

Nevada Test Site Oral History Project
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Interview with
Gary Hallmark

June 24, 2005
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Charlie Deitrich

© 2007 by UNLV Libraries

Oral history is a method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews conducted by an interviewer/researcher with an interviewee/narrator who possesses firsthand knowledge of historically significant events. The goal is to create an archive which adds relevant material to the existing historical record. Oral history recordings and transcripts are primary source material and do not represent the final, verified, or complete narrative of the events under discussion. Rather, oral history is a spoken remembrance or dialogue, reflecting the interviewee's memories, points of view and personal opinions about events in response to the interviewer's specific questions. Oral history interviews document each interviewee's personal engagement with the history in question. They are unique records, reflecting the particular meaning the interviewee draws from her/his individual life experience.

Produced by:

The Nevada Test Site Oral History Project

Departments of History and Sociology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 89154-5020

Director and Editor

Mary Palevsky

Principal Investigators

Robert Futrell, Dept. of Sociology

Andrew Kirk, Dept. of History

The material in the *Nevada Test Site Oral History Project* archive is based upon work supported by the U.S. Dept. of Energy under award number DEFG52-03NV99203 and the U.S. Dept. of Education under award number P116Z040093.

Any opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in these recordings and transcripts are those of project participants—oral history interviewees and/or oral history interviewers—and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Department of Energy or the U.S. Department of Education.

Interview with Gary Hallmark

June 24, 2005

Conducted by Charlie Deitrich

Table of Contents

Introduction: birth, family background, childhood in Alabama and California.	1
Civil Air Patrol and military service, training to become Army medic.	9
Stationed in Germany, sense of the Cold War in Europe.	12
Returns to California, education, part-time jobs.	16
Talks about work for Douglas Aircraft (1965-1968).	17
Moves to Hughes Aircraft, Planning Department (1969-1970).	18
Takes job at Hawthorne High School (1970-1971).	21
Transfers to City of Los Angeles Department of Water and Power (1971).	23
IBEW apprenticeship and education as electrician at Los Angeles Trade and Technical College (1971-1975).	24
Work on Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant, CA (1975).	25
Work on Alaska pipeline, Valdez, AK (1976).	28
Moves back to Los Angeles, and then takes job at the NTS (1977).	32
First impressions of Las Vegas, NV.	35
Work as electrician at the NTS (Areas 12, 2, and 6 respectively).	36
Details work as electrician in Area 51, NTS.	38
Activities with German-American Club in Las Vegas and requirements of NTS security.	39
Working at Area 51, NTS and transfer to Tonopah Test Range (TTR).	42
Work on Fire Storm, Dolphin, and Caboc.	44
Talks about work, gives description of typical work day at the NTS.	46
Discusses post-shot work and his accidents at the NTS.	52
Radiation safety at the NTS.	56
Marriage and divorce (1981-1983).	57
Problems working for REECo, end of testing, laid off from REECo (1993).	58
Conclusion: opinion about government's role in testing, work on Yucca Mountain project (1994-1995).	60

Interview with Gary Hallmark

June 24, 2005 in Las Vegas, NV

Conducted by Charlie Deitrich

[00:00:00] Begin Track 2, Disc 1.

Charlie Deitrich: *OK, so if you could state your full name, date of birth, and where you were born?*

Gary Hallmark: Gary Hallmark; June 12, 1942; born in Empire, Alabama.

Were you raised in Alabama?

I was in Alabama until eight years of age and then I moved to California.

Do you have much recollection of growing up in Alabama?

Oh, I go back almost annually and sometimes three, four, five times a year.

So even though you were only there till eight, you kind of feel like that's your—

That's still home.

Small town?

Yes.

What was the name of it again?

I was born in Empire, but I lived in Jasper. Jasper is the county seat of Walker County, the sixty-seventh largest county in Alabama, and there's only about seventy counties.

That is small. What was it like growing up in such a small town?

It was a rural farm community. I stayed with my grandmother and grandfather while my mother went to Birmingham to work. And I did all the stuff kids do on a farm, feed the animals and—

So you basically grew up on a farm?

I grew up on a farm.

Did you like that kind of life?

Oh, yes. I've always had a liking for animals. I don't think I've had too many years since I left there when I haven't had some kind of animal around the house. I just recently lost a cat I had for just about twenty years. I got him out of the pound when he was almost a year old.

I'm sorry to hear that you lost your cat.

Tell me about your mom.

My mom was the second oldest of ten kids and so being up around the oldest, she had to help take care of all the other ones. And of course she couldn't wait to get off the farm, so that's why she went to Birmingham and worked. She married my dad in, I guess, about 1940. He did various jobs down there. He was a ranger out in the woods—well, I guess even before their marriage, he went in the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]. On my last visit down there, one of my aunts said, Oh, I've got something here you probably want. It was his camp book from the CCC camp. A lot of people would probably find that interesting to go through because, you know, that tells about a lot of people's relatives that were in these CCC camps. Lists names and home towns. I've been into genealogy so—

That must've been a great find for you, then.

Yes.

Where did he work? Did he work in national parks or—?

He went up to Pennsylvania, right off the top of my head I can't remember the name of the camp—and near the end of the book he was scheduled to go to Oregon and I don't know if he ever made it or not. He didn't really say. But the book, some of it's hand written, some of it was printed by the camp with pictures of people in the camp. And anyway, after that he joined the Army and spent twenty-four years in the Army.

So that's why you lived with your grandparents, because he was in—?

My mother worked.

Yeah, and he was in the Army?

Yes.

So he was in World War II?

Yes.

What branch of the military was he in? Was it the Army?

The Army. He was in the Timberwolf Regiment. They came up from Italy into Germany.

Oh, wow. That's impressive.

I guess while he was over there, he met a German family in Kassel. From that period on, I always had the impression that we were part German. I have a stepbrother who was raised away from me and I never knew until after we were both adults, and he had the same impression. But once I got into the genealogy, I found out that we weren't German. I guess it was just because of the association with that family in Germany that my father was saying that we were [00:05:00] Germans, because some Germans think that Hallmark is a German name and it seems to be strictly English.

Is that right? So did you have any hobbies, activities as a kid growing up in a small town in Alabama?

No. Back there you wouldn't. You'd go swimming in the river, but usually wasn't a lot of time for doing other stuff. I went to two years of school there with my aunts and some of the neighbors. But like I say, it was farm life and work and playing in the woods and fields and—

So you were outdoorsy, I would imagine.

Oh, yeah.

And I would imagine the farm kept you pretty busy.

Yeah, we had horses that we'd sometimes ride. They really weren't riding horses, they were draft animals. My earliest recollection is falling off of one of the big draft horses. I would assume she was a Clydesdale from her coloring and everything. I was on her back and my uncle was leading her. We were walking up a hill and he was leading her by the bridle and she was just following behind him. But she hadn't been worked for a while, and all of a sudden she made a left turn and headed out across the field and, well, my legs were almost straight out to the sides because she was so big around, so I had nothing to hang onto except her mane and I didn't hang onto that very long.

Did you have brothers and sisters?

No. Well, I got stepbrothers-and-sisters but not that I grew up with.

So you essentially grew up an only child?

Yeah. I had a strange experience, though. I was working out at the [Nevada] test site [NTS] in the early nineties and a guy came up to me and asked me if I had any relatives working at the test site. I said, Not that I know of. So he goes on to say that he has a RADSAFE [Radiological Safety] girl that goes in the tunnel with him every so often to check for radiation, and her name is Hallmark. I said, Is it a little brunette about yea tall? And he says yeah. I said, Is her name Michelle? [And he said], Yeah, I think so. And it turns out I had a sister working out there that I'd only seen one other time before.

That is remarkable! A stepsister, right?

Half-sister.

Half-sister. Was that mother or father's side?

Father's side.

So did you introduce yourself after that?

Well, yeah, we talked; I ended up getting sent to the same tunnel that she was working at, and we went underground one day—it was just four of us, a laborer and that same electrician and myself and her—to check for the radiation.

That is remarkable.

I don't know. Because my father never told them about anything, they never had much interest in getting to know me.

Do you still have a relationship with her now?

Her youngest brother, he and I correspond by e-mail; he's the only one that seems to be interested in the family tie.

Sure. That is a crazy story.

And the oldest two—she's got, let's see, she's the third or fourth of the older ones—and the oldest two, a boy and a girl, they just absolutely do not want anything to do with me. I called the oldest girl at her home one time and I said, *This is Gary Hallmark. Click!*

You're kidding!

I mean that's all I said.

I wonder why that is.

Well, they're Italian on their mother's side, and I think she's only a first-generation Italian-American. So basically she wasn't even supposed to marry my father, the way the Italian culture is, because he was divorced and still had a living spouse and another family. So I guess that—you know, in the suburbs of Buffalo, they just don't want anything to do with me.

That's too bad.

Yeah.

[00:10:00] *That's too bad. So up until eight, you're living in Alabama?*

Yes.

What leads you to California?

My mother decided—she had met somebody in St. Louis [Missouri]. She worked in a factory in St. Louis for, I don't know, six months or a year, and then she met a lady from California, and they kept corresponding afterwards. And then they said, Oh, you should come out to California, wages are better. And so we went out there and we lived with her for about six months till we found our own—got our own place.

OK. Where at in California?

The Inglewood-Lennox area.

Were your parents still together at this point?

No. He was still in the service, and by then he was, let's see, I'm not sure where he was at the time. Three years after we went to California is when they—she finally filed for divorce because he hadn't seen us since '48, so after five years, she just went ahead and filed for divorce.

So you lived in Inglewood. What's your mom doing for a living?

She started out working as a waitress and then she went to a bookbinding place; part of the time she even did both of them at the same time. Then somebody got her on at Northrop Aircraft and after working a few months at Northrop Aircraft, she quit the restaurant and worked twenty-five years for Northrop.

What did she do for Northrop?

Secretary? No, she was out on the line. Rosie the Riveter.

Where was the Northrop plant?

In Hawthorne. Between 120th and Broadway.

So that's a pretty good job.

Yes. I worked aircraft for five years.

Is that right? Who'd you work for?

I worked for McDonnell Douglas and Hughes Aircraft.

So your mom's working for Northrop. What's it like growing up now? I mean there must be some sense, even though you're a fairly young guy, what's the culture shock like going from Alabama to Inglewood?

Oh, it was quite a bit. And of course kids aren't always the nicest. I mean I was different because I spoke different and that was pointed out to me several times, even to the point it almost went to fights. But it was pretty nice. We lived in one place about three years and I had a couple good friends in junior high school—or not junior high school but elementary school. I got into a square-dancing group and we had kids from about three different schools in that. And unfortunately, too many of the friends I ran around with all died fairly young.

Oh, that's too bad.

The one boy that lived on the same street that I did on Greenwood Avenue, he must've passed away ten, fifteen years ago, maybe even longer than that.

I'm sorry to hear that.

Then another friend, I kept looking for him after I came out of the service, and finally through some of the stuff on the Internet with this Classmates.com and stuff, I found out that he had passed away. That really surprised me because he was always such an athlete. He was only five-foot-eight, I believe it was—or five-foot-seven, something like that, fairly small, but he was chunky—he played football even up into junior college. But like I say, he only lived to be about, I don't know, I imagine somewhere in the vicinity of forty-five to fifty years old.

Ah, that's terrible!

Yeah.

Was the square-dancing club, were there other Southerners in it that kind of—did you find people that had similar backgrounds?

No, most of them were all born in California. We'd go around to different square-dance conventions, and dance at them. We went down to one, I think it was Sunnyvale, California, we went down and danced. And at the same time on television there was, I think it was, the Spade Cooley Show and they had the "Y-Knot Twirlers." They used to perform [00:15:00] one or two dances on every show. But these were for probably anywhere from eighteen to twenty-one year olds, and we were down in the twelve, thirteen, fourteen-year-old bracket. We went to this convention, we got out on the floor and they were dancing, and we went in and cut their male partners out, and we ended up finishing the dance with—

Is that right? Did that cause a stir?

No. It was just—

Part of the show?

Yes. Well, there's ways to do that. Square-dancing was fun, and it's a real social group. I just found out recently there's a big, huge square-dancing group here in the valley.

That must've been a great experience as a kid, to get to travel around and do those conventions and stuff. So you liked performing and stuff like that.

Well, I was always kind of bashful, so sometimes it was pretty hard.

Is that right?

Yes. I even joined a dance class and it was some of the same people that were in the square-dance class. We went to make a local performance and they scrapped the dance routine and we

just—because we were dressed up like sailors and we were singing “Anchors Aweigh” and we sang it rather than danced it.

Is that right? What propelled you to get into the square-dance club? Did you do some of that in Alabama and you—?

No, there was somebody, some friend of my mother’s knew these people that danced, and then I knew some of the kids that were in it from school. There was this one lady, she kind of pushed my mother to try to get me to join it. She acted kind of like a surrogate grandmother to me, and I think she was next door to one of the families where they would sometimes practice.

And at this time, it was just you and your mom living together?

Yeah.

That sounds like a great experience. How long did you do that, the square-dancing?

Probably only about two years. When I got ready to go into junior high school, I moved across town and went to a different junior high school than all of those kids did and just got away from it.

Did you have any, you know, during junior high or high school, did you have any life goals? Was there any sense of what you wanted to do?

No, I didn’t even have that after I got out of the service. But I did join the Civil Air Patrol [CAP] while I was in high school, so that gave me a little bit of a military pre-training, I guess you’d call it, before I went in the service. And it paid off, some of the officers and stuff recognized it right off. But I went in when the Berlin Wall was going up—

Yeah, this is like the late fifties, 1958, something like that?

I went in in ’62 or—yeah, June of ’62, I think it was, or ’61—and while we were in basic training, they cut basic training short by about three weeks and sent a bunch of us to Fort Riley,

Kansas to build that up to combat strength. And then things kind of cooled down in Europe a little bit, even though the Wall went up. Then [Nikita] Khrushchev with his shoe at the United Nations, well, then they started practicing for amphibious landings in case we had to invade Cuba, so we did that for a while. And then after we did that training, got our basic training finally finished, and our secondary training finished, they split the unit up and I ended up going to Germany.

So you joined the Civil Air Patrol while you were still in high school, is that right?

Oh, yes, that was an auxiliary of the Air Force and it was for fourteen-to-eighteen-year-olds.

And what kind of propelled you into that?

I knew some people that flew and had a couple of real good, close friends. One was from Alabama and we used to go flying with him; I think he was a captain in the Civil Air Patrol. And he mentioned the cadet program, so me and two of my neighbors went down and joined it.

So you had friends in there and it just seemed like a—

Yeah, so pretty soon we had a whole group in there that we ran around together with through most of the four years of high school.

And so after high school, it was just a natural thing to enlist?

[00:20:00] Well, I went college and I wasn't ready. I thought I wanted to be a vet, but then I started looking at the curriculum and I said well, four semesters of biology, four semesters of anatomy, and two semesters of psychology: just a real heavy load. I said oh, well, I'm not ready for that. So after one year in college, I joined the Army.

Where'd you go to college?

El Camino.

El Camino. That's a JC, right?

Junior college, yes.

And that just doesn't sound like it was your bag at the time.

No. And I went in the Army still thinking about the vet, I enlisted to try to get into the Veterinarian Corps in the Army, but the Army had greater hopes for me to be in the Medical Corps so I was a medic for three years.

What was that experience like?

That was quite something, and most of the time I felt like I was inadequately trained for it. I mean I had a few incidents that happened and luckily most of them turned out right. I had one guy, we were in a very bad section of Germany: Grafenwohr. It's where they go for most of their winter maneuvers and stuff, and its high rugged mountains; In the wintertime, there's snow, it's colder than—I had this one buck sergeant come to me and he just wanted some antacid. And he was complaining the next day. They were supposed to go out for some artillery practice. So generally thinking just before a field trip, a lot of people trying to get out of it, you know, saying, well, I got this, I got that. Well, he was the other way around. He just wanted something temporarily for the night. And I tapped around his body a little a bit, a couple times, and he flinched, and I says, No, I ain't going to give you any antacids. I think you need to go over to the dispensary. When he went to the dispensary, they put him in an ambulance and sent him down to Nuremberg, to the hospital. I'm not sure if his appendix didn't rupture on the way down there, but I know if I'd given him something to take and he'd have gone to bed, he might not have woke up.

Wow. What was your training like to become a medic?

It was five weeks' training at Fort Riley, Kansas, and I think we practiced more evacuation than we did actual patching people up. But we did have a few weeks of classroom where we would

talk about different types of—it'd be a lot stronger than just a first-aid class but it was still, some of the stuff you ran into. I was in the barracks or maybe even in the dispensary on night standby and they had a softball game going and one of the guys took a wild swing and he took the bat and he hit the catcher across the femur. That is probably the most dangerous bone to be broken, I think; it can ruin you for life. Or the femoral artery, you know, if it starts bleeding and you don't get it stopped, you're dead in a real short time. And so anyway, I got out there to the guy and I splinted it to make sure it didn't move and we got him to the hospital. It turned out it was just a bad bruise, but it was something to scare you half to death. Then we had a training exercise with some National Guards that came down from Ohio, and some of them were Air National Guard. But one guy comes in with his airplane and he buzzed a tank and he buzzed too low. He went into the mountainside and last I heard, they never did find his head. And we had two of our oldest and highest medical sergeants, they went out to the scene, and [00:25:00] these are guys that have been in combat, and they come back about the color of this paper [white]. I'm glad they didn't call any of us to go out there. I guess that was not a pretty sight to see.

Yeah, it sounds terrible. How long were you in the Army?

Three years total.

And you were a medic the whole time?

Yes.

And you said you were there right as the Berlin Wall is going up and the Cold War is kind of, you know, particularly tense with the Cuban missile crisis. Did you have a bigger sense of the Cold War and kind of the larger world during that time?

Yeah. When we went off to Germany, we were very limited in our travel, especially towards the east. I wanted to go visit Berlin but first I had to get permission to go, and I thought with getting

that permission I was ready to go and I went up to the train station to get onto the military train. But no, you got to have advanced reservations to get on the train, even though for a week or two weeks before you'd put in for this authorization to go. So I never even got to Berlin until 2003, I think it was.

Oh, you're kidding. Did your father keep in touch with the family that he met in Germany? Was there any sense of that connection for you?

Oh, he lost touch with them after the war because a lot of people moved around quite a bit after that. I had once tried to make a little bit of effort to try to find them and—but especially being new over there, it was very hard. I even tried to find one of my buddies from Civil Air Patrol, he was in the MPs [Military Police] over there and I spent a whole day traveling around on the train and never did find out where he was at.

So you never did make it to Berlin, but what other places were you stationed?

I was stationed in Hanau am Main.

Say it again.

Hanau on the Main River. This is just twenty kilometers from Frankfurt. So Frankfurt, Offenbach, Wiesbaden, Kassel. We traveled all the way down south into Nuremberg, and six months before I got out I went all the way up into the Alps. I went down to the *casern* that the 10th Special Forces trained at, to the NCO [Non-Commissioned Officer] Academy, and to me that was nothing but basic training all over again.

So you spent the majority of your time in Europe and Berlin—I mean not in Berlin but in Germany?

Yes.

It must've been quite an experience for somebody that went from Alabama to Inglewood, then to Germany. I mean you'd come back, you know, with quite a bit of experiences for a young man.

Well, I tried learning the language and I found an Army class in German. I put in for it and they allowed me to take a half-a-day off every day for two weeks, I think it was, or a half-a-day for four weeks. And I went to this class and came out pretty good in it. Our first sergeant, he was a very—well, he was a twenty-some-years veteran and unfortunately very heavy on the bottle. He saw a class that was cut in half because it was all day, so he figured that since that was half the time as the other class but twice as many hours a day, it must be an advanced class, so he sent me to that. I tried to quit after the first day because this was exactly what I took already, and of course that was the equivalent of two days' classes the way they worked these things. So he says, Well, nobody can catch up. If they replace you, they won't be able to catch up. So I continued and finished the class out.

So did you become fairly conversant in German?

Yes, I did real well. Then when I came back to the States, I was real active in some [00:30:00] of the German events here. I went so far as to end up being in the German-American Club and on the board of directors in their carnival group.

Impressive. Because German, that's a tough language.

But I enjoyed it over there. I enjoyed the people. I went into France and I tried to behave the same way in France as I did in Germany and it didn't work.

Why is that?

I don't know. I think the French are just too arrogant.

Is that right?

I'm supposed to have a little bit of French blood and I kind of deny it most of the time. I tried to speak what little, you know, French I could to the people and mostly all I got was *No compri, no compri*. If it wasn't perfect, they didn't want to even hear you try. So I ended up a few times having a few words with people in German over in France.

I can't imagine they appreciated that too much.

No. I said, well, if they can't understand my French and they don't want to act—unless they speak English, then they can listen to my German.

What else really led you to leaving the service? Is that what you said, three-and-a-half years?

No, just three years. Three-year enlistment.

Did you ever think about maybe staying in, you know, re-upping?

I tried for a couple different things. I even volunteered to go to Vietnam in Special Forces, but they didn't take me in that. I tried helicopters and they didn't take me in that. I spent my time and got out.

What possessed you to want to go to Vietnam?

Just the additional training. When you go into Special Forces, you're trained in two to three different specialties. I was already a medic and they may end up making me a communications specialist or some other. And so I said, well, I'll do that and get a little more training in a little more gung-ho type outfit. But it was denied, so I said, OK.

Do you have any idea why?

No, I don't.

You ever think about what would've happened if you had gotten in, you know, the different direction your life would've gone?

Well, I'd probably be an entirely different person if I made it back.

So were you a little—when you were turned down? Is that one of the reasons why you just decided not to reenlist?

Well, I wasn't real happy. I tried to go in the Navy first and they didn't want to train me in what I wanted to be trained in, so that's why I ended up going in the Army and ultimately they didn't train me in what I wanted to do either. But then they did it a different way, they turned me down *after* I got in, rather than *before* I got in.

Right. So about what year do you come home?

I came home in '64.

Sixty-four? And did you go back to Inglewood?

Yes.

And to kind of pick up your life again, what are you doing at this point?

I went back to Inglewood, went back to junior college, and did a few part-time jobs for a year.

What kind of jobs?

Delivering chicken, delivering pizza, [driving a] moving truck.

Just anything to pay the bills?

Yes. Then I got on at Douglas Aircraft and I worked there for a year. I finally decided I wasn't going to make it as a veterinarian—I just couldn't hack all of those hard-core classes—and so I started studying the languages. I studied German some more in college and then I even took a Spanish class, which my German teacher chewed me out for.

Why is that?

Taking two languages at the same time.

Little bit too challenging?

Yeah. And it was because I ended up drawing a blank on my test in Spanish and when I couldn't come up with the Spanish word, I ended up writing the German word in there. I was trying to translate and when I translate, the word that came easier was the German word than the Spanish word.

Now, this was still at the community college?

[00:35:00] Yes. I stayed there for a year and then when I started studying the languages, I decided to take a trip back to Germany. I'd promised some Germans that I would be back in two years. I got a deal on a charter flight for six weeks or seven weeks in Germany, or in Europe, so I put in for the vacation and the aircraft plant turned me down, of course. And I tried in different ways. Finally, I got a three-week vacation approved, but I was supposed to telegraph back for an extension every week after that three weeks were done. I think I telegraphed back once or twice. So I came back: they said I quit and I said I was fired, but they took me back. After they let my seniority expire, then they took me back; put me back in the same department, more or less. I stayed there about forty-five days and they lost a contract so I got laid off again. Well I went out the door, around the corner to the employment office, and right back in again. Two weeks later I was right back at it.

What are you doing at Douglas? What's your job?

I started out in the cryogenics lab.

What is that? Tell me more about that.

Well, cryogenics is dealing with liquid and gaseous nitrogen, oxygen, hydrogen. This was stuff on the missile propulsion equipment. Then I worked on the Saturn and the Thor missiles and all of the stuff in the testing area. After a while there, I got into inspection. When I left the first time, the long vacation, I was in inspection. I came back to inspection and that was, like I say, lost

because of the loss of the contract. Then I came into the planning department and I was considered a mechanical engineer and planner. We would write out the worksheets telling them how to assemble different parts, what tools to use and what dies or whatever they needed. I did that for a short time and then I went onto swing shift as a liaison planner where I'd make changes. If they could not do it according to the plan that was sent down for them to work on, the foreman would call me over [to look at] the blueprint—we can't do it this way but we can do it this way—and so I would ink in and make changes and send the changes up to the Planning Office.

Help me understand how, because it seems like your resume up to this point is fairly unrelated to what you're actually doing at Douglas Aircraft. I mean you were a medic, you studied languages, now it seems like you're into mechanical engineering and stuff like that.

When I got into that, I started going into electronics, studying some electronics at the community college. But I kept the German up most of the time. I did four semesters of grammar—no, three semesters of grammar, four semesters of conversation—and I started doing the math for electronics and electronics. Then when I got laid off from Douglas, I went over to Hughes and went into Planning over there. I worked on the infant program, that was the infrared scanners they had in the helicopters and stuff over in Vietnam. At that time it was in the infant stage. I got doused into that real heavily. The guy that had been working on it, he was just, I guess, spinning his wheels. He was putting in fifty, sixty hours a week on it and he was already going over his budget and everything like that. He worked all one weekend and Monday he didn't show up, Tuesday he didn't show up, Wednesday he didn't show up. Thursday, they stuck me over there. Friday, somebody finally contacted him: [00:40:00] he had just walked out of the plant and said, That's it. I'm not coming back.

So the project essentially becomes yours?

More or less, yes. I got these engineers calling, where's my material, where's my parts. Where's this, where's that, and I was getting pretty frustrated with it. So this one guy, he was a fairly big shot, he called up one day and I guess I kind of lost my temper. So the next day I had a visitor, he wanted to see who was talking to him like that on the phone.

And this was an engineer, you said?

Yeah.

And so what exactly—help me understand what you're doing on this project.

Again, this is getting the smaller parts made and sent over to the Research or Testing Division to put them together and make it work. Sometimes we'd get a piece, they'd give you the engineering drawing and you had to get it made. They'd say, can we do this within Hughes or do we have to go to an outside vendor to do it? We have to have a special die made for it to make this part? So you'd have to have that done. And so my time at Douglas, I ended up helping out quite a bit because we had this one part and they kept sending it to different places and it was getting to be quite late in being turned out, but they couldn't figure out how to make it. And we'd done something over at Douglas where we had to use a spin form.

Spin form?

It's almost like a lathe, only as it spins it, it forms out on it. We had a part that looked kind of like a top hat, and it had some real precise radiuses in it that had to be there, they had to be that precise. You couldn't just go and pound it down, you know, make it something and pound it down. It had to come out just to that. The tooling man that was supposed to help the planners come up with where to have it made, he didn't have any idea. And I said, well, maybe we should try spin forming. We called the same company we used at Douglas. And anyway, it got to a

point where I hadn't been there ninety days and I was, just because of the way I got into that job, it was just overpowering. I was getting so frustrated and mad and I was about ready to pull what the other guy did. But I says no. So finally I went to my boss and I said, I got something I want to talk to you about.

He said, Well, that's good because I want to talk to you.

And he had a job for me with some electronic engineers over at the airport side.

And I said, Well, that's good.

Well, when he said he had another job for me he said, I don't know if you care for it but I have this other job—

I said, What is it?

Well, not only are you, you know, the job, it's a little bit frustrating, you're also getting into an area that is a little more in your expertise, is that right?

Well, it ended up being a better job. Like I said, I was already taking some electronic courses to help out with it. So I got over there with them and I guess I did a pretty good job because the aircraft business started slowing down. Then my boss, since I was kind of the low-seniority man, he was going to pull me from that last job he sent me to and put somebody else in my place and lay me off. So one day the head engineer calls me to his office and says, Has your boss been over here to talk to you?

I said, No, I haven't seen him in weeks.

[And he said], Well, he wanted to send somebody over to replace you and lay you off.

I said, Well, this is the first time I've heard about it.

[And he said], OK.

So I guess he called the guy up and just chewed him out.

Is that right?

One time he said, I can't tell you what you can do with your [00:45:00] employee but if you take Hallmark from us, I'm not going to train anybody else. So then you've lost two men.

That must've made you feel pretty good.

Well, like I say, I tried to do a good job for them and they showed their appreciation for it. They were real upright with me in telling me that the boss was trying to sneak around behind my back. And, you know, when he was over there trying to negotiate that, he didn't bother to come over to tell me that that might happen. So the engineer decided to tell me himself and, yeah, I did appreciate it.

And then when I got laid off, I started filing applications with, let's see, with the City of Los Angeles. I went down to the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers [IBEW] and signed up for the apprenticeship down there. In the meantime, I took a job two hours a day at Hawthorne High School. Two hours a day, five days a week at Hawthorne High School.

Doing what?

I always used to kid around and called it—I was the cafeteria bouncer. Let's see, they had two women—I think they had two women who took care of the cafeteria and the restrooms at lunchtime. They decided that wasn't enough, so they had two women and then they hired two men. I worked with one of the women who was more senior in the cafeteria and the other guy that was hired worked with the other woman, doing the men's restrooms. I did this for almost a full school year. At first, I was very disliked. I had replaced a woman because there were two women that used to walk the cafeteria and now there's a man and woman. and the kids kind of resented that. I was, I guess because of the military, I was a little more stern than the women were, and they didn't like that. Within three months, the vice-principal who was my boss came

with a letter to him from the Student Council: they wanted me removed from the job. So he comes over and he says, I've got something to show you. You must be doing your job. I read that thing and I started laughing. The biggest thing they had in there was about me not smiling. And English-wise, it was I think a horrible piece of literature. I mean there was something about my smile in every paragraph. They'd change paragraphs but then they'd still bring back in the smile into the paragraph. I was a mean, cruel, vicious man and I didn't smile and this and that and I didn't smile. I said, Boy, I'd like to put that in the papers, or take it back to their English teacher and see what kind of grade they'd get on that. Of course, he wouldn't let me have a copy of it.

And the vice-principal took that as you were doing your job.

Yeah.

That was like a recommendation, then.

Yeah. He says, If they don't like it, you must be doing your job.

That's funny.

Also, we had the earthquake at Sylmar and oh, probably in the middle of May, I started getting job referrals from the City of Los Angeles.

The Sylmar earthquake, what year is that?

Seventy-one.

So how long did you work for Douglas?

I think it was a total of, let's see, I started there '65, '66, '67, '68. I worked four years with Douglas.

OK, and then '69—

One year at Hughes.

And then '70 you were working at the high school.

Seventy, I was unemployed. Most of '70 until September I was unemployed.

Is that when you were working as the cafeteria bouncer?

Well, I started after September of '70, I went to work there at the school.

Did the job eventually grow on you, the cafeteria bouncer?

[00:50:00] Oh, well, what happened then was in May of '71 I started getting all these job offers or interviews, calls for interviews, and I finally accepted one with [Department of] Water and Power construction. It was a raise in pay, so I said my goodbyes there at the school and then, all these kids that wanted to get rid of me six months earlier, they were crying because I wasn't going to be around for their graduation.

Did you smile?

I've always had trouble with that. Even photographers usually hate trying to take my picture.

That's funny, though, that they eventually, you know, they were upset that you were leaving.

Well, you know, I'd joke around with them, talk to them, and I'd get to know their names and then when I'd see them I'd greet them by name. I've always been fairly good with names. That was another reason why I could do my job as well as I could, because I'd go down the line and see who's in line and I'd come back and there's four or five people that weren't there when I went by the first time. I'd say you weren't there and you weren't there and you weren't there, back of the line. We had a big influence of Cubans, so some of the little Cuban girls, one would get in line and then when you get close to the front, all of a sudden there were four or five of them there. And I'd say, You weren't here five minutes ago. Back to the end of the line. [And they would say], *No intiendo, señor*. I'd say, *Bueno, vamonos la oficina*. They knew where the end of the line was then when I'd tell them, OK, let's go to the office, then.

The Spanish came in handy, then.

Yes.

Probably not the German, though, I'd imagine.

No, I never had much chance to use the German except for my own personal use.

So DWP hires you in '71, is that right?

Yeah.

That is the acronym, right, DWP, Department of Water and Power. And so what are you doing for them?

I'm called a, let's see, electrical mechanic helper. But that doesn't last long because twenty-seven days later I got my call to go into the IBEW apprenticeship. It was a cut in pay and it took me, oh, probably a day or two to decide what I was going to do. And I even talked to one of my bosses there at Water and Power and they said, OK, you stay with us and get promoted to an electrical mechanic and you're still here in Los Angeles with DWP. You go over to Local 11 and become a journeyman; you can come back to DWP or you can go anywhere in this country as an electrician. They said, But the decision's up to you. I took a \$2.20 cut and went over and became an electrical apprentice.

Is that what IBEW stands for?

The International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. Theirs was a four-year apprenticeship at that time at the Los Angeles Trade Technical College. I went two nights a week there and worked five days a week on the job.

And the classes, you're just getting deeper and deeper into electrical work and stuff?

Electrical work and code.

What does "code" mean?

Well, the National Electrical Code is the lowest that any house or business is supposed to be wired at. That tells you how high your receptacles are on the wall, how high off the ground your meter has to be outside. If you're running lines across a driveway, how high up they have to be; if you're going to bury them, how deep you have to bury them, what kind of material you have to put around them. The National Code is about, I'd say, an inch-and-a-half to two inches thick, and it changes every four to five—I think it's every four years.

So we took theory classes and code classes, and I worked quite a variety of jobs.

[00:55:00] Matter of fact, I was probably one of the few apprentices that had twenty-one contractors in my four years. I was also—let's see, I was *the* oldest, I think, apprentice in my class. And when they took me, if they had waited another year, it would've been probably five years before I could become an electrical apprentice again because they had an age limit up until about '75. In '76 the law came in that you can't discriminate on age and they took the age limit off.

So you got in just under the wire, then.

So I got in under, just under the wire and only because I had the military time. I worked the four years in L.A. I turned out in August and I think it was about thirty days later I went to San Luis Obispo and worked on the Diablo Canyon nuclear power plant.

I was born in Santa Maria, so that's just down the road.

I went to Santa Maria and Guadalupe quite a few times.

My dad owned a hardware store in Guadalupe for many years.

That Far Western Tavern was always a favorite.

Great place.

I worked Diablo Canyon for about four months and then I came back to L.A.

Was that your first experience with working with anything as far as atomic energy goes?

Yes.

What was that experience like?

Well, when I got up there, it wasn't a whole lot of electrical work *per se*. I got up there right after they had discovered the ground faults out at sea and I was on a crew that was disassembling stuff that had already been put in. We had to tear it all down and put it back up to earthquake standards. So we were mainly pulling wire out and taking pipe down.

This was mid-seventies-ish, somewhere in there?

That was, let's see, '75.

Did you have any, I don't know, I've never been on a nuclear power plant. Did anything about, you know—what was your impression of it, I guess is what I want to ask.

Well, I consider it one of the big impressive jobs to be on. I've been on three, considering a lifetime experience: on the Diablo Canyon, the Alaskan pipeline, and out at the nuclear test site. The other ones would be like when they built Boulder Dam or built the Panama Canal. They were jobs that don't come along—the nuclear power plants, they come along because we've had, what, seven, I think, something like that, built in this country?

Yeah, I'm not sure.

I know the names of two or three of them but I don't—outside of that, not a lot of chances to get jobs like that again, you know, so once in a lifetime.

Was there ever a sense of working at a nuclear power plant, was there a sense of just the sheer power of the place, you know, what—?

Well, when we worked at it, we were just constructing it. I mean it was—there was no—it wasn't producing anything. It was just a bigger job putting things together than going out and doing a

small building or something. Of course, I've had bigger jobs than that since here in town. I worked Mandalay Bay, what was that, 6,000 rooms or something like that plus eleven restaurants.

So you were only at Diablo for four months, you said, right?

Yeah.

And so you go back to L.A.?

Went back to L.A. One of my brother electricians had just come back from the Alaskan pipeline, and he was telling me about the money they made up there and that this one area was going to hire 300 electricians. So I thought about it, thought about it, and soon I started running my American Express card up, flying up there once a month and signing up. I did that for five or six months. In June, I went up and stayed. In July, I went to work.

[01:00:00] *And you had to fly up on your own dime?*

Yeah. You flew up to the 1547 union hall and put your name in the books. And then you had to come up and renew it every thirty days. When your name finally worked its way to the top, you got the job. So when I went up in June, it was close enough that I decided to stay, and I stayed and in July we got the call and went down to Valdez. I stayed on that for almost a year.

That must've been an unbelievable experience.

That was outside, eleven hours a day, seven days a week most of the time. The crew I was on put in thirty-three miles of cable trays.

What's a cable tray?

Those are trays that you run your cables in, you just more or less lay them in on the top. We had trays from, I think there was nine-inch, twelve-inch, eighteen-inch, thirty-six-inch-wide trays.

It's easier to do trays than it is to do pipe for the amount of wires that they had for those

powerhouses. We tied the powerhouse into the piers, because the piers were all—once the oil came, the ships would just pull up to the pier and a guy in the control booth would just pump the oil in there and it would register how much oil was in there until that tanker was full and then shut it off. Like the self-service gas station. Our temporary power at that camp was so large that when we got the powerhouse complete, we gave our temporary power to the city of Valdez because it was bigger than what they had in the city.

Wow! That's quite a power source. So where are you staying while you're working up there?

It was a camp job. A lot of that work in Alaska, especially if it's a big job, you get room and board with your job because you may take a call out of Fairbanks or out of Anchorage. You might go 300 miles to do the job and you can't drive back and forth in time, so included in your job was—I took a one-day job, while I was waiting to go to work at the pipeline in Anchorage, and it was down at the harbor. After we took the job, we went back to our apartment, the contractor came by, picked us up, and took us to the job. We got through and he said the job might be two or three days but it turned out to be a one-day job. He took us back to the shop and I guess they talked and discussed if we were going to go anywhere else for them or going to go back to the hall. Finally they brought the checks out and of course they paid us while we waited for them to make up their mind if we were going to go back to the hall and then they took us back to our apartment.

Sounds like, I mean if you're there a year and you're working seven days a week, eleven hours a day, and at some point you're working through the Alaskan winter, are you still outside during that time? I mean that must've been, an unbelievable experience.

Well, I think some of my roommates thought it was an unbelievable experience living with me.

Why do you say that?

I got to the point where working out all day, I couldn't stand the way they kept the barracks, the heat in the barracks, so I blocked off all heat vents in my room and even cracked the window about an inch.

They kept it too warm for you?

Well, you know, you're working outside and you've got on thermal underwear and then you got a shirt on and then a coat on and might even have more on, you know. You walk in that door and it's 80, 85 degrees and you just start sweating immediately. I always started, as soon as I walked into the hallway, started stripping clothes into my room. And so I found it more comfortable to block off everything and besides, the walls from the neighbors in the adjoining [01:05:00] rooms, they were so warm that I didn't need any extra heat in my room. But other people didn't think the same way I did. Most of my roommates, they would come and especially in the wintertime, they would be there one, two nights, and I'd come back from work and they'd be bunking next door.

What did you do to pass—I mean obviously you don't have much free time, but the free time you did have, what did you guys do to kind of—?

They had a movie theater, they had pool halls, a rec room. There was some gambling and a lot of drinking. And usually on Friday nights, we'd get our check and go to town.

Valdez? Go to the town of Valdez?

They had a bus for us and usually I'd go into town, put my money in the bank, maybe get a meal out of the camp, although the meals in camp were fantastic.

Is that right?

Oh, yeah.

You wouldn't think that, you know, because it kind of almost sounds like a military experience, but the food was good—?

Yeah, to keep people there, they had—let's see, we had steak, sometimes lobster, crab legs.

[They] used to have prime rib on Sunday, then near the end, as the pipeline started tapering off, they changed the prime rib to turkey. But it was still, I mean, it was several fresh roasted turkeys; none of this convention-type turkey breast.

On the whole, how was the experience? Was it a good experience? I mean I'm imagining you made great money.

Yeah, I think it was \$5.00 an hour more than they paid in Los Angeles.

And you're getting room and board.

Yeah; if you didn't really have any expensive hobbies or habits, you could save a lot of money.

And that's basically what happened to me, I had a bank account there in Valdez and I had quite a bit of money in it. I had a bank account down in California with a lot of money in it, and money in my pocket. And one day they came through and said, You want to volunteer for a layoff? I didn't get along with the foreman too well, so I kind of looked at him and then he real quickly explained that, Well, they want to lay about ten guys off but, you know, I'm asking everybody in the crew if they want their name on the list or not. I said, OK, go ahead and put my name on there. And so I came back. After I came back, I was kind of kicking myself because I could've probably stayed another six months if I was wanting to. But, like I said, I had money in my pocket.

What was the source of conflict between you and your foreman?

I got transferred to him. I had a foreman that was from—I think he was from Michigan. Things were going up there and all of a sudden they started pushing about having local people run most

of the jobs. So they replaced this foreman with a Native American from up there. The day that this foreman left, two or three people took the rest of the day off and went and had a goodbye drink with him. Well, I got something in my eye, I think it was, or a cut or something, I can't remember. For some reason I had to go off the hill and down to the medic and they thought I was protesting also that he was being replaced. So I ended up being considered a bad boy. Then I got transferred over to this other foreman and he right away took the information that they passed along to him and he kept trying to keep an eye on me.

So it's just a complete misunderstanding that just kind of snowballed, huh?

I found him watching me; a couple times when I'd go to the restroom, he'd go and stand outside. They'd have a row of five or six of those little green huts and he would stand outside and wait to see how long I was. One time he was there and I saw him standing [01:10:00] out there—he was waiting, and I knew they weren't all full—so he was waiting and watching for me. He made a mistake and turned his back. He turned his back and he was looking back that way [indicating direction] and I went out the door the other way and went over to the tool room and he never did know how long I was there because—.

Right.

But he just—he had a personality I didn't like and he didn't seem to like mine so—

Yeah, it happens. And especially, you know, with the misunderstanding thing.

I believe there was a younger guy that was working with me and he'd also decided that I was going to corrupt him, so he took him away so he wouldn't be working with me.

That's funny. Well, we're coming up at the end of the first disc, so this feels like a good time to stop and then we'll take a little break and we'll start again.

[01:10:53] End Track 2, Disc 1.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 2, Disc 2.

And we're back. So you spent a year in Alaska, or so, and then you come back to L.A., and what's next for you?

I stayed and worked a few jobs in L.A. and then one day I heard, or read on the bulletin board at the union hall that they needed electricians to help man the test site out in Las Vegas. So I had gone to the hall that day and taken a job. It was a one-day job at Hollywood Park. It was just taking down the totalization boards because that was the end of the season. So I went up to the secretary and says, Well, you know, I'd go but I can't go until tomorrow. So she took my card number and my Social Security number and sent it out here to Las Vegas. I showed up and the normal thing for an electrician to do when he goes into another town is to go in and request to sign the books. I went in and I requested to sign the books and I pulled my card out he said, Well, you're from Los Angeles. Did your secretary call ahead?

I said, Yeah.

He said, You don't need to sign. Just wait for your name to be called.

So I stepped back. It turns out there were twenty-five of us came up. It's a very extensive background check to go out there and twelve of the twenty-five failed the background check and were sent home.

What was the background check like?

Ah, they want to know if you'd had any drunk driving, jail time for anything. They tell you they want to know your last fifteen years, but then once you start filling the paperwork out, plus they want to know every single job you've had for the last fifteen years and when you start talking about electricians or any kind of construction worker, basically that could be—fifteen years could be thirty, forty jobs, depending on how much work there was.

So anyway, thirteen of us ended up going out there and after about six months, it was down to two of us. Everybody else either got tired and went home, didn't like—the camp job out there was nothing like the camp job in Alaska. I mean it was—the quality of the food was a little poor, plus you had to pay for it. But your rent was—you couldn't really complain too much about that, \$5.25 a week.

Those were the days, right? You lived on site?

I lived on site for quite a while until I finally started getting fed up with it. Most people that stayed out there became habitual gamblers or drinkers and so after a while, I got tired of that. First I rented a trailer in town, then an apartment, then I bought a house.

Prior to seeing that, you know, the test site was hiring there, when you saw it on the bulletin board in L.A., had you heard of the test site?

No.

So I'm trying to think, like during the fifties, had you heard of the atmospheric testing that was going on there?

I had seen some of it. I had seen tests on the Bikini Islands or whatever it is.

Bikini?

Bikini Islands, yeah. I'd seen some of that on television, so I'd heard of it but didn't know a whole lot about it.

I guess when you first applied for it, did you know what they were doing?

No. When I came back from Alaska, I flew to San Francisco and rented a car and came down the coast. After approximately a year in Alaska, when I crossed from Ventura into L.A. County, the first thing I said to myself was, what the hell am I doing back here? And so I was always looking—they have tramp magazines and stuff that will tell you where other jobs are at, and I

subscribed to some of those and started looking for jobs out of the state because I did not feel like coming back to L.A. County.

What about L.A.?

Too many people.

It had grown too much?

Well, see, I first went there in 1950 and we still had bean fields around Inglewood. And in 1977, [00:05:00] wall-to-wall people. So I just wanted to get away from that. So I heard of work up here; matter of fact, I came here and I think within six months I signed a thing, had a notarized statement that I was a Nevada resident.

Is that right? This was '77 when you arrived in Vegas?

Yeah.

Had you visited Vegas before?

Yes.

What were your impressions of it?

It was, you know, a lot less crowded than Los Angeles and Oakland, so I liked that part about it. And then this no state tax, of course, helped. I was also having trouble with the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] because the IRS still doesn't seem to understand construction workers. They chased me over three states to try to tell me they were denying my expense seeking employment. The guy finally got a hold of me; I had an apartment over on the east side, and I said, well, now, you been trying to track me down over how many states?

[And he said], well, I tried to reach you in California and in Alaska and central California and now I finally caught up with you here.

[And I said], OK.

[And he said], Oh, OK, we'll write that off.

But, you know, it took them a while to find me, and yet that was exactly what he was trying to say, that well, you can't claim that. Because I had gone to southern California, central California, back to southern California or up to Alaska, back to southern California, and then I came over here. I also went down to San Bernardino, Riverside, Orange County, and San Diego County and applied for jobs at different locals.

So when you first got to Vegas, you liked it. It was, you know, less people and that kind of appealed to you. What was your first—I've never been to the test site. What was your first impression of the test site? What struck you about it?

I guess the size. Because I got out there, of course I drove myself out there, and when I checked in they said, OK, well, you're going to work in Area 2. They gave me a little one-line map showing me how to get to Area 2. I drove and I drove and I drove. I said, wait a minute; that's something like sixty miles from the front gate or farther, I can't remember exactly.

And then that's after, what, sixty, seventy miles to get out there, right?

Yeah. Basically from here to there was 112 miles. So I got out there and then I finally found the right trailer to report to and I reported in and they signed me up and they called the tunnel and I was to go underground. And I sat and I sat. I was working for Bill Flangas, and so he came in and the secretary introduced me as a new hire, and he goes on. I'm sitting there, and finally she says, Well, you know, it's about lunchtime. You might as well go over to the cafeteria and have lunch. So I went over to the cafeteria and had lunch and I turned around and come back. And I sat. Bill comes walking in again and I'm still sitting in the secretary's office. He says, what the hell is he still doing here? And she said, Nobody's come after him. Boy, he got on the phone and he called up Leo Flores and within thirty minutes Leo was there to pick me up and take me to the tunnels. Of course, that just about

shot the day, too. The tunnels was probably three miles from the Area 12 camp. So we went up there and I worked outside where they loaded stuff to go underground. I met a local apprentice and a couple of local journeymen and the steward. When we got back into the camp that night, I ran across the other electrician from—two or three other electricians from California that I knew. What they [00:10:00] had out there were trailers and they had bedrooms on each end, or a bedroom, living room and all combined on each end and then a central bathroom and shower in the center. So we took the trailer: he took it one end and I took it on the other end. We stayed out there for several months. And then when that event went off, I was moved down to Area 2.

So you were at 12, then you went to 2?

That's down in the flats; that's where they do the down holes. So I worked down there for a few months, I don't remember exactly how many. I kind of protested the way that one of the foremen was trying to pit his men against each other. We would roll up cable and he would come over there and he'd pull one or two people aside and says, what you guys got rolled up? Well, the other team, they've got 400 feet more than you do.

Trying to create competition?

Yeah. And then I heard him tell the other group that, and I kind of told a few people, I said, Hey, you know, he's trying to pit us against each other, and I said, that don't sound too brotherly to me. A few people [said], Oh yeah, yeah. And the next thing, we called the steward and he came out there. Then when the general foreman showed up, everybody but about two of us all didn't have anything to say.

Isn't that always the way?

So I was the head troublemaker, and I got shipped out within three days.

"Shipped out" meaning—?

Sent to another location.

OK, but still at the test site.

So I was shipped down to Area 6, and I guess they sent down that I, you know, that I was a troublemaker. Everybody had jobs that worked with some of the other guys down there, there were three or four of us sent down. And anyway, they gave them jobs to work, and I got to work personally with the foreman. I believe that was so that he could keep a close eye on me. I worked with him for about three days and on the fourth day he says, Do you mind if we clear you for Area 51? We got some men over there and they need a hand. [And I said], Oh, sure. So the next day, he comes back at about midday and he says, Well, your clearance went through and tomorrow you report down here and we'll take you and your tools over there.

Had you ever heard of Area 51 before that?

Well, I had after I'd been out there. Of course, people talked about it. Everybody knew what was out there. So I went back to work and I'm working along there and he comes over to me just before quitting time and says, Oh, never mind about coming back down here. Just report over there and we'll send your tools over to you. So the next day I drove, of course not knowing exactly where it's at, but I went over there and got stopped at another guard gate and [was asked] who are you. They took my badge and they went in a little office and made a few phone calls and come back out and OK.

And this is at Area 51?

Well, this was leading into 51. We were still miles to go. So I went in and I worked there, oh, how long did I work there? I don't know, I worked there for a while, I can't remember exactly how long.

What were you doing out there? What's your job title? What was your job?

Electrician.

Electrician? So you're just like—give me a sense of what you would do on a day-to-day basis.

If they needed new service to a building, I put the service in. If they needed wire pulled, we pulled the wire. They went through a period where they revamped some of the housing out there [00:15:00] and they had us change out the thermostats and put new thermostats in. And finally I got assigned to Base Maintenance, so then you wouldn't just go around and do—if the secretary's typewriter wasn't working because there was no electricity, well, I had to go over and find out why there was no electricity and maybe have to replace something, replace a switch or replace a circuit breaker. And I went over there one time, did something. I was in the superintendent's office and I can't remember, I was complaining about something and he said, Oh, well, you know, we can take care of that. I said, No, I think the best thing to do— Or no, they explained to me about who had set up the rule for what I was complaining about. So I complained and all of a sudden the department manager walks in and adds his two cents. He was the one that had made the rule that I was complaining about. I said, You know what? I think the best thing to do is just clear me out of here.

[And he said], Oh, you don't have to do that.

I said, Yeah, I do.

I said, be true to myself, I said, get out of here. And I left and I was blackballed for a year or two anyway and I was not allowed back in 51. But I went to town for a short time; work got scarce, they had stopped building the Aladdin, whatever the last hotel they were working on, and so there were a lot of men on the books.

This is late seventies, now, we're talking about?

This would be '78, '79, yeah.

And I apologize, just to stop you for a second, I mean Area 51 is such a, you know, it really conjures up images. What was it like? What was your impression of Area 51?

Well, when I came to town, I got active in the German-American Club. Then when I got transferred over there, I mean that just made—my activities with the German-American Club almost making me paranoid. I went to a[n] Oktoberfest and I'm sitting with one of the Germans that I'd met, and he got up and circulated around, and there were two guys left at the table. So I said, Well, what part of Germany are you from? [And they said], Oh, we're not from Germany. We're from Bulgaria. And it's a good thing that the chair had a back in it because I think I'd have fell right off of it. All of a sudden I [said], Oh, I got to go get a beer. Of course, I never came back to that table.

I'm not really following. What about that?

Well, they impressed upon us quite a bit that spies are everywhere and maybe just somebody you're drinking with might start asking you casual questions and trying to—and they can piece—you know, they get a little bit from you and little bit from somebody else and they can piece together stuff. So they used to give us these little talks constantly and it kind of made you paranoid.

And Bulgaria was Communist at that time, is that right?

Oh, yeah, they were still a satellite country but—

Yeah. OK, now it makes sense. So it made you uncomfortable and you just—

Oh, it made me very uncomfortable. I mean like I said, I got up and I found another table when I got my beer.

I bet. Yeah, I never thought of it like that, how, you know, I guess the security measures out at the test site would make you a little bit, you know, a little bit on eggshells, I suppose.

Yeah. Well, that—I mean my girlfriend, she'd call here sometimes and the phone would have heavy static on it. And she says, God, I can't hardly hear you on your phone. I said,

Oh, yeah, that's the FBI tapping in again. She got to the point where she wouldn't hardly call.

Is that right?

Yeah. It scared her because she's foreign-born. She's a German and it used to scare her. You know, I was just kidding about it but, they could've been. I know one day out here I saw a car parked out in front of my neighbor's house. I think it's right where you're parked at. [00:20:00] And they sat there and they sat there and they sat there all day long. I was out in front and I noticed my neighbor out. I was talking to him and I says, Yeah, that car sitting out in front of your house been sitting there all day.

[And he says], Yeah.

I said, I wonder what they're doing there.

[And he says], Well, why don't you go ask them?

So I walked over. I said—no, I think first I went in and I called the police and said, You know, somebody's been sitting in the neighborhood watching the neighborhood for hours.

So then I walked over there and there was a gal and she had her window down about that much [indicating distance] and tinted, pretty dark windows. And I said, Excuse me. What are you doing here in the neighborhood?

[And she said], Well, you should know. You called the police about us.

And then I happened to lean forward and look in there and I saw this big old stack of— you know how the computer paper used to always be—

Yeah.

She had a big old stack like that [indicating size] over on the passenger seat. And when she caught me leaning forward, looking in there, *ffup* went the window, and soon as I walked back

on the sidewalk, she left. Two minutes later, a guy replaced her, in a different car. And apparently they were FBI; I don't know for sure, but they were enough tuned in to the police that they knew that I had called in.

Yeah, that's got to make you take a step back, doesn't it?

Oh, yeah. And see, I was out there fourteen years, so I ended up having to renew my clearance three times. Plus I married a German-born person while I was out there. Talk about creating paperwork. We took a honeymoon out of the country: we went to Cancun. And so I came back and one time called this one woman and said, Oh, we went on our honeymoon to Cancun. Am I supposed to fill out some paperwork? [And she said], Yeah, but you're supposed to fill it out before you go. OK.

So you have to fill out paperwork even if you're going someplace, you know, fairly innocuous like Cancun or something?

Well, they want to know where you're going before you go, so then if there's any kind of foreign activity that they consider dangerous, then they will tell you you're not supposed to go there.

When you were at Area 51, again, not to keep coming back to this, but it's just so interesting to me. Again, like what was it like? When you were actually there working, did you get a sense of, you know, the physical space?

There were a lot of things there that I used to kind of shake my head at quite a bit. My stepfather worked twenty-five years for American Airlines and I saw planes out there that I would love to have told him about but—

You couldn't.

And I know I was sent on assignments to do work, I'd get the building number and everything, I'd go over there and I'd walk in this door and I [would say], oh oh, wrong building, I'm not

supposed to be there. I'd look around and I'd find a person in charge there and I'd say, well, I'm supposed to do some work next door.

[And he would say], OK.

[And I would say], what do you mean, OK?

[And he would say], Go ahead and get your work done.

And like one day I was working in a hangar out there. We were putting lightning rods all over it. My partner, he gets up on the roof and he shoves the lightning rod down and I fasten the bolt on it and run the wire over. And all of a sudden I roll over to this one place that he's at and whoa! So I refused to go up at first and again I find somebody and I says, Bird's sitting over there with a cockpit open, and I need to work right there. [And he says], Yeah, OK. And that was the Stealth. I had to sit there on a lift with the canopy [00:25:00] wide open and work over them. And most people did not have any idea what the Stealth looked like, where it was being tested at, or anything else. Here I am working over the thing and can see controls and everything else if I did any looking; I paid attention to my work only.

Yeah. Sounds like it made you uncomfortable.

Oh, it did. I got transferred for one year up to Tonopah [Test Range, TTR], and that's where they were testing them out all the time up there. When they first were testing them, we were working on the runway and we're facing the runway with the hangars behind us. We're out there working and they roll those hangars up. Of course it makes a lot of noise when those mechanical doors were rolling up, the tendency is to turn to see what's going on behind you. Well, most times if you did that, within five minutes a Blazer would come rolling up with the four people jump out of it with M-16s pointed at you and they'd have you down to the front leaning in a rest position. Then they would take you back to their headquarters and then one of your bigger bosses would have to come to get you out, just for turning and looking.

Wow. Did they tell you this beforehand, if you hear a loud noise, don't turn and look?

No. It never happened to me, but one of the guys that later became one of our business managers down here, I think they nabbed him three times.

It seems to me it would be really hard not to look.

Yeah, you hear a noise and—

Just a natural human response, right?

Yeah.

That's crazy!

And then, you know, you're running around out there so much and they'd have places out there along the roadways that you had to stop at and be cleared to go on through. Well, we had one electrician from Oregon, he'd been out there for a long time, I know he was there when I got there and he was there when I left. One day he comes there and just goes right on past the guard and went over to his job site. And I mean all of a sudden, these people are running around all over the place. So then they finally called him in and chewed him out and let it go at that, you know, he's been here so long, they let it pass that time.

So anyway, I went back to the test site after a year up there, and one of the events I went out on was called Fire Storm. Fire Storm was the overall event. I think there were supposed to be ten different shots at that one location. And Fire Storm was the brainchild of Eric Storm, changing the way of doing a down hole. They went from setting up a trailer park and a down hole for each event. They put a pivotal trailer park and then were scheduling ten events in a circle around it. So the boss said, well, you know, Eric, if this doesn't work, we're going to fire Storm. So they made a little emblem and that was what the emblem said, "Fire

Storm,” and that’s what they called this series of events. One of the events that I was on out there was called Normanna. Most of the events out there were named after cheeses.

Is that right? Do you know why?

No.

Seems like an odd thing to name events after, doesn’t it?

They had event names out there that I didn’t even know there were cheeses. But anyway, I worked on two or three of those Fire Storm events. They were all very good to work on. I have letters from different—well, some of them were laboratories who did most of the events in Area 2, and certificates and stuff like that that was passed on to us. Safety was a big thing out there also, that was a certificate for a back care class and that [00:30:00] was a very interesting class. It taught us a lot about what to watch out for when you’re out there working and lifting.

Right. And so apparently Eric’s idea worked and they didn’t fire Storm.

Yeah, he was still working last time I saw him.

OK. Funny, though, when you hear the word “firestorm” in regards to an atomic test, the last thing you would think is, you know, they literally were talking about firing Storm. Funny. So you’re working for REECo [Reynolds Electrical and Engineering Company], then, this whole time, right?

Yeah, I worked on a project called Dolphin and another project, Caboc.

Did they have these kind of team pictures every event?

Most events. Let’s see, and here’s actual down hole work. I don’t know what event it was but they showed us there [showing photograph].

I don’t know how this one even got out. It’s not even got a classification thing on the back of it.

There's our electrical group right there [showing another photograph]. That was another thing. We had quite a few different people come and go, so you met a variety of people from all over the country. There's a couple boys on there from back home.

In Alabama?

One of them stayed out here. He stayed out here until they shipped him home in a box. He lived out in Pahrump and was involved in a rollover.

Ah, that's terrible. I'm sorry to hear that.

Yeah. And here's another event [showing another photograph]. That's all crafts there.

Just to go back a little bit, you said that you'd never heard of the test site or really had an idea of what they were doing when you were in L.A. and heard about the job opening. At what point did you know they were, you know, testing atomic weapons, and what'd you think about that?

Well, I think when I read the sign and, you know, asked a little bit about it, I found out that that's what it was about.

And did that ever strike you as, you know what did you think about once you realized you were going to go out to a place that's testing atomic bombs?

Well, I didn't know much about how they were doing it or when they were doing it.

So I guess maybe you could tell me what role you played in making an event happen?

Well, right here [showing a photograph] I'm arranging the cables as the canister goes into the ground. Those cables were sending the signals back to the trailer park to tell them what the event, how it went off, and they were looking for certain data for each—each event was looking for certain types of data. And we always had all these numerous cables there that we had to work on. And these white cables, they're not wires, they're a coax[ial], so you have to shape them in, no sharp turns or bends in them. That chunky one over there in the green—in the Army shirt,

that's me. That was one thing out there, I was a lot heavier than I am now. Of course, that might be all the biscuits and gravy in the morning at the cafeteria when you're first working there.

Now, you're living off site the vast majority of the time, right? How would that work?

Let's see, yeah, I only lived on site a couple years or less.

So what's a typical day like? I mean what time are you having to get up in the morning to get out there?

Got up about three o'clock, got to the bus stop about four or 4:15, something like that.

So you took the bus out there with—and I imagine you knew most of the people on the bus going out there?

Oh, yes.

What did you do on the bus to pass time?

Going out, I slept. Coming back, I either read or played cards. The bus that came by here after I [00:35:00] moved to this house, the bus that came by here went all the way into Henderson, and so we had quite a few fitters on that bus. So I used to sit in the back with them and we played Tonk and Hearts. Then if we were on a bus that we didn't have enough players for a card game, then usually it was reading.

Or Solitaire or something?

Yeah. Well, I think I read 250 *Long Arm* series Western books on the rides out to the test site.

Is that right? About what time would you get out there?

I'd get out there about seven o'clock in the morning.

And then you'd have breakfast in the cafeteria?

Breakfast, and then you had to get on another school bus and go up to the event.

But the food wasn't as good as in Alaska, right?

No. And you only got cafeteria privileges usually if you were working in Area 12. If you worked in Area 2, you'd just get there early and you could heat something up in the microwave or something like that, but you had no breakfast.

And, you know, maybe take me through the high points of a typical day for you out there.

Well, it would kind of depend on what part of the testing cycle you were in. You'd start off with the list of cables they needed, and then they came in on, I think they were like 25,000-foot reels which took a forklift to move them around. You put them on these racks and then you run them through a counter and put them onto the smaller reels for ever what length they needed to go down hole. Typical down hole was 3,000 feet. So you'd run these through, you rolled them up, put the two ends so they could be moved at ten feet, and then they'd go to a splice shack. In the splice shack, they would tell you what kind of connector needed to go onto that and the electricians working in the splice shacks would then put the connector on them. I've done both the reel-to-reel rolling up and I've done the splicing of the connectors. I've gone out to the down holes and laid it out on the ground, which looks like a whole bunch of spaghetti because you run down and make loops that will pull off easy when they're going over the chute and into the down hole. That in itself takes days, if not weeks to do that because you're liable to have 300, 400 cables on one down hole.

Wow. And this is all to get like, you know, data from the tests and stuff, right?

Right. You'd have power cables. You'd have data cables. I don't know, let's see, we must've had probably twenty-five different types of cabling that would go down. And of course they all took a different type of fitting just about.

That's very complicated and involved.

And so eventually I learned to splice just about any type of fitting that was needed. I learned how to do it.

Did the job change as you got closer to test day?

Like I said, one day you might be reel-to-reel outside, a few days later you'd go inside to splice, and then a few days after that you were loading them up on trucks and taking them to the event site, unloading them, and putting them out on the ground. We call that "whomping cable." You go out there and you lay it down and go along there with your foot and keep it in a little row. I was on one of those events like that down in the flats and one of my working partners was Steve [Steven D.] Ross, who's one of our newly-elected—

City councilman.

City councilman.

Yeah, right. Were you guys acquaintances? Did you—?

[00:40:00] Oh, yeah. We worked out of the same hall and we met out there and have been friends ever since.

Was there a lot, you know, a lot of bonding, a lot of close relationships developed out there?

Yeah, I have three or four people that are real close from out there, and I lost a couple of them that were close from out there.

I'm sorry to hear that.

I didn't get to know Steve's wife, his second wife. I saw them during the campaign and they were both real happy to see me because we hadn't seen each other in a while. He started his own electrical company after he came to town for a while, and then decided to—went and took the test, got his contractor's license, and got started as a minority contractor because they put the company in his wife's name. He was doing real good as a contractor.

Yeah, sounds like it.

And he was our political action committee chairman at one time, and then his wife started, well, you're spending too much time down at the union halls, spend a little more time at home. And that was kind of necessary since their marriage brought them together and they made it a household of seven. Between them, they brought five kids. And so he's done a terrific job. He's got about two in college now.

Wow. If you're getting up at three, what time are you getting home?

Seven.

How was your relationship during this time? It must've put quite a strain to be—

Well, I was single most of that time. Yeah, because I've been single most of my life. I was only married for two years.

You're working five days a week out there?

Sometimes. Sometimes six, sometimes seven. And sometimes ten-hour days. Most of those days you wouldn't come home. The days that I did get home, midnight and you just about meet the bus coming back.

Did you get to be out there during the actual event, the actual test day?

Most of the time, I always came home on test day, took the whole day off. But a lot of times, they would allow us to go into Mercury and wait it out.

Did you ever do that?

I can only remember staying overnight in Mercury on one event. That was a British event and I'm not sure if that was on the event itself or the after-event party.

There were parties after the event?

Sometimes, especially when the British would fire or have an event over here. They were a lot of fun.

Were they? Did you interact with them at all?

Oh, yeah. There were a lot of people out there that knew me but didn't even know my name.

They know me as the Knife Man, because I used to carry knives out there in my lunch bucket and sell them.

Really?

Yeah. You know the big buck knives or compact knives with the scabbard? I'd take those out and sell them, certain kinds of knives the splicers would use, and even a Rambo knife one time, which I'm surprised that I got it onto the site without getting arrested.

Yeah, I was going to ask you, did they ever hassle you about bringing anything in?

No. The only time I've ever got hassled was when I went in on one event and I had five knives in my pocket and the security guard says—as you go in to where the device is at, you have to get rid of everything out of your pocket—and I was emptying out, the guy starts looking at the knives and says, How come you got five knives?

And I go, Oh, I use this for the heavier stuff and use this for this and that one there cleans fingernails.

[And he said], Never mind. Get out of here.

The general foremen used to kid me too. Every once in a while, I'd get moved around, and so I'd come back into an area that I'd been in before. And I [00:45:00] remember one time I came back to Area 2 and they says, What's the matter, Knife? Business got bad someplace else so you need some new customers? In Area 2 they always had a locker. It had my name on it and above it it had "The Wanderer." So they always left it open for me

because I was always coming back. I must've went out to different areas and came back to Area 2 six, seven times.

So you—I mean it sounds like you've been, as "The Wanderer" you saw a lot of the test site.

I saw just about every bit that a person can see.

So you weren't there on the event day usually?

[Telephone rings]

[00:45:44] End Track 2, Disc 2.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 3, Disc 2.

And we're back. So you usually were not there on event day?

No.

What was the work like after the event? You know, how did that differ from pre-event stuff?

Well, during some of the peak times, I mean you couldn't tell the difference, depending on what crew you were on, because you'd just go right back into the reel yard and start getting ready for the next event. And then one crew would go out after the event was checked for safety for radiation leaks and stuff, they'd go out and they'd put a fence around the area, and where this fence was at, we'd cut the cables and roll them up. If they had a smaller event, and these cables would test out, they'd reuse them. So they were trying to save the taxpayers a little money but I don't know if we really did, by the time the labor got through. But we'd go back out there and we'd cut our own cables loose. If they wanted to cut them closer to the hole, they had a little robotic, almost like a tile saw on wheels, and they'd run it down there, down close. Sometimes a day or so afterward, the ground would fall. The hole always left a pock mark in the ground where the event went off, and sometimes that all wouldn't fall at once. So sometimes they would, like I

say, use that machine to go out there and cut the cables off, and then we'd pull it out and roll it up.

So you would use the machine for fear of falling, or radiation, or both?

Well, yeah, because if it fell the wrong way and would open up, there could be a leak. But that was to keep anybody going out there, walking out there to cut them and having, all of a sudden, the ground disappear under them. We had a post-shot event on the mesa and some people went up there to retrieve the cables, and part of the mesa caved in. Two or three people were sent to the hospital. This one foreman, his back was broke and he eventually died before he got out of the hospital from it. Luckily it wasn't our group. It was LASL, Los Alamos Scientific Labs people, but that was still a local union electrician that was killed.

[00:02:54] End Track 3, Disc 2.

[00:00:00] Begin Track 4, Disc 2.

And we're back. So you said they did take safety precautions, but it sounds like accidents did happen. Maybe you could tell me about some more of those.

Oh, yeah. Well, I've got a scar at the center of my palm where I was in one accident out there. I was on top of a device canister, securing the cables to the canister, and they were up through the tower and then back down on the ground. So before they go to move that, they have to bring them over and put them in these glands. The glands are kind of oval shaped and they cut a wedge out of it so that they'll fit tight to the top. They come out the top, and then you put that wedge back in, and they're held in place there and then they're epoxied in. Well, I reached out to pull one of the cables in to be able to fasten it down, and it was tied off higher up in the tower. These towers are sometimes five to eight stories high. And I reached to pull it in and all of a sudden it started pulling me back out, and that's I'd say a fifteen, twenty-foot-high drop if I'd been pulled

off of the device. I put my hand down on this canister and where they had cut the chunk out was razor-sharp titanium. That just went right down in my palm and the blood started flowing all over the place. I got my hand over to slow the bleeding down and headed off, and of course everybody knew something happened because by the time I got down there, my whole hand was all bloody.

Did your experience as a medic, you know, kind of come back to you?

Oh, yes. Well, that was it. The first thing I did was stop the bleeding, protect the wound. And we have a procedure that if it's not life threatening, that you're supposed to go up and get a movement pass from our supervisions office and go to the local dispensary. Then if the local dispensary can't completely take care of it, they send you down to Mercury hospital. The man in charge from the laboratory, I mean he got so excited, he was trying to get me into his sedan and he was going to rush me straight to Mercury. And I says, Well, we can't do that. We got a procedure to follow.

So you were the calm one.

Yes, I stayed calm. Well, like I said, you know, a little over two years as a medic. I went up there and I said, I think I need a movement slip. We went up and they cleaned it up and bandaged it and in a little bucket of ice and put me in a van and sent me down to Mercury and they sewed it up down there. Took nine stitches to stop the bleeding.

Wow. Any other accidents you were—either that affected you or that you had heard of or happened while you were out there?

Oh, there were numerous accidents, and there ain't too many that stand out. Underground, we had a[n] air hose break loose and that beat somebody pretty bad.

Is that right? Because they kind of flop around, right?

Yeah. And then I left [Area] 51—the second time I was out at 51, I left them on a stretcher. I was on a twenty-foot extension ladder looking for a place to run a pipe run and I put the ladder up there and I tied it off up there. I'm looking around trying to find a place, a clear path to run about 300 feet of pipe. I get finished, I untie it, and I start down. I took one step with my left foot, I reached to take the second step with my right, and when my right foot finally hit something solid, it was the concrete seventeen feet below. That was a one-foot landing and my heel just burst, thirteen centimeters out one side and blood all over the place, and nobody heard me fall.

[00:05:00] *Oh, you're kidding!*

I was sitting there, looking about like a pretzel in that ladder because, you know, legs go through the rungs. So I get the ladder off of me and I finally managed to get on one foot and I hop around to the semi and went over to the stairs. I looked at the stairs and that's extruded iron stairs. I looked at that, hopping over there wasn't too enjoyable and I thought, trying to hop up that, I think not. So I grabbed the handrail and I lowered myself to my knees on that extruded metal and on my knees I went up the nine stairs there to the door. I said [to myself], well, it hurt like hell to get myself up on one foot before, I don't think I'll try it. Then I reached out and I finally got a hold of the doorknob and I pulled the door open and I yelled for a carpenter who I knew was working close by. This female painter, she heard me and she says, *Somebody looking for Jerry?* And then his boss happened to come through and she asked him. I yelled again and she looked over at the door and all you could see is a head sticking through the door down at the floor level. She screamed once, ran over there, and opened the door. By then, Jerry and his boss came over and they lifted me up and put me into a secretary's chair. The painter, she ran and got a bunch of wet paper towels to try to clean up my foot a little bit and within a half-hour, had a whole building full of people.

Wow. And they take you from there to the hospital?

They took me to the 51 dispensary, where they bandaged it and cleaned it up. Then they decided what they were going to do with me as far as getting me transported back to the city. The first thing they did was to strip me of my identification as to being a worker out there, because that place doesn't exist, so you can't have a guy coming in and saying, Oh, you got hurt out at 51. So they stripped me of my identification and at first they were going to fly me in by helicopter. My story was supposed to be that I was out at the test site and got hurt and they were doing a maneuver close by and heard the call for help and came over and picked me up. But then they changed their mind and they had a twin-engine plane there and they took out a couple of seats to make room for the stretcher. Took me to North Las Vegas and had Mercy Ambulance to meet them at North Las Vegas and then went to UMC [University Medical Center].

Any permanent damage? Are you OK?

Well, you'll see every once in a while when I get up to walk, it takes me a few steps to get started. It kind of fused my ankle a little bit, and I got my motion there after eighteen years.

I'm terribly sorry to hear that.

And anyway, I was out of work for five months. I went back to work, supposedly on full duty. Most people thought I looked more like Chester [character on the television series *Gunsmoke*] out there because I was still limping pretty bad.

Did you go back to 51 or—?

No. I went back to Area 2; another one of my returns. And of course they took one look at me and said, No, you're not going out in the field. They put me in a splice mix and left me at the splice mix for a couple of months. But I was still being paid by 51. And every time some place would be shorthanded [they would say], Oh, here, send Hallmark over there. And I

went I don't know how many different places. I went to 2500 area, which is where they used to test the rocket motors back in the, I guess in the sixties. Then they had some trouble back in Area 2, some kind of walk-off, and I never did really get in on what the exact trouble was but—

That's like a labor problem, walk-off, is that what you mean?

[00:10:00] Yes. And so anyway, I got shipped back over there real fast. I left so fast that I even left my hat hanging on the hat rack. Then I went up on the mesa and I was working on a down hole, and the down hole was bigger than the amount of men we had, so we got some men from Area 6. And 51 needed a hand back over there. Well, my clearance was coming due, so they made a swap. One of the hands that came from Area 6, he went to 51, and I went in his place to N-Tunnel. And I called up and told them, I says, You know, I'm getting traded around like one of these ball players but I'm sure not making their kind of money. They said, Well, you don't have to worry about it. Someone's already replaced you. So then they took me off their cost account and I became a permanent tunnel hand again.

So you did—yeah, I mean eventually you back out in the field full time, then.

Yeah. And matter of fact, I finished my time out at the test site in the tunnels. I went from N-Tunnel to T-Tunnel to P-Tunnel and out the door.

Wow, did your injuries ever give you a second thought about, you know, working out there, or no?

No, they're injuries that can happen—

Anywhere, I suppose.

Anywhere.

Did the fact that you were working around radiation and that kind of stuff ever, you know?

Well, we had these badges and they had a dosimeter on them, and they checked them monthly, I believe it is. Once a year, they gave you a report of what your scan was, and mine always came

out 0.0000. I said, well, knowing our government, I don't know if that's exactly true or not but—
And since I've left the test site, I've had two or three physicals paid for by either DOE
[Department of Energy] or Department of Defense [DoD], I think, but I'm not sure. One was out
of Stanford and one was out of Cincinnati. The universities were conducting these things in case
test site workers did get any kind of permanent problems, silicosis, asbestosis.

How'd those tests go?

So far, all of mine have come out pretty clean. I've had some friends of mine, well, a couple
people I know at the breakfast [REEC Co retirees' breakfast], they've received \$150,000 for theirs.
But the whole time I was out there, I wore a beard, and so when it came time for reentry, they
would not accept anybody on reentry that had a beard because the face mask would not fit tight
enough. And they said, well, you're going to have to shave. I says, well, I don't
think so.

And what did they say?

They'd just get somebody else. They had enough people that were clean-shaven that they—but I
guess sometimes they tolerated me maybe more than they should've.

Well, when you're good at your job, I guess, you know.

Well, you know, I was fairly steady, even though in '81 I got married and divorced in '83, and
then after that for about five, six years I'd take four vacations a year to have visitation with my
daughter.

She was in Germany?

No, she was in Long Island [New York]. But still, that was all the way across country and so—
The only place I really had any hard time about taking the time off was at Tonopah, and I
cancelled one visitation because of it. The general foreman caused me to cancel it, he quickly
tried to get me to re-fill out another request because somebody told him that he could probably

be in a lot of trouble. He got mad and literally tore it up himself, so he overstepped his [00:15:00] bounds. Somebody warned him about that and he quickly came out and tried to get me to fill out another one. I said, Look, I've already cancelled the flight, so forget it. Yeah, Tonopah was the only place that I had ever thought about getting out of the trade.

Is that right? Why is that?

Some of the people I had to work with up there. I ran into a group that had a little clique up there. The only thing wrong was they decided they got to get rid of me and they put me with the wrong person. He liked what I did and he refused to go along with them. And his next-door neighbor happened to be the department manager up there, so when he didn't make the report card—they give us a report card semiannually, I think it was—when he didn't make this report card out the way he was supposed to, they jumped all over him. He said, Well, go ahead and tear it up and make your own there because I ain't going to change it. If you don't like the way I write it up, you can go over and see Gelkirk. And of course they knew that Gelkirk was going to back him rather than them. I found myself again up there sometimes being under observation. I had the assistant department manager one day speak to me at the casino in town. I was sitting there and he and his wife came by when they got through eating dinner. He spoke to me and I spoke back. And the next day I went in on the job and I asked my foreman, I says, Our assistant department manager spoke to me in the casino. I said, I don't even know how he knows who I am. He said, Oh, he knows who you are. He came out here and asked me to point you out.

Is that right?

Yeah. I tried one time to go back to 51 from up there because I was having such a rough time working with those people and putting up with them. That same friend from California, he was in 51 at the time that I was up there and so I said, You know, why don't you say something

to Leo about if you need anybody? Leo did but he went through the chain of command, and boy, they went through the roof when they went through the chain of command and asked about getting me transferred.

How long did you end up working for REECo and out at the test site, total?

Fourteen years.

Fourteen years. What ultimately made you leave?

Laid off.

Oh, is that right?

It was closing down.

When was this?

I left in January of '93.

That's right around the time the testing stopped, right?

Yes. And so after that, every place that still had people working was down to a skeleton crew.

Basically the people that stayed behind after I left, they were closing up these tunnels and getting ready for everybody to be out of there—

Shutting off the lights, as it were.

And the only place that was still going was the shaft in Area 6. I think there were three electrical crews left on that job. At one time, we had 500 electricians out there.

You know, you spent a good chunk of time out there. Did your perception change, you know, from the time you started to the time you ended, your perception of, you know, atomic testing, of atomic energy, anything like that, did you—?

No. I still feel today, about the only time that the government really screwed up was during the above-ground testing.

Is that right? The atmospheric testing?

Because I heard a lot of people—they say John Wayne's death was contributed to the test site.

He was over in Utah filming and—

I think it was The Conqueror was the name of the movie, wasn't it?

Right, yeah. And that was the one thing is if the winds were blowing, as long as they weren't blowing towards Las Vegas, they could test. And so that was the—well, of course at that time, they didn't have that much knowledge, because they have even had soldiers out there—

The atomic vets.

[00:20:00] Within a short distance of the down holes with just ponchos laying across them and the blast would go off. I know when I was in the military, we were told things about the atomic testing out there. I think even by then, they were still [saying that], well, if you have something like a poncho, that would help protect you. So the knowledge on the testing didn't even really get updated to anywhere close to the truth until the seventies, probably.

Yeah. We're down to about five minutes left on this CD, and I was just wondering if you had any final thoughts or anything you'd like to share with us, stories, any just kind of final impressions?

I guess not. I came to town, like I said, in '93, and in '94, '95, somewhere along in there, work slowed down a little bit and I took a call back out to Yucca Mountain. Of course with the long ride out there, I fell asleep and when I woke up I was in Yucca Mountain. I got off the bus and, again, it was about like coming out of Alaska into California. I said, what am I doing back out here? I think I lasted five months before I quit on them. Most of that five months, I didn't even put in a full forty-hour work week working. I may've put it in one, two, three days a week going for half-day, full-day schools on all the different things that you—your turtle training and nuclear stuff and what to do in flash floods. I mean they gave us training all the time out there.

What about it didn't appeal to you? Did you feel like you had just done that already, sort of?

I'd done that, and that ride out there, I said I think I'll just stay in town and work on jobs where I might have to travel ten, twenty miles rather than a 200-mile round trip.

So it was more of a logistics thing than anything else, then.

And back into the same type of stuff I'd done for fourteen years. Matter of fact, when I told them I was going to quit, they were going to give me a special project where I was off all by myself.

I'd go up in the morning with a truck, do my job up there, come back at night. And they said,

Look, you don't have to go underground. You can do this. You can stay out here. I think it was three weeks later at a union meeting and the foreman and the general

foreman were trying to keep me out there, they had drug up and they were in town. I said, Boy, trying to talk me into staying out there and here you guys come back in.

[And they said], Well, we've been out there—

And I said, Well, I was out there for fourteen years, too.

I was going to say, it's got to make you feel good, though, that they wanted you to stay. Did you?

Oh, no. No, they couldn't make it sweet enough that I wanted to make that ride every day.

Well, great, we're down to about a minute-and-a-half if you have any last thoughts now.

I guess that's about it.

All right. I just wanted to thank you for taking this time with us. I appreciate it.

[00:23:43] End Track 4, Disc 2.

[End of interview]