

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

**Interview with**  
**Henry (Hank) Peluaga**

**April 22, 2005**  
**Las Vegas, Nevada**

Interview Conducted By  
Mary Palevsky

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Produced by:

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## Interview with Henry (Hank) Peluaga

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Conducted by Mary Palevsky

Interview was recorded on audio and video.

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

**Mary Palevsky:** *Mr. Peluaga, thank you for speaking with us today. I thought we would start by having you say your full name, where you were born, when you were born, and a little bit about your family background here in Nevada, and then your early life and how you came to be working at the [Nevada] test site.*

**Hank Peluaga:** Well, my name is Henry Peluaga. I was born in Eureka, Nevada. My grandmother and mother both were native Nevadans. And my grandmother was on the tribal list, so that made me a quarter Indian. And my father was a Basque sheepherder. He come from Spain on the Spanish side of the Pyrenees mountains, and on the other side is the French. So he was herding sheep all over, and then he come in to Eureka [Nevada], and that's where he met my mother and married her. And then he bought the Lincoln Hotel there, but during the Depression he went busted.

*Now, what year were you born?*

Nineteen twenty-seven.

*1927! So that makes you—tell me how old you are.*

Seventy-six.

*And what were your parents' names?*

My mother's name was Helen. She come from a family of eight. And I don't know what my dad's family was. I never did meet—just, you know—

*What was his name?*

Joe.

*Joe. And you said "Indian." You were saying before that your grandmother was on the Shoshone list, is that right, you were saying?*

Yeah, tribal records.

*Tribal records. Do you know what her name was?*

Well, at that time they kept changing their name. If they worked for somebody named Anderson, they had their name Anderson.

*Really!*

If you worked for—and her name was Bessie, and I think the last name she had before she got—when she was a young girl and was working for these different people around the valley there, and then she'd take their name, and then when she went somewhere else—she was raised in some creek there, I can't think of the name of it now [Maggie Creek]. But it's in the Antelope Valley [Nevada]. And my grandfather had a ranch over there; my mother's father. And his name was William Blair. And he had a brother come through and they had cattle and they were going to drive them to California somewhere and sell them; I don't know, something happened, cattle got rustled or something, and so he come back. And then he caught pneumonia and he was a-horseback coming from Eureka to the ranch, and he fell off the horse and then froze to death. And the snow was so deep, they couldn't get him to the cemetery, so they buried him there at the ranch. And then the same thing happened when my grandma died. Snow was so damn deep, they couldn't get her up to the cemetery, so they had to wait.

And my dad was a miner—no, he was a sheepherder first, and then he went to mining in Ely, Nevada. He started working there in the mines.

*So did you all move to Ely or—?*

Yeah. And then from there, we went to Lovelock. From Lovelock, we went to Mill City. And then I was raised in Winnemucca from then on. And I started mining then. I'd go to work for these little leasers, you know. But at the mines, you had to be a mucker for five years before you could go mining; I thought, you know, I thought, hell, I was more of a miner than I was a [00:05:00] mucker, and I'd just go mining. So when I went to Ely, there was four of us went into Ely. And Bill Flangas was the mine foreman.

And he asked, what do you guys want?

And we told him, we says, We want to go to work. We're miners.

And he said, Well, go down and tell them and they'll send you to work.

So we went down and told them and they said, Bill Flangas can't hire you. It's got to be George Jennings.

So we went back up there and Bill said, Well, what are you doing back here?

And we told him we had to see Jennings, too. And he said, Oh, OK.

So after we talked to Jennings, then we went to work.

*So this is when Flangas is managing—what was the company at that point in Ely?*

Kennecott Copper.

*It was Kennecott. And about how old were you at this point?*

I was twenty-two, I think. No, I got married—just a minute. I was probably twenty-one.

And we went up there and start mining, and then from there—but I worked for a lot of little places like tungsten and a cinnabar mine and silver mine, tungsten mine over in Twenty Mile Hill—and then me and Don drilled the last round down in there. You got a hanging wall, you know, and then it was kind of a quartz, but right behind that quartz you usually hit your tungsten. But the guy I was working for, they said, No, we're leaving. So we pulled all the equipment out of there, and then we're going to, what the heck, McDermott, Nevada. That's a

mercury mine. And he says, If you want to come up there, you can go to work for us for sinking that shaft. So I said, All right, and I went up there, me and Don Buskirk. But it was snowing so bad that he couldn't get over to where the mine was, and we had to cross their airport to get over there; and they had some kind of litigation up where we couldn't cross on their airport and all this and that, so I told that I guy, I said, Hell, I'm going home. And we lived in Lovelock then. Me and my wife had a bar there.

*You had a bar there?*

Yes. And then after she had that bar for about a year, then I got one across the street from her. That Jerry's Nugget down here, he owned the Pershing Hotel there that was hooked onto the bar that I had. And the wife was across the street, the Longhorn. And we finally broke it up and lost all our money. So then—

*Let me just get your wife's name before you go on.*

Lola.

*Lola. Go ahead.*

So then I went up and started driving truck for this iron mine, and turned a truck over and broke my back. And from there, I went—where'd I go from then? Oh, and then I went from [00:09:00] San Manuel, Arizona and worked in the copper down there, copper mines. And when I come back to Nevada, Lola was in Reno; [I] stopped and seen her there and told her, Well, I'm going to go back, because there was no work around here. And when I go into Tonopah, my old car broke down. So I had a tow truck go out and get it, and this Bill Beko, he was an attorney, I think, and there's one guy on one side of the street and another guy over here on this side of the street and they were hollering back and forth. And he said, Well, how come you weren't at work yesterday? And he said, something happened, he couldn't make it.

And so I listened to the conversation and then I asked the one guy, I said, what do you do?

[00:10:00] He said, I'm a miner.

And I said, Well, that's what I am.

He said, You are?

And I said, Yeah, and I'm looking for work.

He said, Well, go see Bill Beko and he'll send you to Las Vegas to the Mercury mine.

But first, in Ely, this lady that owned a bar told me, she said, Flangas has got a job down somewhere around Las Vegas there, and them guys are making big money. We was working seven days a week and everything. And a lot of them were from Ely. Went back up there and she said, Boy, they come in here with them big checks. But I thought what she meant that he was working at a mercury mine.

So when Bill Beko, he told me, he said, Well, we're not hiring no out-of-state men, said, We're just hiring men from Nevada.

And I said, Well, that's where I'm from. I was born and raised here.

And he says, Where was you raised?

And I said, Winnemucca, Nevada.

And he said, Did you know the Mentaberry boys?

And I said, Yeah.

He said, What are they doing now?

I said, Well, one of them's going to college in Reno, and I think the other one's already an attorney, and the other one's working helping his father out there with the sheep at the ranch.



He said, Oh, yeah, OK. You go on down to here in Las Vegas and get in the union, and then you can go on out.

*So that was the test to prove that you were from here.*

Yes. So then when I got here, I went out and passed everything and they told me to go to—there was two tunnels up there [at the NTS]. It was B Tunnel and E Tunnel. And Flangas was running B Tunnel, and I'm not sure who was running E Tunnel.

But anyway, this other guy I worked with, , I was his partner, and he says, Where you going?

I said, I'm going up to B Tunnel.

He said, Oh, boy, that's where I'm at.

And I said, Well, who's up there?

And he says, Bill Flangas is the big cheese.

And, well, I didn't get along with him that last [time] when I left Ely, and I thought, well, I better not go up there because he'll run me off. So I went to E Tunnel.

And I got off the bus and I was standing out there in the track and [Frank] Solaegui come out and he says, What's your name?

I said, Hank Peluaga.

He said, Oh, yeah. He looked at my paper. He says, Come here, and took me out, down to the end of the track there and pointed up and said, Here's where you're supposed to go, is up there.

And I said, No. If I don't go here, I go home.

And he says, Go on in there and go to work.

So that's when I started mining [at the NTS]. But they had a lot of laborers out there that were trying to be miners and hell, one of them got killed.

*What year was this?*

Nineteen fifty-seven.

*Fifty-seven. So that's the first time you met Frank Solaegui, then, was—*

Well, I knew his brother. I worked for his brother down in Fallon. And all I knew was him by name, but I never did know him till I come here.

*Sure. Now, that's a Basque name, too, isn't it, Solaegui?*

He's a French Basque, I think. Because I got a cousin, his name's Otaegui and he's French. So Solaegui, Otaegui, I figured—

*So you must've eventually run into Bill Flangas, though.*

Oh, yeah. Then I caught hell. He says, How come you never come up there? I told him, I said, I figured maybe you'd run me off. And he just laughed. But we're good friends, all of us, you know.

*Explain to me a little bit, you were saying the guys they had out there weren't real miners. What would you see that would make you know? I'm trying to understand the mining business a little better.*

**[00:15:00]** Well, they were laborers, and they were in there trying to make miners out of them.

And when that one got killed there, I can't remember now, anyway they were all back at the— they had a water can there where they all got water. I think a slab come in, come down from the back, you know, and busted the timber all to hell and killed one and broke his leg or something.

Well, then all of them run out. Most of them were colored guys, and they all run out. They said, Hell, we're not going back in there. They told the mining people and they said, well, we'll have to get some miners in, so that's when they called Caliente and got what miners

they can get out of there, called Ely and got what miners they [could] get there, and then—well, as they went along. But a lot of them laborers stayed there as miners. Hell, I broke them in.

*Oh, OK.*

Yeah. And then all of the guys that were superintendents, project managers, and stuff, I broke every one of them in.

*Back in those days, what did the mining consist of? What kind of equipment did you guys have, and what would be the process of working in a tunnel like that?*

Well, we had a jumbo, and it was a four-man jumbo, two on the bottom, two on top. And we'd drill and blast with that. And then they come out with this other machine, an auguring machine. So they didn't know how it was going to work, so they just mounted one. Where the two jumbos were on top, they just mounted one and put it up there. And Jimmy Stinnett was on it. And he'd out drill us. He drilled the whole thing out while we was still drilling on the bottom. And so they thought, well, we'll get two more auguring machines and put them on the bottom. Well then, when they got them, hell, we started going like wildfire. And they had three shots, then, on top, you know while we was there getting this hole ready for—

*Oh, they had some atmospheric shots.*

Yeah.

*Well, you saw those, then.*

Oh, yeah.

*What was that like?*

Well, they give us, you know them welding glasses you put inside your welding helmet? They gave us them and we had to turn our back to the shot and then hold them up and they'd still light up.

*So that leads me to the next question. So this is a different kind of mining because you're not looking for minerals.*

No, you're driving—like the users come in and one of them would want to go out ten foot more for ten feet and then come in, just for—I don't know what for, some kind of instrument stuff. And everything was different. You know you weren't looking for no silver or gold or nothing like that. You were just doing mining. And a lot of them didn't like that.

*Why?*

They just wanted to be looking for something.

*So the different users, the labs, would come in and they'd say, well, dig this way or—*

Yeah. They'd give you a blueprint and you had to go by that blueprint.

*OK. Now, when you said you broke a lot of the guys in, so what's your position, then? What are your—?*

I was just a miner.

*You're just a miner, but you're teaching these other guys what to do.*

Everybody thinks there's nothing to that mining, but you've got to be awful careful, you know, keep barred down so slabs can't get you on the ribs. And then they would go in there and they'd put up—first we was timbering, put in seals and rings of steel, and a lot of guys didn't want to put them in. They'd just drive out old bald-headed tunnels till somebody got hurt, or [00:20:00] damn near got hurt, and then they'd stop and timber it all up. So then they come out with that wire mesh, and we'd put the wire mesh up and rock-bolt it, and then gunite it after that.

*Right. Explain to me what that is. Is that a kind of cement or something?*

It's like that stuff they put in swimming pools. I think we shot it on there an inch deep.

*OK. And that holds the top and the sides—*

Yeah. What it does, it don't let it air slack.

*Air slack?*

Yeah, when it gets air slack is when it starts opening up.

*I see.*

We drove a lot of them that way, and we did that same thing in the deep holes down there, and we'd wire-mesh them and rock-bolt them. But first they had rock bolts, you had to mix it by—they had little deals about three foot long, half-shell thing. You had to mix this cement and put in there, and then shove in the hole the loading stick, and then shove your bolt into it. But a lot of that—and we shot some of them holes, when the bombs went off. We'd go back in there and there'd be a lot of them bolts down on the ground, but there would very seldom be a rock bolt that you put in with a deal on the end, what do they call them? But them cement ones would come out.

*Oh, I see. So the other kind would stay in, even after the explosion?*

Mm hmm [yes].

*You would go in after a shot also? After they would shoot a bomb, you guys would go back in?*

Yes.

*OK. What would that be like?*

Well, they give you two pair of gloves, and then they expect you to wire in rounds. You have to drill, shoot, and then on the primers they got two wires, and you had to wire one, then wire this one, then go around till you completed the deal, and then tie a hot wire to each one. And it was hell trying to tie them deals. And finally this guy come in there and he showed us that you take two of them, fold them over like that, and just give them a twist. And what we was trying to do was turn them on. And you had coveralls. Some shots, you had two pair of coveralls. And then

the holes would get so damn hot when you was drilling, you had to go in there with water to try to cool them down before you loaded dynamite in them.

*Oh. So you're going back in by dynamiting to get back in.*

Yes.

*Are you one of the guys who got material or equipment out of there? Would you be recovering that kind of stuff?*

No. What we do is just, like we'll get to ground zero, then we'd back out and then let the users go in there, and they knew what to get and everything. But one time, they said just drive a drift out there and you go into the hole. Well, I was in that hole, and we had a bulkhead up here, just plywood, and the first guy in there was a miner, the second guy was a shifter, and then me. And we were going down, had all that air shit on, and the miner was way ahead of us. Or no—well, he was ahead, but anyway, we was staggered one like that one and then me. And when I looked up and seen that bulkhead gone, I hollered at them guys, told them to stop and come on back. And the radiation, like I had 200 and Coors [Acorcino Trujillo] had 300 and the miner had 400. But that's just [00:25:00] the way we were in that drift. So when we come back out of there, and then Flangas got—I think it was Bill, says, *What the hell you go that far in there for?* And I said, *Well, if I hadn't have noticed that bulkhead was gone, we'd have went further. But I noticed it because we had a turnout into there, and all that wood was gone, and I told them, I said, It's time to stop. And they never did reenter that, so I don't know.*

*Do you remember about what year that was, or what that test was? It's OK if you don't.*

It had to be '68, I guess.

*OK. And when you say "Coors," that's Coors Trujillo is that—?*

Coors was this miner. They called him Coors, I guess, because he drank Coors all the time. But his name was—

*John Campbell will know.*

Yeah, John, he knows. He's got a list of everything.

*Yeah. Because he's got a list of the names and all the nicknames.*

Yes.

*So you had a nickname, didn't you?*

Pollywog.

*That's what I thought.*

Yes . But anyway, while I was out there, I had some horses out here, five head, and I was working graveyard and I'd come in and stop and feed them, and then I'd come on home. My wife had a beauty shop on here then.

And they come out and said, Where's Hank? We've got to get him right away. This is real important.

And she said, Well, I don't know. He stops and feeds the horses and then I don't know where the hell he goes.

And they said, Well, we've got to have him. You've got to have him today. No fooling around.

So they finally got a hold of me and they said, You'd better get down there and see what they want.

I went down and, well, what they wanted me [for] was to go to Alaska on that shot there, Cannikin shot. See, Solaegui was the one that went up there first. And he looked it all over and he told them, No, I don't want no part of this. So he come on back. And about two weeks later they got him again. They says, You've got to come up there. Well, they had

the same problem that we had out here at first. They couldn't get any miners, and they were getting guys out of that labor hall that were just men working, and then they couldn't turn on a drill. They could drill if you turned it on for them. And it went on like that.

Well then, Frank went out there first and he looked it all over and he said, All right, but I've got to have my key men to help.

So they said, Well, we can't do that.

And he said, Well, goodbye.

So then they said, Well, wait a minute here. You go ahead and call them and see if they can come out.

But there was four of us at Mercury. There was Wally Beaman, he's passed away, Harry Giesler, he passed away, Solaegui, and myself.

*OK. I'm going to pause for one second before we go on. I want to hear your Alaska story, but I'm going to pause the machine.*

OK.

[00:29:08] [Pause for conversation]

[00:29:44] [Resume interview]

*OK, so Alaska was—what year was that, do you remember?*

Seventy-one.

*So you go up, and that's for Cannikin?*

Yes.

*You go up to Alaska. Now, had they been there a while?*

[00:30:00] Yes, [Peter] Kiewit [Sons, Inc.] had that job. But what happened was, those guys' would go down and drill, and they'd shoot that rock because they couldn't load all their holes and they'd just, whatever ones they could load; they'd just fill them full of dynamite, and when it



went off, it'd just pulverize the ground into sand. And it'd go down in the pumps, and then when they—but there, you had to pump twenty-four hours. You couldn't shut them off. And it'd eat all them [00:30:30] pillars out, so the whole shaft'd start filling up full of water and it'd come all the way up. So they'd have to, I'm not really sure, but I think then they had to go and tear the head frame back down, lay everything over, and bring the drill rig back in and pump all that water out. And then they'd set up their head frame again and go down and start mining. And they'd do the same thing again. What holes they could load, they'd load the hell out of them and break that rock so fine that it ate the pumps up again. And they said [they had] so much muck, from blasting and missing the bucket and falling onto the bottom. We have a plate of the hole, and then down underneath it is the pumps. And you have a little door about fourteen by fourteen inches, and you got to take the bolts off it and raise it up and go down in there and get the pump.

*Oh, I see.*

But that had about five foot of muck on it, and nobody'd muck it out. Well, what you had to do is go down and muck it into a little bucket, and then a guy'd pull it up and dump it in the bucket, and when it got full, then they'd send it out. And it was so damn hot down that hole, you could only last about thirty minutes, and then you had to take five. And they had a Gatorade. We used to drink that Gatorade. They had a pile of muck there in front of the cage and we kept telling the miners, muck it up, muck it up, and they wouldn't do it. So Solaegui says one morning to me and Wally Beaman, he says, *Come on. We're going down and muck that out. So we went down there, started mucking, and we mucked a bucket and up it went. Then they had this Gatorade in a five-gallon water can with crushed ice, and it'd just be ice cold. And Wally said to me, Hank, you want a Gatorade? And I said, Yeah, I'll have one. So he threw me one and I downed it, and then I asked Frank. And he looked at us like what the hell do you think*

I am? And he didn't have one. So Wally and I drank ours, and when the cage come back down, we started baling that muck into it.

And Solaegui looked at us and he said, Does that Gatorade do that?

We said, I don't know. It gives you another life.

And so he said, I'll have one.

So he had one and then, hell, he went to mucking. But if it wasn't for that Gatorade, I don't think we'd have ever got anything done.

*You know, it's interesting you mention that Gatorade, because I was talking—you tell me if you remember this, if this is true. I was talking to an Air Force guy a couple of weeks ago who was up there for Cannikin, and he said that they ran out of Gatorade and some miners refused to work without it. Do you remember that?*

Yes, what happened was we were getting the lime, the green Gatorade. And they'd run out of it, but they had the orange, and they sent the orange up there. But criminey, from drinking that green all the time, they didn't want that damn orange stuff, and so we just had to wait till we got green.

*So, that's interesting because he was remembering something about the miners and the Gatorade.*

Yeah, well, there wasn't that much difference in it, that I could see, because Gatorade is Gatorade, you know. But they refused to work because it was orange. So I don't know.

**[00:35:00]** But we had two guys up there that were on my shift. What they did was we'd work three weeks of one shift and then three weeks another shift and three weeks another shift. So the shift we was working with all got to go home for a week and then they'd come back. Well, then, we changed, the walkers, shaft miners, shaft superintendents they called them, we changed with

the men. But these two guys, one was a colored guy and one was a pilot in the German Air Force, and they were down there drilling. And I had to go up top for something, and we rode that cage on a muck signal, because if you rode it with a man signal, hell, you'd freeze to death in the shaft, because it was so hot in the bottom and then cold on top, and soon as you got on top, you went right into the dry room. There was enough heat in there to knock you down. And so I went up for something and I come back and they were over there like on the rib, talking. And the machine was running, but it hung steel and the machine was going around like that but the steel wasn't turning. And I looked and the one hose was that big around from being stretched. And I jumped down there and turned that air off, and that water.

I said, What's the matter with you guys? If that machine's running, you stay there with it. If you're going to go drink something, shut it off.

And the one told me to go to hell. The hell with you, he says.

And I said, Well, get on the cage. You're getting the hell out of here.

And so then his partner give me some crap, so I said, You get on there with him.

And then I got on it and away we went to the top. So I told Solaegui, I said, When I got down there, these guys were over there. We didn't care they were drinking, but they didn't shut the machine off, and if that hose would've broke, somebody'd have got killed, because that hose, with all that pressure, and that water. So Frank told them to get on the airplane and go on back to here, you know.

So they got on the airplane and went back to the union hall. So when they went in there the guy [the business agent] said, What happened? And the one guy said, Well, just because I was a colored guy, and the other one said, And then because I was a pilot in the German Army, we got fired. So Frank called for some more miners and he's

telling him, No, you're not getting no more miners till you take these two guys back.

*Now, they're sent all the way back here?*

No, that's Alaska.

*Back to the Alaska union hall. Right.*

Yes. And Frank says, No, he said, I'll tell you what to do. You go get the business agent from the carpenters, business agent from the operators, and the business agent from the miners, yourself, and electricians, he says, and get on an airplane and come on out here. He says, We got to show you what the hell's going on. So here they come. And Frank called me and he says, Come on, you're going to take them guys down and show them what we got. So I had to suit them up with rubber, for the water falling down that shaft all the time. So we suit them all up with rubber and I put two of them in the top and rung it up, and then I got in the bottom with these other two. And this cage we had, it'd hold eight people, four on top and four on the bottom. And we started down the hole and they hollered, No, no, stop, stop, stop! We don't want to go no further. I said, Well, once this thing's going, there ain't no way I can stop it. But all you had to do was reach out and whap that bell cord and he'd stop it that quick [snapping fingers]. But I just told them, I said, There ain't no way I can stop this till we get on the bottom. So away we went to the bottom, and none of [00:40:00] them would get out, and they was all looking around in there, and you couldn't see for steam, just until you was down there a while and then you could make out stuff. So they said, Well, get us out of here. Get us out of here. So we took them back to the top. And the business agent for the miners says to me, he said, If you know any miners, anywhere, you get a hold of them and have them come to my union hall and I will send them out here. He

said, I didn't know you had that kind of a deal down there. And so that's the way we got—then I knew some miners and I called them and out they come. Come to his hall and he sent them out to us.

*How far down did you take those guys? How deep was that?*

Six thousand. Well, it was sixty-one hundred foot to where the pumps were, but we had a bulkhead in there at six thousand, yeah. I'm going to show you something.

*OK.*

[00:41:10] [Pause here for Mr. Peluaga to retrieve an item.]

[00:41:25] *Oh, great.*

This is what they give me when I got back to Las Vegas here. And a steak dinner .

*I've seen these certificates, but I've never seen one for Cannikin before. This is great! So this is all the stuff that happened. How great!*

In November 6, 1971.

*I'm going to look at that more later. I want to take a look at the different cartoons. So someone drew cartoons and stuff of what happened and put them on there?*

Yeah. Some of them miners were pretty good at drawing them.

*Those certificates are really interesting. So how long were you up in Alaska for that?*

Well, the cavity was supposed to have been a hundred feet, fifty foot from center line out and then a hundred foot. But then when the guys had Frank take it over, they said, Just give us a fifty-by-fifty and we'll settle for that.

And Frank says, No, all your records and stuff call for a hundred-by-hundred, and that's what we're going to give you.

And they said, There ain't no way you can do that, and he says, How long it take you to put that in there?

He said, I'll turn that hole over to you four months from today.

And he says, That's pretty fast.

Frank said, Yeah, I know, but I know what I'm talking about, too.

So four months and four days, we was through with that hole. We was all coming out.

*Wow. Now, is it correct that Cannikin was done in Alaska because it was too big to do in Nevada?*

Yes. And another thing, Amchitka was the island and they'd already shot a few there. And I really don't know. I think that the heat had a lot to do with it for, their instruments that had to go down there, they couldn't be in very—heat wouldn't bother them any, so that's why they went down there. But all the holes I was in up to the mesa, Area 20, were forty-eight-inch, and this one in Cannikin was fifty-two. So it was a little bigger hole, too.

*Oh, OK. Are they using the same kind of drilling equipment to make the hole in Amchitka that they were in Nevada?*

Yes.

*Now, you said that Kiewit had been doing it and they couldn't do the job?*

**[00:45:00]** Well, Kiewit was all right, but it was the guys they had working. They didn't have miners. A guy'd go out there and go in the union hall and say I'm a miner, and so the agent'd send them out there. And when they got out there, they didn't know nothing.

*So you're all working for REECo [Reynolds Electrical and Engineering Company], then.*

Yeah. What happened was REECo lent us to the AEC, as I understand now, and then the AEC lent us to Kiewit. But this Pat Hand, his name wasn't Pat Hand, his last name was Hand but they just called him Pat because of the card game, I guess. But anyway, he was out there. He was a walker. And when I went out there, I got on the island, Solaegui called me up and says, Come on up to the hole. Go over to the motor pool and get you a truck and come on

up to the hole and get associated with it. So I said all right. Well, when I come out of my room, Pat Hand had this room and I had this one, and there was a guy talking in there, had tattoos all over him, and he said to Pat Hand, he said, They got a bunch of hot shots coming out here from that Nevada Test Site. And he said, Boy, I can't wait to get my hands on one of them. And Pat Hand said, Well, there's one right there. Boy, that guy turned around and looked at me and just walked off. But that's the way they were.

When the day of the mining was going to start, Solaegui told me, he said, Hank, you're going to start that mining out. So I said OK, and I went up to the mechanic and I told him to cut me collar pipe, two-inch collar pipe, out of either steel or plastic, I didn't care. So he cut them, and then I threw them in the bucket and I was going down the hole and the guy says, What the hell are you going to do with them? And I said, Well, that's the only way you can drill a shaft. And I said, Well, there's no use in me trying to explain it to you. When I get down there, I'll show you.

So when we got down in the hole, we unloaded all the collar pipe, and then I got a sinking hammer and I went around there and I drilled holes down that deep, about eight, nine inches, and then I dropped this collar pipe in them. Well, that guy says, We can't drill like that. He says, You got to shoot the whole long hole. We got to make it round. And I said, Well, I can't explain it to you. I'll just show you. So after I drilled two, three of them holes down and put the collar pipe in them, then we got a six-foot steel and put it on the machine and went down, and then you blow them holes, blow the hole, blow the hole, and when you went back to that hole, it might have a little water in it but there wouldn't be no sand or nothing. It'd be clean. So he said, Well, I'll be damned. I went around there and drilled all of that and then you got a stilson wrench the miners built [a pipe wrench with

pivoted, adjustable jaws for gripping.] They have a stilson wrench, you know, air hammer or whatever you want. But you can take that—like this is a collar pipe, just take that wrench and put it over like that and move it and then pull them right out of there so you can save them. And then you just wire them in, shoot the round. And when them guys all seen that on my shift, then a lot of them didn't know either. One, Charlie McKinley, he worked out at the test site for them, and he was out there at Amchitka. But he was the only one that stayed. Pat Hand and the rest of them all left. Well, I [00:50:00] think they wanted to be with Kiewit, was what the deal was. But we still got Kiewit checks payday.

*So the problem was you have this huge shaft and you need to mine out the bottom?*

Yeah, put a sphere in the bottom.

*A sphere so they can put their bomb in there, their device in there?*

Yes.

*And that was what Kiewit couldn't figure out how to do?*

No, it was the drilling part. See, they didn't have nobody that knew how to drill that shaft. The guy'd drill a hole here and one here and one here, and he when they come in to load them with dynamite, he could only load one or maybe two. So then he'd load it clear to the top with dynamite, and then when it went off, it'd turn all that rock into sand, and then all the water, it was making fifty gallons a minute, I think, and it'd wash all that water down.

Well anyway, when we first got there, Solaegui had us drive a drift. We'd come up to where the top was, where our cavity was going to be, and we drove a drift back in there sixty-two feet. And there was a hole that come down from the—

[00:51:25] [At this point, Jason [grandson] enters the room with another chair.]



[00:51:34] Drove a drift in there, and they had a pipe coming down from the top. I think it was a four-inch. And that was the way our water was going to go out when we sealed everything off. We had big hoses rock-bolted down to the ground that couldn't raise up, and then that was going to be where our water [went out] because we couldn't turn the pumps on off. So we got them drove, and then we put a dam in, I think it was about a ten-foot dam, then a ten-foot dam, ten-foot dam, ten-foot dam, and we pumped that water clear back to the end one because we was getting a lot of silt, too. And that's where that silt would stay, behind that bulkhead. And then it would run over, it'd come to the next one and run over, and then just come on out. And when it went back into the shaft, it was clean water. It still had a little silt in it, but not enough to bother the pumps. But they didn't know anything like that, see, they didn't have any experienced men like Solaegui; he knew how to do this, how to do that, and that's what they was up against, really. They had men, but they weren't mining men.

*Right. And I'm wondering also, they weren't mining men but you all had experience doing that kind of deep-hole mining here in Nevada?*

Yes.

*I think that was something that you did at Nevada more than once, right, so you knew how to do it.*

Yes. Oh, yes, up on the Area 20 mesa, we must've had fifteen holes that were down. The shortest one was forty-two hundred, and the deepest one was five thousand. Yes, because this is the deepest hole there ever was.

*I know.*

And we did the same thing there. We went down, put in cavities, or I mean spheres, and then the users went down and put their stuff in it.

*When you're saying not cavities, you're saying spheres?*

Yes.

*That's what you would call it?*

A sphere, yeah. This one particular one up in Cannikin was a hundred foot, and it come down like that, and then on the bottom, you had to round it off like that.

*OK. Were you there when they shot the test?*

No. I left the morning that we got the—we was pulling out the guides coming up and old Charlie McKinley changed—they got a little cable on them cranes, and then they got a big one. Well, he [00:55:00] changed the little cable, and then when that guy come back on that cable, he's got a dial there that tells him how much pull he's got on it and he said, Hell, I give it any more, I'm going to break that cable. So he says, We've got to go back to the old way again. And that took about two hours to break that down and about two hours to put it back in. Well, if he wouldn't have done that, we'd have finished the pull on graveyard. But there was probably, oh, maybe seven hundred foot left that had to come out. Well, what they were doing, they had a sweeper welded on the bottom of the two—or your two guides, the air guide and the water guide were guides that you used going down the shaft to ride on. And we had this sweeper on the bottom, and all the cable, welding cable and everything, as it's coming up, it's picking all this stuff up, and the higher it gets, the heavier it gets. But Charlie didn't realize that, I guess.

*Oh, I see. You said something a while back about coming up with either a muck signal or a man signal. What did you mean by that?*

Well, yes. When you're hoisting men, you give them three and a one. And when you're hoisting muck, you give them a two-one. And that means—they had a speed for the muck and a speed for

the men. And the speed for the muck was so many feet faster than the men on. So what we used to do is get on there, give them the muck signal, and so we'd get the hell out of there. Well, this safety man come up there. We'd never get a safety man, very seldom. And he come up there. He was federal safety. And we're sitting there in the dog house all talking, and he said, The next man that rides that cage out on a muck signal, I'm going to have him run off. And he could. He had enough power, he could do that. Because you're breaking a safety rule. And while we're sitting there talking we hear *bunk, bunk-bunk*, the muck signal, and he waited. You could hear that old cable a-coming and coming. So when it just about got to the top, he walked out, and guess who was on the cage? Frank Solaegui. Never said a word. Just turned around and walked back in the doghouse and sat down.

*Very interesting.*

Yes, because we wore that underwear, what do they call it? I can't think of the name of it.

*Like long johns? Like long underwear?*

Yes, but it was—they call it something. That's all we'd wear was that, and then just put on a suit of rubber. Didn't wear no clothes down there. Then as soon as you hit the top, the top man had the door open and everything, you'd just dive right into the dry room, dry off and change clothes.

*Right, because it was cold, right?*

Yeah. And the way they had it up there, a crew went down, usually two on a crew, or three, not over that, and they'd work two hours and then they'd come out and the next crew'd go down.

*So how long would it take you on the man signal, obeying the law, to get from the bottom to the top?*

Well, I don't know, probably about twelve minutes. Yeah, because you rode her on a three-two.

Three-two was men on, go down, and three-one was men on, come up. But the one bell was stop.

No matter where you was in that shaft, if you got a bell he'd just [slapping hands together] stop [01:00:00] that thing right there. And then they'd yo-yo for, you know.

Carl Lefler was up there. He was a walker. He went there with Frank and Harry [Unsworth] and Beaman, I think. But coming up, he was coming out of there one day. He was on swing. Or no, he was on day shift. He was coming out and there was a grout pipe there, about a two-and-a-quarter-inch or something, that they grout when there's grout in the hole. And coming up, it broke loose and it come in the cage. And they'd cut as much off as they could to keep in the cage, and down the pipe'd come again. So they'd cut off another section, and they was there about an hour just cutting pipe and cutting pipe and cutting pipe. And the power was on all the time for them pumps. If you ever shut that off, well, you'd be under water if it's making fifty gallon a minute. And about two hours, you're in water. Unless you've got a big cavity where it'd hold a lot of it.

But we didn't have much of a cavity then. They hadn't started any. Because when I got there, Unsworth was his name, Harry , he went down. And he'd worked in the deep holes out here [NTS]. And he knew that you cut the casing out, and they couldn't ever make up their mind at Kiewit, well, to cut the casing or what. So he went down there, him and a couple of miners, and they just cut a big old gash out of it and went to drilling. Well, when he come up, they asked him what the hell he was doing down there and he says he cut that casing out. Boy, they got all hot style and they fired him. Well, that was another thing, see, Kiewit didn't want to do nothing. What they were trying to do was run that on the phone. They didn't know what to do, so they'd call the main office back in Omaha [Nebraska] and then they'd call them and tell them, well, do this or do that. And like Mr. Ash was his name, he was an AEC man and he was there on that hole, too. And he was kind of in—but he passed away here a couple of year ago or so.

*OK, we've got to stop.*

And then this other one here, I got this when I retired out there.

*Let me come see. Oh, this is great! "Royal Order of Tunnel Elves." You don't look like an elf to me, though, I have to say. 1991.*

**Joe Thomson (cameraman0):** *You guys ever have the need for any little guys that had to do some stuff that other people couldn't get into, small people that may do certain tasks here or there that the other guys couldn't?*

I didn't hear you.

**Joe Thomson:** *A couple of small-sized miners that might have to case some tunnels or do some things?*

Oh, yes. Well, we had one drill cage up there was thirty-six inches [chuckling], and half of them couldn't get in it. We had little guys that we'd send down, yes. I couldn't get in it and I wasn't very big. [I] only weighed 167 pounds.

**Mary Palevsky:** *You were skinny.*

Yes.

[Looking for photographs]

You know, I had some pictures of my crew out there, but I think I lent them to John [Campbell].

*Campbell?*

Yes

*He's got a lot of stuff, and I have to go back to his house and look at it some more. I'll ask him if he has stuff from you. Pictures of your crew?*

Yes, I don't know whether I gave them to him or what I did with them.

**[01:05:49]** End of Track 2, Disc 1.

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

*So I was asking you if you were there for the[Cannikin] shot, and you said no, in Amchitka.*

No.

*You came back here?*

Yes.

*Did they tell you what they were testing up there? Did you know what the weapon was?*

No. I was on the back shift, so I didn't find out nothing. I worked straight graveyard all the time I was there. And once in a while I'd go out like on day shift, or stay from my shift on graveyard in the day shift a little bit. But all of the pictures were all taken on the day shift.

*I see. And what were living conditions like up there?*

Oh, they were beautiful. That's where I gained all my weight.

*Really.*

You could eat steaks that thick [indicating thickness] three times a day. They didn't give a damn. And then at night—from drilling, you know, from being hot down there, I'd have to take my fingers like that and get off that machine.

*Really!*

From, what do they call it, quinine, I had to take them quinine pills.

*Really!*

And from heat cramps, from that bouncing of that machine, and I couldn't open my damn hands. I'd have to take them like that [demonstrating movement from clenched fist position] and open them. And I went to the doctor and he says, Come back next week and I'll check you again. If you're not better, I'm going to have to put you on some kind of medication. He said, But let me give you a little advice. He said, You go get you some popcorn salt and that Olympia beer and, he says, dump that salt in

that beer and drink it. And he says, And I'll see you in a week. So I went ahead and did like he said and dumped that salt in there and drink it, and went back, and he said, Yeah, hell, that straightened you right up. He said, But you still got some, so keep up the job.

*I wonder why that worked.*

I don't know.

*Did you feel any difference?*

Oh, yes, it quit cramping up.

*The salt, I guess.*

Yes, what it was doing was sucking all the salt out of me.

*Oh, OK.*

But he says that popcorn salt is a different salt than this. It's real fine and it goes right to the bloodstream, I guess.

*That's amazing.*

But I had to take quinine pills. And then they pulled them off the market. You can't get them no more.

*Is that right? I wonder why quinine.*

I don't know.

*We can probably look it up in the encyclopedia and find out, but something about—*

But see, when you drill, when you're getting that bouncing, you know, all the time. I still get trouble with my fingers.

*I was going to ask you, do you feel any effects today in your hands?*

Yes. Well, I get all this junk [showing broken blood vessels].

*What's that from, do you think?*

Doctor told me too many aspirin. And I hit that and it all started bleeding. I got to pack Band-aids all the time. Because there's blood all over my shirt all the time.

*Yeah, because the aspirin thins your blood.*

Yes. But that's what he said it was, the cause of it was too many aspirin.

*Do you take a lot of aspirin?*

Yeah, I'm on all that medication over there. Heart trouble. Had a heart attack, two of them.

*You've had two heart attacks?*

Yeah. And my heart was fluttering and they couldn't get it to quit and they put me on that [00:05:00] medicine. I don't think they still ever got it to stop.

*Now, while we're talking about your health, do you mind my asking, are you involved in any of the compensation programs from the test site?*

No, I've been denied on all of that.

*You've been denied on it.*

Yes.

*But you went you through the process?*

Yes.

*OK. What was that like, briefly? Can you tell me? What did they ask you to do?*

Well, they tell me to go get X-rayed and take my X-rays to a B Reader and let the B Reader read them and then forward what the information is to them. [A National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) B Reader is a physician who has certified proficiency in the classification of chest radiographs for the pneumoconioses using the International Labour Office (ILO) Classification System. *See NIOSH website*].



But like Monday, I've got a—what the hell is his name, Edwards, Dave Edwards he knows you. He's a miner, and then he worked for the city here, oh, Sewer Department.

*I probably met him—did I meet him at the [REECO retirees' monthly] breakfast, do you think?*

That's where it was, yes. And then Ray Slaughter they told me yesterday he's got leukemia of the blood. And then Rocky, Rocky [Richard] Hardcastle, he was on the oxygen, but he passed away here three weeks ago.

*I know. I heard. I think John Campbell told me. I was sad to hear that.*

Yes. He's the one that sat on the end of that one table all the time [at the retirees breakfast].

*I know who he was. I talked to him. Now, did you work with him out at the test site?*

Yes. Yeah, I worked with all those guys. Like Rocky, we were both walkers. But I'd work with him sometimes; sometimes I wouldn't.

*Explain to me what a walker does.*

Well, when I first went out there, the shifter would take care—like the shifter on swing shift, then he was in charge of everything. And then the one on graveyard was in charge of everything. And then on day shift they had a walking boss that was over the shifter. And finally, after I worked there about six, seven years they decided to make a walker and put him on the swing shift and another one on graveyard. But they weren't paying nothing. If you worked Saturday and Sunday, you did that for free, gratis. So when they told me, he says, *You're going walking*, and the guy that was in charge of everything—and I can't think of his name, but he had a big old boat and he used to go fishing all the time, he and my dad were good friends—and he says, *You're going to go walking*. Well, hell, that was about a \$200-a-week cut in pay.

*Why would it be a cut? Because you're not doing the mining anymore?*

Yes, well, you get paid by the hour mining, and that other one you're just on salary. So I went up and talked to him. I said, You know, I'd love to take that job but I'm trying to help my father a little bit because he's retired, and he knew my dad. He says, You just stay where you are and when you get ready for that walking job, you let me know. So I stayed shifting and all these other guys had to go walking. Boy, they were all mad. They said it's all in who you know. But then they got where the wages were pretty good, you know. Then it was about a tossup whether you was a shifter or walker. But when they got real down, we didn't have no work out there, the shifter was knocked down to a lead miner, and then there was one miner, and they didn't have no walker. Yes, they had a walker. [00:10:00] But the walker was knocked down to a shifter, and then they had a lead miner, and then a miner. But a lead miner, hell, you know, they don't know too much either. But anyway, the shift I was on, I worked for Myers and Jimmy Nielsen. And Myers was knocked down to a walker, and then Nielsen was knocked down, too.

But I was working out there and we was sinking a shaft, and we weren't very deep. You could look up there. It was probably fifteen foot deep. But we was still sinking. We was going down. And what Nielsens wanted was a cut hole in it, but an end cut, they call it. And he come to me and he said, I want you to put an end cut in that. Well, what I was doing, you know, like this is a shaft, I'd drill a hole right here, a reliever, and I'd drill one here and one there, and then I'd shoot the deal, and then when the reliever went off it'd bring that corner out, and I really didn't need an end cut. But he says, Put an end cut in it. Put an end cut. So I said, Where do you want it? Where do you want the end cut? And he didn't know, so he turned around and walked off.

*If you're walking in the shaft, then you're literally walking and watching what people are doing?*

*Is that what that means when you're a walker?*

Yeah, you're in charge, well, like a superintendent. You're just one grade under him. But see, when we went to Alaska, they called us all shaft superintendents instead of the walkers.

*I see. But that way, you're watching and making sure everything's being done right.*

Yes.

*You're not doing the actual mining anymore?*

I was. I didn't stop. I just kept working right with them guys.

*You did. Interesting.*

This guy come out there one day, I was working for MX [missile experimental], and he come out there in the water truck, and he pulled up there and stopped and he says to me, Hey, you work here?

And I said, Yeah.

He said, Where can I find Hank Peluaga?

And I said, You're looking at him.

He said, what the hell are you doing up there?

I was fixing this big hose on the water pump.

And he says, You're not supposed to be doing that. You're supposed to have one of the guys do that.

And I said, Yeah, what the hell. By the time you go get them and bring them over here and show them what you want, I could do it myself.

And they had a big old truck out there. Then, it had \$100,000 worth of equipment on it. It was one of the big trucks they brought out of Ely to haul the mucking, one of them Yukes. And it had all of this stuff on it.

*Tell me again what you just said about Ely, the muck from Yukes? I didn't understand the word you said.*

Yeah. Yuke.

*What is Yuke?*

Big trucks that they'd haul a hundred ton of muck at one shot.

*It's called a Yuke?*

Yuke. Yes. And they bought one, the Air Force bought one from them and they painted it blue, and they'd go around this track. We put in that track. And they run off the road with that big truck. And then when they run off the road it was in sand, and the old truck went right down. So Captain Perry come to me. It was just before noon, lunchtime. And he says, Can you get that truck out down there? He says, It's got \$100,000 worth of stuff on it, so be careful. It was tied on all over the back and everything for [00:15:00] checking missiles and stuff. And I said, Yeah, I'll see what I can do with it. So I went over there and looked at it. I was over the laborers then, and I told the laborers, I said, Run up there into Area 25 and have the Teamsters send us two loads of railroad ties. They're little ties, thirty-six inches, that they use underground. So he brought us up two. I told him, Tell him right away. Can't wait. So he brought them right then. He loaded them in the truck and brought them out to us. And we stacked them up in the back of this truck, on the ground, you know, cribbed them up. And then we got in and raised the bed. Well, the bed can't raise up but the wheels come up. And we cribbed it, and then we cribbed under it with ties. It was I think about six, eight foot in front of the—from the front wheel to the back wheel. And then got in and drove it right out. Drove it right up on the road again and parked it. And here he come. After they went and ate, they come back and we already had that truck out. And he says to me, Hot darn, you get that truck out of there that quick!

And I said, Yes.

And he said, Well, I ain't going to ask you how you did it.

And I said, Well, I don't want you to.

But they all give me letters when I worked out there, wrote a recommendation. I've got some if you want to read them. [See copies of commendations for MX and Cannikin work].

*Yes, I'd love to see them. We'll do that in a minute. But let me ask you. So you're working on the MX track at the time?*

Yes.

*And they're using that truck to take readings—?*

The missiles. Yeah, it goes over the hole, picks a missile up, and then takes it around the track.

*Oh, so it's literally taking it around the track.*

Yeah, and then we had bumps in there that they had to go over like that, and they'd go over at different speeds.

*Oh, so they're testing how the missile does in these different—*

But the missile truck, you could go either way. It had a tractor on both ends. And you could get in it and drive it this way. You could turn around, it was so damn big. Then if you wanted to go the other way, you got in the other end.

*So when you're working out at MX, do you know what you're working on, then?*

Yes.

*You do know you're working on that—?*

Oh, yes. Missiles.

*That's amazing. And so you had to, I'm asking, you guys had to dig the shaft that the missile would supposedly come out of?*

Yes. But see, when things got slow up there, we didn't have nothing to do, the walkers. I used to think, what the hell they keeping me for? But it come up that a blasting school was going to be held, that Bill Beam, he was a safety man, so he said, we're having a blasting school. You walkers can come down if you want. So they come up there to the tunnel and told us that they were having that school tomorrow, so if you want to, come on down; if you don't, that's fine because you wasn't obligated. But I thought, well hell, I ain't got nothing to do anyway, so I went down there and went to the school.

*Was that in Mercury?*

No, CP [control point] hill. That's halfway between the—Area 3 is what they call it. So I went down there, and I think it was 200 questions, asking how fast a fuse burned a minute, or a second, and you'd write in there one second, a minute. And then the priming cord, it'd go immediately. So you put the primer on the priming cord and then you light the priming cord and it'd run down to the timer and then it'd set it off. So that's the way it'd go. And then I passed.

[00:20:00] So they give me all my paperwork and sent me back to the tunnel.

So this job come up; Yucca Mountain job. They had to build a road to get in there. So they sent Manuel out there. And Bill Beam come up to him and he said, where's your blasting license?

He said, I don't have one.

And he says, You can't work outside here in the mining. Underground, you can blast all you want, but outside here, you got to have a blasting license.

*Oh. And who was this? Manuel?*

Manuel Fresquez. So they come and got me. Oh, they were all mad, said, that son-of-a-gun, he got in there. Well, I got in then. I had my blasting license. They said, Well, we aren't going to take it now. He said, No, it's too late. So that's the way it was.

But we was drilling pads, you know. We drove this road all the way up. Widened it out is what we were doing. It was an old trail. And we'd just drill and blast and then a CAT would come along there and push it out of the way. So this Teamster come out there with a load of something he had for the Yucca Mountain project. And he says, You can't go no further. The laborer stopped him.

He said, what do you mean, I can't go no further?

He said, They're going to shoot up there.

He said, who the hell is going to shoot up there?

And he says, Hank.

And he said, Well, I just have to wait, then.

So he sat in his truck and waited till after we shot. I come back down in my pickup and there he was sitting. Old Ewing his brother, owned that Ewing [Bros.] Towing over here, trucks and stuff, and his dad had a mine up there in Sandy Valley.

So when I come down in my pickup I see him and he says, Oh, you're Hank. He says, Hell, I didn't know you knew how to do that.

And I said, Yeah.

And he said, You're my partner.

Then he took me as his partner in their silver mine out there.

*Really!*

Yeah, and I went out there. I worked for Wells Cargo then. No, I borrowed a wheel barrow from Wells Cargo and went out there and hand-mucked all that stuff out and dumped it over in the dump. And if you went across the canyon and looked back at the dump, you could see where the fresh muck was. And we ended up losing it. They said that we didn't do our assessment work.

But you could see right there we did it. So they had this guy take a bulldozer and cut a trench where you couldn't get in there. And I had a dune buggy. I was into off-road racing and I had two, three dune buggies around here, and one day I just drove that dune buggy out there and went right up to that mine. And about two weeks later, I went in there and here he was, standing there with a .30-.30 in his arms like that [demonstrating posture] and he said, How'd you get in here?

I said, Right down that road there. How the hell do you think I got in here?

And then he told me, he said, You'd better get out of here.

But they'd got it all, the gold mines took and everything.

*And where was this, again?*

Sandy Valley, right out here at Goodsprings.

*But this happened, what? When you were working—*

While I was still working out there.

*Yeah, but you were working on the road for Yucca Mountain. That was the eighties, the late eighties?*

Yeah. Whenever that MX missile—

*We'll have to look it up.* [Per DOE/NV website MX missile test work took place at the NTS between 1978 and 1983].

I think it was. I don't remember now.

*I'll look it up. Wow, what a story. So you got your silver mine and you lost your silver mine. You said you had a silver mine and then you lost the silver mine.*

Oh, yeah. Yeah.

*Did you get any silver out of it?*



Yes, it was running pretty good. Well, what happened was they took some guys with a helicopter and this round plastic pipe, they were four foot long, they just went up there and land the helicopter and let these guys out and they'd put all these markers in there. Then they went [00:25:00] over the hill, did the same thing. Everybody up there lost their property. And they all did their assessment work. But it was a big gold mining company out of Colorado and there wasn't no use fighting them. But I went down there one day to the courthouse and this young lady was in there. And I told her, I said, I got this mine out there. I want to get my name put on the paperwork. And she went and looked and found everything and we filled everything out. And then about, I think it was four or five months later, after I did my assessment work, you have to go down there and file it. So I go down there and file it, and there was a guy there and he says, Well, I can't find no paperwork on you.

I said, Well, it's there because this young lady and me made it out.

And he said, No, I can't find it.

So what the hell was I going to do?

*Nothing. No. Wow.*

But we put drill pads up there on that mesa. We come all the way to the top and then right along that mesa. And then we was going to go off the other side, and then you go into Pahrump. What do they call it? Lathrop Wells. Then you go into that. But I only had about from here across to the street to go, and they come up there and stopped us. They said, No, don't go off there, because if you do, we got to put a security gate there, and that'll be two more, or three, four more security guards we got to hire. So I quit, but hell, they could still get over there. So that didn't stop them.

And then we went up there and drilled these drill pads. And I think it was three of them. They were about 200 by 200, yeah. And the drillers went in there and they drilled down into Yucca Mountain, checking that ground and stuff.

*Amazing. I never thought about how they got the road in there, but you worked on that road.*

Yeah, I put all of that road in there. They used to show it on TV sometimes and I'd tell Lola, see that road there? I put all that in. And all the drill pads.

*So then from the drill pads, they go down into the mountain.*

Yes, they come up and they set up their drillers, they got to have all that room for their drill seal their dog house and stuff, and then they got to have room for trucks and trailers and everything in there, and then the drillers.

*Now, back to the test site, the test site proper, so you talked about when you first went, and you talked about working on MX, and you did deep hole drilling out at the test site. Is there anything else about the test site that you think it's important for me to know, of the kind of work that you did there?*

That's it, just drilling and blasting. But you know they tell you mining is nothing, but every day I'd learn something new. Every day I'd learn something new. And I loved my work. You know I couldn't wait to get back out there to do what I knew I had to do. And I showed them a million shortcuts.

*Did you?*

Yes. Things that they didn't even know. Even their higher-ups. Solaegui knew them, but nobody else.

*And you had learned those things other places, or you'd—*

Yes. And then I learned a lot of it out there by just doing it. But I'd learn something new every day.

*What was it like during the day? Did you like working with the guys? Was there competition?*

*What was the work atmosphere like?*

**[00:30:00]** Well, when we first—you know they killed a couple guys in the shafts up there, and then they quit them. So about I think it was four or five years later, they decided they needed some shafts again. The users I think out of New Mexico, can't think of who they were—

*Was it Sandia [National Laboratories] or—*

Sandia, yeah, they needed some more shafts. So they come out there and they said, *We've got to have a shaft.* But we didn't have no shaft miners. And we had to call the tunnels to get miners, and you know what they sent us? All of their junk that they didn't want. And when that bus pulled in the yard there that morning, [Seymour] Shackelton was my superintendent, and I said to him, *What the hell have we got out there?* And it was all of the deadbeats that they didn't want up there. And you know I took them guys and within a month I had the best crew on the mountain. Even the crews they had up in the tunnels. But I'd treat them right, treat them like men and everything, but them other guys don't. They'd holler at them, and I never did holler at them. If I want something, I went and tapped them on the shoulder. And if one of them couldn't drill, I'd stay right there and, help him out and things like that. And it really p'ed them other guys off. But I broke them in. I'd just show them how to do it and they turned out to be the best men there.

*So they needed to be taught, basically.*

Yeah, just showed different things. Like when you're drilling in that ground there, you've got to mud a hole. That means you just turn your water on just barely so that instead of water coming out of that hole, there's nothing coming out but it's just making mud. So what you're doing, you're mudding the hole. And then when you back out of it, take a loading stick and run in there

and out to push that mud, back in. And then when you got ready to load it, your powder would go right in there. And there's a lot to that that people don't know. They don't know how to mud a hole. They use too much water and not enough air. But we could mud them right. And then if you blew them, you blew them out, that mud was red hot and it'd hit you in the face and just burn the heck out of you. But a lot of guys didn't know.

I had a big old kid out there. Nobody liked him. They'd get him on their shift and get rid of him, get him on the shift and get rid of him. So I was walking by the dog house one day and I heard them say, We got to get rid of him.

And I went in there and said, Well, let me have him.

And they said, What do you want him for?

And I said, I like the guy and I know he's got a big family and he needs work.

So they said, All right, you've got ten days to straighten him up.

So I took him and I talked to him. I said, You know now they got you on probation. Ten days, and that's only five days and five days. I says, We got to straighten up. So he said, OK. And he turned out, hell—and then you had to grade the men. So one of the walkers out there—oh, he got killed, but he was our superintendent—I made out a, we'd call them, oh, [they reported] what they can do to the men, how long that they—and I made this out, and I got called in the office and he said, Hey, what's this? I know that guy ain't that good.

And I said, Well, let me tell you something right here and right now. A lot of guys won't do a damn thing for you, but they'll go in there and kill themselves for me.

He said, Oh, yeah?

And I said, Yeah, well, you know, you treat them right...

And I had the best crew there, and everybody that come out there said, I want to go on Hank's shift. I want to go on Hank's shift. So they figured I was doing favors or something, because why the hell would guys want to come on my shift?

[00:35:00] But I was waiting for a bus up there one day and this guy was sitting there and he says to me, Where do you go?

I said, I go out to Area 12.

He said, Oh, yeah? What do you do?

I said, I'm a miner.

I never did tell nobody I was a walker. I'd always tell them I was a miner.

And he said, Yeah? What's your name?

And I said, Pollywog.

They all called me Pollywog, so I'd just say Pollywog. Boy, he jumped up off of that and he said, Hell, I've been wanting to meet you.

He passed away, too. Oh, a lot of the guys I worked with all passed away.

*You said that one guy, a superintendent or a supervisor, was killed? You were just saying?*

Yeah.

*Who was that?*

[Galen] Adair. Yeah, he was riding a bicycle. He started riding a bicycle out there.

*At the test site.*

Sometimes he'd ride it from here clear out there. But somebody run over him right out here on—you remember when they were just finishing that expressway?

*No, but I haven't been here long enough, but that's OK.*

Where it went into [Interstate] 95? Right there's where that kid run over him. Killed him. And you know he had on his riding suit and his riding jacket and riding hat and no wallet, so when they run over him, they didn't know who the hell he was for two days. Till his wife missed him. But the only thing, when you worked at the Nevada Test Site, they don't know whether you're in double over, stayed out there, because you'd have to call them to let them know what the heck was going on.

*Oh, I see. So she thought maybe he was still out at work or something.*

Yeah, she thought, well, he just got late so he stopped and worked over.

*Yeah. Thank you, because you've given me a really good sense of what the work crews are like and what you were like as a supervisor. What were the guys that you worked for like? You've talked about Solaegui. You say you worked for Seymour Shackelton, too?*

Oh, yes, a long time. Yes, they were fine guys.

*And would you have much interaction, many things to do with the actual users? Would you see them doing what they're doing?*

Yes, we could. But like say that you wasn't a very good miner, they'd send you in there to help him. But if you was a good miner, you stayed out there and did all the drilling and stuff. But like the guys that didn't know too much, they're the ones that got to get in there and watch everything done.

*I see. That's interesting.*

But I had a colored guy that you'd send him in the—they had two drifts, two different shifters. We'd tell him to go into one drift, or the shifter would tell him, I couldn't tell him. The shifter would say, Well, go in there and do this or do that. And then he wouldn't do it. He'd go in the other side and work in there. So the shifter told me, he said, He's not doing what I

tell him. And I said, Well, I'll have a talk with him. So I talked to him and I told him, The shifter's unsatisfied with your work. I said, If he wants you to go in there, you go in there. And he says, OK. So then when I started to walk off, I heard him tell the other guys in there, I'll be here when that son-of-a-whatever, he's gone. So I thought, well. I went out and talked to Shack, Shackelton, and I said we was having trouble with that, what the hell, Waters was his name, having trouble with Waters, he don't want to do nothing you tell him. So he said, Well, what did you do with him? And I said, Well, I've done everything. But I said, We're going to work this weekend and I'm going [00:40:00] to make him a shifter to be over all the guys, see what happens.

So that morning before we went underground I said, Waters, you're going to be the shifter today.

And he looked at me and said, I don't know nothing about shifting.

And I said, You're going to be the shifter. Now get in there and go to work.

So they went in and went to work and hell, he liked it, so next time I made him shifter again he was happy as hell. So when his thirty-day probation was up, we had to let him go. So all the women come out there over the—they got—I can't think no more. But they all come out there and they have a meeting and says that, You run this guy off because you don't like him.

And I said, No, I like the guy, but he wouldn't do as he was told.

And she said, Well, what did you do with him?

I said, I made him a shifter. He couldn't handle that. I made him a bull gang foreman. He couldn't handle that. And I said, Instead of going where's

he's supposed to go and do what he was supposed to do, he'd just go do what he wanted to do.

So she said, OK, but you ain't heard the end of this.

So about a week later she called me on the phone and she says, I'm coming back out today to interview you; you want me to tell you what you told me so you'll know it won't get fouled up?

I said, Lady, you could come to me ten years from now and ask me and I could tell you the very same things I told you last week.

And she says, What do you mean?

I said, Well, I know what I'm talking about. I don't have to be told this or that because I know what I told the man.

So anyway they went ahead and laid him off.

So me and the wife went out to *Jerry's Nugget* to have dinner one night and when I out of—that's before they remodeled it. When I come out of the restaurant, I see him sitting over there, playing 21. And he told them guys, he says, I know where Hank gets on the bus. I know what time he gets off the bus. He said, I'm going to whip his butt. So I told Lola, I said, You go on out that way. I'm going to go around there by him. So I just walked over where he was and he says to me, Hey, Hank, if you get me back out there, I'm going to work this time. And I said, OK, and I just walked on out. But he come back out.

*He did?*

And they put him on the bull gang. And they said, Well, who are you working for? Who will you be working for?

He said, Hank Peluaga. Pollywog.

Oh, Jesus! He said.



But hell, I treated him good. He was the best guy that could be.

*Wow. Now what did the bull gang do?*

They put in the railroad. And then do all the cleanup and dump the garbage and pump out the toilets.

See, what they got is some rails they call slide rails, and they lay the rail and then they lay the—turn the slide rails over and lay them where the whatchacall is in them, the ball on top? They just turned them over and lay them like that, and then that puts them a crib on each side, and as they drive the drift forward, they keep the machine and butt these out until they get them up at the end of the thing, and then they stand rail. The bull gang comes in and puts all the ties in, stands the rail, and then lays two more of them, so you can keep going all the time.

And we got this walking boss one day and he says to the—Silva was the bull gang foreman. He said, How long would it take a man to put in the tie? He had a little book he was writing in.

Silva said, Oh, five minutes.

[And the walking boss says], OK. How big a crew you got?

**[00:45:00]** And he says, Six. Five guys.

Well, he said, one guy will have to put in two ties. So he said, Say that's ten minutes on him. How long does it take to stand a rail?

And he said, Oh, you just put it in and flop it over and then tack it down.

How long will that take?

He said, Fifteen minutes.

He said, There you are, twenty-five minutes, your rail's in. Now don't let me catch you out there no more, you know.

Silva come up to me and he says, I don't know what's the matter with some of these. He said, You can't really do stuff that quick.

*Oh, my gosh. So what year did you retire?*

Seventy-one.

*Maybe '91? No? When you retired?*

Oh, yes, '91.

*Ninety-one. That's what I thought. Yeah. So you'd been out there—how many years was that?*

Well, when I went to work out there, it was June 20, 1958—no—or '57? I don't know. And I worked till '73, come in and went to work for Wells Cargo five years, and then Flangas called me and I went back out. So then I worked till I retired. That was a hell of a good job. I made some good money out there. And then I got all these [health] problems now, so I don't know.

*Do you think they're related to the work at the test site?*

Yes, it's got to be. My first doctor said this was caused from smoking, but I haven't smoked since 1960, I think it was. I joined the Mormon Church and I quit smoking, drinking, everything. But I think it's diesel smoke and the powder smoke and all that other junk. But I can't get them to admit it. And I can't hear. They never did give me no hearing aids. Getting where I can't see.

*What do you think their reason—they just aren't accepting certain claims, or what's the deal there?*

Well, I think what happened with this first doctor, said I had that COPD [Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease], he give me the business, and so they won't even listen to me now. But they told me to go get an X-ray and—

*Of your lungs?*

Yeah, and take it to—I've had a couple of them already, and take them to a B Reader.

*What's a B-reader? [B Reader explained on p. 30].*

I don't know. Just somebody that reads over [at] the doctor's, that can understand what he's reading, I guess, because he looks at the [chest x-ray]—but one doctor said I had silicosis. Dr. Stewart over here with the Senior Dimensions. And then my pills and things got so damn high that I had to go to the vets [Veterans Administration] and they were supposed to charge me a co-pay and they didn't do it, and then they just sent me a bill, I want \$444.00. Well, hell, I didn't have that money to pay that, so I didn't bother doing anything. And I got a letter from them that said that if I didn't send them that money, they'd stop my pension check and my Social Security. And I told Walt, I said, *Criminey*, if they do that, I never will get that started again. So I drove out there and talked to the man and he said, *Well, can I put you on a payment plan?* I said, *Yeah*. He put me on a payment plan where I pay \$50.00 a month. So I quit them [00:50:00] and went back to the Senior Horizons. So I don't know. But that doctor I got now seems like a real nice man. He give me a nice letter to send back on that silicosis deal.

*Right. What is COPD? [see above]*

I'm not sure. It's from smoking, he said.

*Oh, OK. But you just have the symptoms that it's hard to breathe, is that right?*

Yes. But I've got that cough. I keep coughing that junk up, and they told me the lungs was white, don't worry about it; when it starts getting yellow—well, it's starting to get yellow now. But I'm on—I take six pills in the morning and five at night, and then that oxygen I'm supposed to be on twenty-four hours a day.

*Well, then we should probably wind this up because I don't want you to go any longer—*

Oh, I'll be all right.

*OK. Well, this has really been really interesting and I've learned a lot from you, so if there's anything else you want to say in closing. I want to take a look at those letters you said you got.*

All right. But on the day they was pulling the last things out, see, if they hadn't changed that cable, we'd have finished it on graveyard. So—

*In Amchitka.*

Amchitka. So Frank—we was all standing around the hole there when they were pulling that out and Frank said—that was Saturday morning and he said to me, Well, we'll leave Monday, get on that plane.

I said, There's a plane leaving here today and I'm going to be on that.

And he said, Yeah, well, that's a little old plane, that's Aleutian Airlines.

And I said, I don't give a damn. I'm getting the hell off this island.

So me and Wally got on it. But see, when I went—this guy, his daughter run off with a guy that was on dope and stuff. I think he said it was in Oregon. And we was all froze on the job. The miners would go in and we stayed there. And Frank says, Well, no, you can't go.

He said, Well, I either go or I'm going to quit. I don't give a damn. I'm going to kill that guy.

So Frank says, Well, all right, go on, but you be on that damn airplane Wednesday to come back.

So he said, All right.

And he left, and he just went down there and found his daughter and everything and brought her back, and then he just stayed a couple more days. So then he come back out. And we all raised hell with Solaegui. We says, My God, they let one guy go and they won't

let us go. So he fixed it up where we got a week off. And his wife, Beaman's wife, and them all come up. They come up to Alaska. But Lola wouldn't come. She was busy in that damn shop.

So I come home. Well, the tickets that the company—see, REECo or AEC, somebody, bought us the tickets to go out round-trip. And because I had come home, I had used the back side of that ticket, so I had to get another one. And the tickets had went up seven dollars and some-odd cents. So when we went in to get on the airplane, they looked at my ticket and they says to Wally, well, he's first class. He says, You want first class? But I wasn't. I had a regular ticket. What they didn't look at was the price, or the date that we bought them, got them. So he said yes, and we rode right up there behind the pilot.

But see, Frank stayed there—we got into Las Vegas here, it was about noon Monday, me and Wally. They flew us—stopped at every little old island there was to deliver the mail and everything. And then we got on the plane in Seattle. We had to ride the Hughes plane. It went to [00:55:00] Salt Lake [City] and then Salt Lake to San Francisco, and then get on one in San Francisco and come back to L.A. [Los Angeles], and then get on one in L.A. and come back to here. Well, Solaegui waited till Monday, and he got on that big airplane that they had, the one the government—and we got off the airplane at noon. Frank got off at two o'clock.

*That's funny. OK. Well, OK, I think we can stop for now.*

Let me get the letters [see letters of commendation for Cannikin and MX work].

[00:55:33] End Track 2, Disc 2.

[End of interview]