

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

**Interview with**  
**Cornelius John Smits**

**July 26, 2005**  
**Las Vegas, Nevada**

Interview Conducted By  
Suzanne Becker

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Produced by:

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## Interview with Cornelius John Smits

July 26, 2005 in Las Vegas, NV

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[00:00:20] Begin Track 1, Disc 1.

**Suzanne Becker:** *State your name.*

**Cornelius John Smits:** Cornelius John Smits. I don't use Cornelius. I go by John. I'm retired Navy, thirty-year Navy guy. I was born in Newark, New Jersey, lived there six weeks, and then my parents moved to Rotterdam, to Holland, The Netherlands, where two younger brothers were born. My father was with the Holland America Line, and it seemed that dollars converted to guilders very nicely, so we lived in Europe until I was about six or seven. [We] came to the States and ended up in northern New York, Watertown, New York. My father has always been in the restaurant, maitre'd world, and he managed a private club in Watertown. So then I grew up in Watertown.

*What year were you born, if you don't mind me asking?*

Nineteen nineteen. July 4, 1919. So I grew up there, went through school, Immaculate Heart Academy, the sisters—my mother was Irish Catholic.

*Do you remember your years in Europe at all?*

No, I don't. My little brothers claim they do, which infuriates me. No, some—very few major things. Now, I've been back several times, in Ireland, my mother's home, and Holland, Belgium.

But no, I have no true recollection.

*I'm sorry, just to go back, where is Watertown?*

Watertown, New York is sixty miles north of Syracuse, which is a pretty well-known place. It's the gateway, sort of the gateway to the Thousand Islands, St. Lawrence River, Lake Ontario.

*That sounds beautiful.*

Oh, it is great. It's great country. I had a fine youth. Did a lot of sailing on the lake. Racing with the Canadian guys. Very, very fine.

I graduated from high school in 1937, which was the height of the Depression up there.

*How was that, living, going through that time? Did you realize what was going on?*

Oh, yes. My father had left the Black River Valley Club. He was down in New York [City] in the Barkley Hotel or one of the large hotels, and we were on a subsistence for several years.

I finished high school, and there was almost no work available. But I had a dear old friend who owned a dairy company in Watertown, and he had close friends up in Canton, New York, St. Lawrence University and the New York State Agricultural School, state junior college now. And he arranged for me to go to Canton, New York, which is about sixty miles away, north again, near the Adirondacks. He arranged—well, I met the dean, who was his friend, and the dean set me up with a place where I could work for my room and at a little restaurant where I could cashier for my food. And so, not finding work, I went to college.

*Well, a good option. A good alternative.*

Two years of that, and got a junior degree, whatever they called it. That was in 1939.

*What was that degree in?*

Industrial chemistry.

*OK. Had you had an interest in that or—?*

No. When I got there, they had electricity, chemistry, and farming. So I figured what the [heck].

I couldn't change a light bulb.

So [in] '39, then, came back and worked in a paper mill. Northern New York was full of paper mills. There was good power on the Black River, and there were a lot of wood[s] in the Adirondacks and elsewhere, Canada. Most of the towns like Watertown had a paper mill, which

was their principal source of employment. I worked there in the lab, [as a] lab technician, [00:05:00] [for] twenty-five cents an hour, I think. Technician.

*Wow! Times have changed.*

And then I decided I was interested in paper-making, the forest—the industry, and as you probably know, Appleton, Wisconsin has the foremost school in the world, I believe, in that industry. So I set my sights for that. I needed some more education, so I went to Syracuse then that summer, took botany and something else, and barely struggled through. But I didn't have the tickets for Appleton, and lo and behold, that was '40, the Navy had a program to become a commissioned officer in the Naval Reserve if you had two years of college. And I signed up for that. Took a cruise on the old USS *New York* to qualify, whatever that meant. We never did know how we qualified. We were swabbing decks and—

*Maybe just to make sure you could sail on a boat.*

Yeah, not get seasick.

*Exactly.*

So then I went to the midshipmen's school in Chicago, Northwestern [University]. They called us "ninety-day wonders." We had a three-months school, which made us ensigns, as compared to the boys at Annapolis who spent four years becoming ensigns. So we were known as "ninety-day wonders."

*Did the accelerated program.*

And I went on active duty from there spring of '40.

*Now, this is as World War II is just gearing up?*

Yes, before World War II. And went to Seattle, Washington in March of '41 and joined a Navy cargo ship. I don't know how much detail you want on my Navy time.

*I'm curious to know what you did.*

It was a fine experience. We were in the Gulf of Alaska. The Navy was building air bases at Sitka, Kodiak, and Dutch Harbor, and so we made the run; every month we would hit all three ports, delivering building supplies, food, whiskey and some of their families. It was peacetime and we carried some dependents. And I was on the *Spica*, USS *Spica* [AK-16]—like the star. All the cargo ships were named for stars.

*[I] didn't know that.*

After two years, I got full of Alaska. I tried for sub school and I couldn't pass the eye exam, and something came out and said, we're looking for—I was a lieutenant (senior grade) by then. I hadn't been in—.

*Quick rise.*

Oh, God, unbelievable. Not me, it was just everybody with certain dates. An ALNAV, as they called it, all-Navy announcement. An ALNAV came out, said, we're looking for lieutenants to command LST [landing ship, tank]. Well, I wandered all around Alaska asking people, what is an LST? Nobody knew. They hadn't even built one then. So I volunteered and sure enough, came back to Little Creek, Virginia and went through the LST training. Landing ship, tank. It was about 310 feet long, with the bow doors that opened and would take the troops from Hawaii or wherever and take them to the atolls and islands where they were to do combat. And so then we would get in and open our bow doors and either the amphibious vehicles or the troops would march out into the beach. Which was a great experience. Had a year-and-a-half of that. Made the landings in some of the tough islands in the Pacific. But we did all right.

And then I was put on a Navy tanker. Tankers are named after rivers. This was the USS *Enoree* [AO-69]. *Enoree* is a river in South Carolina, I think. As executive officer, number two.

**[00:10:00]** A big ship, 510 feet. We operated in the Western Pacific, supplying carriers and battleships and cruisers and destroyers with fuel. They'd come alongside—well, [for] the big ships we would go alongside and transfer fuel by hose.

Then the war ended, and the Navy had a point system for getting out. Everybody wanted out. One glory of having been married was you got ten points for being married. Well, the captain was married and I was not. He went home and I took command of the oiler. Took it to the Persian Gulf and got oil and brought it back to Bikini [Marshall Islands]. [On] Bikini, they were setting up for the first shot, '46, July '46.

*If you don't mind me just asking to back up for a minute, obviously you remember the end of the war and then Hiroshima and Nagasaki. What did you think about that? To be a part of that and experience that?*

We were in Okinawa. *Hundreds* of ships, troop transports. I don't know how many thousands of people were in Okinawa, Buckner Bay, on ships and ashore, waiting to go to Japan. Nobody was looking forward to going to Japan, because they were ferocious fighters. And, my God, August the 6<sup>th</sup> was like Heaven opened up for us. I have never, never even thought of criticizing President [Harry S.] Truman for his decision. It saved—I'd say if we had invaded Japan, we would've lost about a million people. So Hiroshima occurred. Of course, it's a disaster. It's regrettable. But if you were near the front line, it wasn't regrettable.

*And you were right there. You were close.*

And then Nagasaki. We went to Hiroshima with the tanker and—

*Were you there afterwards?*

Yes.

*What was that like?*



Well, we couldn't go near the city, so we visited some of the suburbs. The fleet was in there.

Then I finally got to come back to the States, summer of '46. And the rest of my service – I retired in '69 – was mainly aboard ship. I had the command of two destroyers, a destroyer escort in Korea, and a troop transport in Vietnam, big transport. I had a tour in the Pentagon. I had a very great tour in Europe, Paris with General [Lauris] Norstad at Versailles for a couple of years. So that's about it. One of my shore duties was in San Diego [California], Naval Air Station Coronado, and I was assigned to the Nuclear Weapons Training Center. I thought, what the hell is that? Well, I learned over a couple of years what it was. First thing I knew, I was teaching admirals and captains all about the bombs. This is [in the] early fifties.

*At the very beginning of the program.*

Yes. And so I had three years there and I became pretty well known in the Pacific Fleet as an expert in the employment of nuclear weapons.

*Were you out at Bikini at all when they were doing any of the testing?*

Where?

*Out at Bikini?*

No. I left. I got relieved. My relief was waiting for me on another ship. I left. I came home on a ship coming back about five days before the shot. I don't know if I ever read of that or not. They were all so far out, they didn't see much.

My next assignment, after the school, I went to a fleet staff in the Pacific, a destroyer staff. Then I went to Europe, and then I came back and took command of the [USS] *George Clymer* [APA-27], the troop transport, Vietnam era. Went to Da Nang with the troops.

**[00:15:00]** And then I was ordered to Joint Task Force Eight because of my so-called nuclear background.

*What is Joint Task Force Eight?*

JTF-8 was Army-Navy-Air Force-Marine staff, having to do with testing of nuclear weapons overseas. They were in the midst of building Johnston Atoll and of course in Kwaj[alein] we were getting ready to launch missiles for testing. So I was made the logistics officer of JTF-8 and spent about three years, I think, if not more. We were in Washington, D.C., and then we were moved to Albuquerque [New Mexico], which was nice. Albuquerque had Kirtland Air Force Base. They had a *lot* of nuclear staffs and schools at Kirtland in Albuquerque, and so it was a logical place to put us, on the base. And it was nice. [We] got quarters for the first time. We did a lot of traveling in the Pacific, getting Johnston Island ready.

*What types of things did you do to get the island ready?*

Well, they enlarged the island by about a third. It's just a coral atoll. We had to get wood, lumber, barracks, everything you can imagine.

*So basically you built the island.*

Yes. It was quite a big base when we got through. In the meantime, the AEC [Atomic Energy Commission] was heavily involved with all of our activities. I became well acquainted with the AEC guys here in town on Highland Avenue in those last couple of years, and we went overseas together to the tests. Then I retired in '69, August '69, being a rich Navy captain with eight dollars in the bank and three kids in college.

*So you ended up with quite a long career in the Navy.*

They called me up from here, from Las Vegas, and said, You want to come work with us?

And giving it about five minutes of thought, I said, I'll be right down.

*Obviously you'd been familiar with the AEC and been working with them throughout.*

Yes.

*Were you familiar with the development of the [Nevada] test site and what was going on?*

No.

*What did they want you to come work for them for?*

They were setting up a new division. They had had some problems, logistic control, management problems. The manager of NV, Nevada Test Site Office, Bob Miller, Bob and I knew each other pretty well, and he called me up and said, I'm setting up a new division, Logistics Division. You want to come down? And I said yes. So we set up a new division. I came down and slowly got it staffed.

*What exactly does Logistics Division mean?*

It has to do with supplying everything they need at the test site.

*And what year was this? Sixty-nine?*

Yes, fall of '69; 1970 it really got going. The stuff was all out there but it was taken off in the boondocks. Nobody knew where anything was and they'd go out and buy new stuff, and they had new stuff in the warehouse. The General Accounting Office [GAO] came out and said, hey, what the hell is going on? And Bob Miller, the manager, reacted and decided to set up this division. So I got some real good guys out of the test site guys and downtown guys and ex-military. We were able to really, in a couple years' time—the first thing was to get the confidence of the labs. The labs run the test site. Once you learn that, then you're on pretty solid ground.

*So you got to know the right people.*

Don't fool with LASL [Los Alamos Scientific, now National, Laboratory] and [Lawrence] Livermore [National Laboratory]. So I got to know those people and got along with them and

explained to them we were not going to interfere with their shots. We had to do a little housekeeping. It went very well.

And then in '69 I retired and came down here and stayed with it till I retired. The last couple of years [00:20:00] with the Atomic Energy people, I got involved in the electric vehicle development, which is entirely separate. So essentially that's my going-in—

*What year did you retire from the test site?*

Sixty-nine. Oh, August '86.

*OK. So you were out there for quite a bit.*

I was not at the site. We were on Highland Avenue, the big headquarters. I was out at the site a couple times a week. My people were out there five times a week, if not more. But I was downtown. Logistician.

*Now, I'd like to just back up a little bit because at some point in there you got married.*

Yes. I was married in 1947 in Watertown, New York to a young lady I'd known, family I'd known for many years. We had three children.

*What are their names?*

A boy and two girls. And lived in Albuquerque then. While the girls were in high school, the boy started college. He's a lawyer now in Sacramento.

*And what is his name?*

Stuart. Daughters Sally and Mary. They are here.

*In Las Vegas. Very nice.*

Yes. Sally is a superintendent, supervisor, with Juvenile Court Services. And Mary's also with the Juvenile Court, in a different capacity. And they're married and have children. We have ten grandchildren. My first wife and I were divorced in '74, and through a chain of circumstances I

met Joan, '75-or-6, and we were married in 1980. She had owned this house. She and her husband had owned this house, had it rented out for years, and so we came back. Joan has two children: Jill Bowen and Eugene Bowen. Her son Eugene is a psychologist in the Clark County School system. He's been with them for quite a while. Jill is just getting her degree at age forty-three and wants to go to law school.

*Never too late.*

That's right. We're very proud of her. And we have ten grandkids between us; seven of them are here.

*Well, it's nice. You've got a lot of family out here. You're lucky.*

Yes. You know, when I first came down and joined the AEC, I said, well, I'll go down there and get the five-year retirement and come back to Albuquerque. I had always lived on either the East or West Coast, nowhere else. And I really liked Albuquerque.

*So what'd you think of it when you got out here? Out to Las Vegas?*

Middle of the summer. I'd been here off and on, visiting the test site and visiting these guys in Highland, but I'm not sure I ever spent any time outside. August. Oh, it was hot. But small town. A lot of people knew one another and it was sort of still slow and easy. The Strip was just really sort of gearing up.

*Well, '69, it was significantly smaller and a little different here.*

Yes. Oh, I don't like what's happened to it, but what the heck, it doesn't disturb us. We see the Strip maybe whenever a visitor comes; one trip, then we give them a house key, the car keys, bring in the morning paper when you get home. No, we—our church is here, the university. I spend a lot of time at the university. I finally got a degree, thanks to Joan. I'd gone to school in a

lot of places in the Navy: Paris Hawaii, University of Maryland mostly, overseas, Georgetown. So I made a lot of credits.

*Did they all transfer?*

Yes, she finally made me go over, and I was short one credit in the arts. The secretary there [at UNLV] [00:25:00] said, why don't you go and talk to Dr. Jones and tell him about your experiences and see how you can handle that? Well, I developed a little log and got over there and started talking about Paris and the Louvre and London and the arts museum and going to the archipelagos in the Pacific and the Pyramids and about halfway through he says, Hey, that's enough. That's enough. You got the credits. And then I liked political science very much, Dina Titus and Jerry Simich.

*Right, you must know Dina Titus.*

Oh, yes. And so then I went on and got my master's.

*In political science.*

Yes. And the day I—as I was retiring from the AEC—DOE [Department of Energy] or—AEC, ERDA [Energy Research and Development Administration], DOE, retired from DOE, Joan was nominated as Woman of the Year in one of the career programs. So we went and sat at one of those round tables in the Hilton, I guess, and there was a couple there and the woman was Candace Kant. Candace Kant is a Ph.D. English person—

*I've heard her name.*

Oh, she's a fine lady. And we got talking. She quizzed me, and then she said, You know, we are strapped for instructors, particularly in history and political science. You want to come down? And I went down in '86, until 2002. That's sixteen years. I really liked it. I loved the young people.

*Where were you teaching?*

Well, I would move around. I was an adjunct. So I've been in the Henderson Campus, Cheyenne, Charleston, and I guess that's about it.

*So the system, you've been—*

Yes, mostly at West Charleston.

*And you enjoyed it?*

Yes. Oh, one course, 7:30 in the morning, the kids are sleeping. They come off night shift and they're in the back row, sound asleep. And I'd leave them alone.

*That was good of you.*

But there were an awful lot of good kids. And I would take the morning paper and I'd say, well, what do you want to talk about? Oh, God. I got them off the sports page and off the comic page over time. I gave them little credits for bringing up topics and discussions. And I think I helped some of them.

*It sounds like you were very interactive with the class.*

Yeah. I really, really enjoyed teaching. So that's about it.

*I'd like to hear a little bit more about what you did out at the test site for all that time, and what it was like.*

Well, it was a fraternity, really. After you're accepted and join the club, you don't know if you're talking to a contractor, a military guy or an AEC guy. Particularly in the days when we were building Johnston Island. I could pick up the phone and talk to Holmes and Narver in Los Angeles and I'd say, we need a shipment of four-by-six timbers on Johnston tomorrow night. [And they would say], OK, John. Well, now, today you'd go to jail, you know. Where the hell is the paperwork? The documentation? Where was the backup? The things we did. And even at the test site, we could call REECo [Reynolds Electrical and Engineering

Company] and talk to your compatriots and say, Hey, we've got a problem in Area 12, and twenty minutes later they're up there. No paperwork, no approvals, and all that junk. We couldn't do it today, just could *not* do today what we did in those days because of bureaucracy.

*Yes, it was very different.*

I suppose there's a reason. But that was our main job, to put out fires and keep the environment and the support systems going full bore for the labs. Whatever they needed, we made sure we had it or we got it, one way or another, by hook or by crook, I guess. But we never—none of us ever went to jail, though we've talked about it since. I go to a men's breakfast every two weeks with a bunch of contractors and DOE guys and we talk about some of those [00:30:00] escapades [chuckling].

*Stuff you could never do today, huh?*

We were involved in Amchitka [Alaska], getting everything up to Amchitka for the shots. I spent time traveling through my old Alaskan territory. Went to Dutch Harbor and Attu and Kiska.

*How is it up there?*

Well, I was there in the summer and fall. Pretty good. I spent several winters up there earlier in the Navy.

*So you kind of had an idea.*

Yes. I was not an operational guy. I wasn't there when they pushed the button at the com center to set off the shots and what have you.

*Were you ever out there for any of the shots? I mean just coincidentally?*

Yes. I was ordered up here by the Navy in 1955, probably—that was as a nuclear weapons [officer] in San Diego—to see a shot. It was an air burst. There was a big tent camp out at



Mercury. And we had a cloudburst, and we're sitting in these tents water running through. [We] went through several delays.

*Was that at Camp Desert Rock?*

Yes. Finally they announced it was going to go because of the weather, so they got us up around four, got us over there around five, and masked us up and hooded us up. Hell, I could've stayed in San Diego, gotten out of it, you know. But here I was at one of the early shots, so that was a big deal.

*And so you obviously got to see it. What was that like? What'd you think about that?*

It was an air burst, and that was impressive, no question about it. But with the goggles, you don't get the full effect. We were so far away, we were at News Nob where they kept everybody, all the viewers and visitors. I don't think we got any wind effect from it.

*Did you feel a shock wave at all?*

No. No. We were pretty far away from it. It was a small yield. So that was OK.

*There's not a lot of folks that have seen those atmospheric shots, though, so it's impressive.*

No, that's right. I was still in the Navy. And so I got back to the school and I was an expert then, you know, my God, I'd seen a shot.

*Did you see a lot of change at the test site when you were out there? A lot of change, procedures or people?*

Yes. As time went on, we got organized. Not necessarily for the better but there was more control. The labs started speaking to each other, started using each other's equipment. Initially they were two test sites. It was LASL with all of their stuff and here's REECo—it's all REECo equipment, and here's Livermore with all of their [equipment].

*So it was still very divided*

Oh, indeed. But as time went on—well, we had a couple of serious accidents which brought them together.

*What happened?*

We had a failure over the test hole where the device dropped. Scared the hell out of everybody. I think it was Peninsula [1975]. I'm not sure. They had those names, you know. And so lo and behold, the government convened a board of investigation. I was on it. And we spent several weeks, if not a couple of months, quizzing top lab people, top contractor people, [00:35:00] and others. That brought forth information about the divisions of the operation and what could be improved. That was very helpful. You know what it came down to? When was this? Late seventies or early eighties. You know, the U.S. national government has always been trying to go metric rather than linear. Well, it's never going to happen, unless they start it in kindergarten. Well, the labs had gone metric; the contractor is linear. They take these readings.

*That's quite a discrepancy.*

Boy, it was a shock. It's a great thing that it came out because we could've really, really, if we'd set one off like that—

*How does miscommunication like that happen?*

We still don't know. The labs just assumed that this national order came out, you know, we're all going to go metric. Well, it got lost in the [shuffle] or it got ignored. But it was a very fine experience, talking and meeting with all of those people in the investigation. We were able to do some good out of it. That's the best part of an investigation, not to hang somebody. We didn't. There was no individual. So that was interesting. I don't know of any significant activity. I was not a main shooter in the test site program. I was a supporter. Logistician.

*Well, but without that, they couldn't have conducted a whole lot. You were sort of the framework for the whole thing. That's pretty significant.*

Well, that's right. Yeah. That's right.

*Now, you mentioned that you had a crew that worked with you?*

Well, I had a staff. We were a division, so we had two sections: Equipment and Materiel. We were responsible for transportation; I had a transportation expert. Real estate; had a real estate guy. And then the other two groups were involved either with equipment management or logistic support. They were good, good people. Really were. Dedicated. [I] came out of the military, you know. [I was] a young, young man going into the military, spent thirty years, and I took a dim view of civilians. Hell, they're always getting in the way. Well, I'll tell you, and I guess I had that attitude when I arrived at Highland Avenue. And I'll tell you, it was not a year, I had a great respect for those people. They *worked*. There was no sitting around coffee hours and early lunches and all that stuff.

*Hard-working.*

They were coming in weekends, and I learned to respect them very much, which is good.

*Was that a difficult transition, coming out of the Navy?*

No. I was fortunate. I spent a lot of time at sea. I had six commands all together, which is unusual. But going to the task force, Joint Task Force Eight, as my last assignment, here we are in Washington in civilian clothes, calling each other by our first names. We didn't know who was a colonel, captain, major, or sergeant.

*You were just all on this task force together.*

Yes. And that made a very easy transition for me. Now, if I had come home off a ship, I'd still be out there sailing sailboats or something in the backyard. So I was able to transgress from the

military mind or attitude, unknowingly. So when I joined the AEC I was still with the same people.

*So that made it a very smooth [transition].*

You worked with the task force—I was on the task force, came and worked with the AEC, came here with the AEC, worked with the task force. So all in all, I was very fortunate in that regard, yes. I wouldn't have changed any of it.

**[00:40:00]** *It sounds like quite the ride, no pun intended. You got to see a lot and do a lot.*

Oh, it was just great. I had thirty years in the Navy, seventeen with the AEC, and sixteen with Community College [of Southern Nevada]. My son says, You know, you had trouble holding down a job, Dad. Three jobs in sixty years or something.

*Wow. You don't hear of that so much anymore. People move around quite a bit.*

Well, it's an entirely different society now, I think.

*Yes. It is.*

Boy, it scares me sometimes.

*It sounds like the camaraderie or the fraternity that you had at the test site wouldn't maybe be possible in these times that we live in.*

No. No. It would not be possible with the government system, operations, regulations, oversight. And I suppose a lot for a good reason. I couldn't pick up the phone today and tell them to fly a load of lumber to Johnston Island. GAO would be on my back the next morning: "What are you doing? What *authority* did you have?"

*It'd take weeks to get that. That's interesting. How did you transport all the stuff to Johnston Island? What kind of procedures were involved in that?*

Well, we used a lot of shipping, but in urgent cases we would fly. On Amchitka, that hole is 5,000 feet or so.

*It's huge.*

You know, they spent as much time on the pulleys going down and up as they did in the hole. It was terrible down there. These miners lived on Gatorade. We had Gatorade everywhere, including the hole. Well, we ran short of Gatorade. Looked like we were going to run out. And those guys said hey, no Gatorade, no pulley. So somebody called me in Las Vegas and I called the vice-president of Holmes and Narver in L.A. and I said, we've got a problem, Sam. I said, Gatorade. [And he said], Gatorade? Well, within twenty-four hours, he'd bought all the Gatorade on the West Coast, got it on an airplane. Now, how would you explain [that]? Why did you fly Gatorade to Amchitka? So those kind of things.

*You're right, you wouldn't be able to just do that today.*

Couldn't. Well, you should've shipped it. Would've saved \$12,000. That's right. We wouldn't have had the shot either. It's a new world, and of course the contractors are new, too; different people. Most of the people—[now] when we have breakfast, they're all retired.

*Now, you're still in touch with some of these folks?*

Oh, yes, yes. We meet every two weeks over at Arizona Charlie's and tell lies. We talk about our doctors and our pills. Breakfast usually breaks up and one of them says, well, I've got a nine o'clock appointment. Got to go to the lab. But they're passing on pretty fast. They're fine people. They did a great job for this country, I'll tell you. I'm involved with the [Atomic Testing] museum, with Troy Wade and Nick [Aquilina] and the gang, which I think is a great memorial.

*They did quite a job on that.*

Oh, gosh, you've been there.

*[Yes].*

Yes. We're in financial trouble but keep looking for a new building they call the Wynn Building or something for \$2,000,000. But it's a testimonial to the Nevada Test Site, military, civilian, who made it all happen. I think made a *very* significant contribution to the Cold War and the peace that ensued. Now, I don't know where we're going, but that's a different subject.

*It certainly is a significant part of our history.*

Oh, indeed. Yes.

*And the test site, and I think as well as for Nevada's history.*

Oh, gosh, yes.

*Now, I'm curious. You came out here at a really interesting time in Las Vegas history because.*

**[00:45:00]** That's right. Yeah.

*Could you talk about that a little bit? I think that that's just fascinating.*

Well, I really don't know much about Las Vegas.

*Well, when you first got here, you mentioned earlier that the Strip was just becoming [popular].*

Yes. We had the Sahara at one end, and of course Caesars just opened a year or two. The Stardust, I think, was there. Those that I remember are imploded, went down. Put up those beautiful buildings. Museums, by God. No, our lifestyle hasn't changed all that much in the thirty-five years we've been here. Joan had a private practice. She's primarily interested in children, children's problems, and did very, very well. She's well known for it. Dr. Joan Owen.

She got a couple degrees out here.

*That's [great].*

I got a couple. We're Episcopalians. Our church has been pretty steady. We use the library, public library a lot.

*That's a good library. It's nice.*

Yes. And so we're sort of settled in now.

*It sounds like you've carved out a good place.*

Yeah. Just finished two weeks back East, New York and Grand Rapids. Tomorrow we're going to Cedar City [Utah], three days.

*What are you doing there?*

A little Shakespeare.

*Great!*

We go every year.

*I hear that's really nice.*

Oh! Have you been there?

*Not to the Shakespeare.*

Well, you should.

*That's what I've heard.*

Really. Really. It's a nice experience. Well, they [got] the Tony Award a couple years ago for the best Shakespearean operation.

*I've heard about it from many people, and I hope to be able to check it out one of these years.*

Oh, sure. Sure. One of these years. That's right.

*Is there anything that we haven't talked about that you feel is important to your story or the story of the test site?*

There may be—my memory is receding rapidly, you know. No, I can't think of anything. I'm very happy to have been able to be with these people after my Navy retirement. It was a great transition, and I came to respect those people on the civilian side and all the people that were at

the test site. They did a hell of a job, and they were dedicated. Dedicated. Hours be damned. Weekends, nights. They really were. And the camaraderie is just something you couldn't replace.

*That's what it sounds like.*

Yes.

*Now, it sounds like you were all over the test site. You had access to the whole thing.*

Oh, yes.

*So you probably got to know it pretty well.*

Yes.

*Pretty big piece of land.*

Yes. Up on the mesa and we were in Frenchman [Flat]. Never got to Area 51. I had one of my people who had a clearance because occasionally they'd have some need and they'd call Gene Freeman But he couldn't tell me what he was doing. I said, Don't tell me. I don't want to know.

*Couldn't even tell you if it existed.*

[I would say], Just go do it. I'm so pleased that we've retained the site, and with the activity, it's building up. Boy, it is so *unique* to have that *huge* piece of real estate secured physically and with logistics, power. Now, I see where the [Department of] Homeland [Security] people are coming out, home defense people are coming out, they're starting some training. I think training for examining cargo ships. I don't know how you do that in the desert [chuckling].

*Yes, not a lot of waterways out there. Now, what was that like? Here you spent all this time around water and on water, and all of a sudden you're in the middle of the desert. What did you think of the test site when you first got out there?*



Oh, I was just so impressed. Wow! It was a-going; everybody was moving—and very [00:50:00] impressed. The desert never struck me as that unique. I'm *more* struck when I fly into Syracuse and everything's green. Every place you look, it's *green*.

*Yeah. You forget; forget that things aren't brown. So was that a difficult transition, going from water to [land]?*

No, not really. It's a matter of people more than environment. And I just was around a lot of nice people, good people. That's what makes the difference.

*Do you get out to the water at all these days?*

Not really. No, we've never taken a cruise. I don't know why. I had no nostalgia for the sea. I saw enough of the sea.

*You certainly spent enough time on it.*

I never got seasick, but I got sick of the sea [chuckling]. We used to travel to the Caribbean, but we would always fly, for holidays. And Hawaii. But we haven't been on board a liner. I doubt if we will.

*Great. Well, I definitely thank you for taking the time to talk with us.*

Oh, you're welcome. You're very good at your work.

*Thank you.*

[00:51:41] End Track 1, Disc 1.

[End of interview]