonderful happy memories, it has to be my life as a Canal Zone brat. Had to be some notion of what would be happy. I can truly be called a Canal Zone brat and have nothing but a smile on my face.

N: Well that's certainly a happy thought to end this interview with. Thank you so much for meeting with us—

S: Well thank you—

N: It's a great record to have

S: I'm really happy to participate. I was asked to do this at FSU's World War II institute and it was a pleasure because when it was all done, and when it was edited and cleaned up, and copied, I made copies for each of my five children. Therefore, they had a record of their father's life as a young boy. So this will also accommodate that—

N: Yes, good legacy.

S: I thank you. Good, Good.

[End of interview]

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