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

Interview with George and Theresa Maynard

January 26, 2004
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Mary Palevsky

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

Mary Palevsky*: OK, so as I said, why don't we start just with a little background of each of you, maybe take five minutes or so to get where you were born, when you were born if you don't mind telling me, and then fast forward a little bit to how you ended up in Nevada when you did at the test site. So Theresa, let's start with you.*

Theresa Maynard: OK, I'm Theresa Maynard. I was born in New York City. We moved to California when I was about eleven. I was born March 13, 1937. My dad had worked overseas in—

George Maynard: Enewetak.

Theresa: Enewetak. And he was there for about a year and came back to California and we all moved to Nevada. And I had just graduated from high school, so I was working at the Bank of Nevada on Fremont Street, for about a year, and then went to work for the test site.

So let me go back to your dad a little bit. He worked at Enewetak during some of the—I guess the first tests.

Theresa: Yes.

And had he been in the war in the Pacific or—?

Theresa: No.

He hadn't. So he went to the Pacific postwar?

Theresa: Yes.

And what kind of work did he do there?

Theresa: He was in security.

Yes. So was he with the military or with—?

Theresa: No, civilian.

He was civilian.

Theresa: Yes.

With a company or—?

Theresa: FSI, I believe it was.

And FSI is the—?

Theresa: Federal Service...

George: Federal Services Inc.

OK. All right. Great. That's perfect and to the point. Why don't you tell us a similar thing.

George: I'm George Maynard, birthday 1/25/35. I entered the military in 1953. Upon my return from a tour in Korea in 1955, assigned to 18th Airborne Headquarters, Fort Bragg [North Carolina]. I applied for special automotive schooling and before my schooling came through, I was assigned to Armed Forces Special Weapons Project [AFSWP], Sandia Base, Albuquerque, New Mexico. Upon my arrival I stayed at Sandia approximately seven days and was sent on an extended, indefinite TDY to Nevada Test Site.

TDY is tour of duty?

George: Temporary duty assignment.

Temporary duty assignment. Great.

George: For an indefinite period.

For an indefinite period.

George: Yes, ma'am. And I arrived at the test site at about mid-July 1956, and at that time they were in what they call the interim period, because it was a minimal number of military and civilian personnel. And my duties were to be the mechanic and standby driver for the military ambulance we had that covered highway accidents from Mercury test site to Beatty. So shortly after the Operation Plumbbob began, I was coming through the security gate and I had a flaw in my security ID badge—which one of the security guards took a hole punch and punched a hole through my picture—so I had to go get a new badge. And I met a young lady that her first day of work—the badge office clerk—and she prepared my new badge. And I didn't know it at the time, but the security inspector that punched my badge was her father. So I asked her out that night and we were engaged shortly thereafter and married September the seventh 1957 in Pasadena, California.

Wow. So that would be September of the same year. Wow, that's exciting.

George: Quick marriage. About a seven month engagement.

Yes, that's wonderful, and a good marriage because you—

[00:05:20] Theresa: We were engaged two weeks after we—

How neat. Now, because it's a woman interviewing you and not a man, I'm going to say you both must have liked each other right away.

Theresa: Right.

That is so neat.

George: Yes, we hit it off pretty good.

That's great.

Theresa: And still are.

Yes. I think that that's sometimes really the case. It was true with—I'll be personal, with my husband. I knew right away that I really liked him.

Theresa: Yes.

But so let me back up a little bit. When you first went in the Army, Fort Bragg was the second place you went. You originally were—where did you go first in the Army, for your basic training or whatever?

George: Well, my basic training was at Fort Lee, Virginia and upon completion of my basic training I was assigned to Quartermaster Army Depot in Stockton, California.

In Stockton. So you got out to the West.

George: Yes, ma'am. And from Stockton I was sent to Korea and I spent about eighteen months in Korea—

That's the piece I missed. You said a tour of duty and I wasn't sure where. So you were in Korea.

George: Yes, ma'am, from May 1954 to October 1955.

And what was that like? What were you doing in Korea?

George: I was in a heavy equipment repair facility. We overhauled portable power units, large diesel generators, Caterpillar road graders, tank retrievers, heavy transport vehicles, and this was all used for recovery of all the items that were left in the field after the armistice was signed.

OK. Oh wow. So then you come back—

George: And I was assigned to 18th Airborne Headquarters in Fort Bragg, North Carolina.

Right. And then to this special weapons project.

George: Armed Forces Special Weapons Project in Sandia Base in Albuquerque.

Now at what point did they give you a sense—either at Albuquerque in Sandia or when you get out to the test site—of the kinds of things that are going on? Were you aware of nuclear testing?

George: I was not aware of what the future was until they had me start filling out a lengthy personal history questionnaire, and then I'm getting phone calls from folks around home that were being questioned by the FBI and Secret Service. Then I had an idea that I was getting into something that was highly sensitive or a top secret-type operation.

Right, because your family and neighbors are saying, Why are they questioning me about you? Yes. Now on your side because your dad, Theresa, was a security person and you're this young woman out of high school, did you have a sense of what your dad was involved in, or just that you couldn't have a sense, or what was that like?

Theresa: No, you know, I knew a lot about what he was into.

You did?

Theresa: Yes, right. So I knew what was going on at the test site and—

You knew they were testing nuclear weapons.

Theresa: Right.

You must have had to get some sort of clearance to even have your job.

Theresa: Yes, it took about six months but I got my security clearance too.

Yes. A similar kind of process where they—?

Theresa: Yes, you fill out from I guess basically the day you were born and where you lived and where you went to school and who you know and who your relatives are and a whole lot of stuff.

I guess a young woman like you is perfect because you have had little time in your life to do anything questionable. I mean how old were you? Eighteen or something?

Theresa: About nineteen.

Nineteen.

Theresa: Yes. But I enjoyed it and it was very interesting.

So you worked in the badge office.

Theresa: Yes.

Tell me a little bit about what that involved.

Theresa: Well, I would get a request for a badge for anybody coming into the test site, whether they be military or civilian or whatever, and we would process it and then depending on what clearance they needed, whether they were eligible to get a security clearance badge for that. And that's basically what I did.

And how would that be determined? You'd have people coming in for one day that would just get a daily pass, I would guess, and then you had people that actually were being processed to work at the site with the highest clearance?

Theresa: Right. Yes.

And would that go to someone like your dad who looked at the official information or how would that work?

Theresa: No, my dad didn't have, you know, much to do with that end of it.

Oh he didn't. OK.

Theresa: He was mainly on the gate or out in the areas—

Checking out the situation.

Theresa:—or guarding the sites.

I see.

Theresa: The site itself. In the towers.

Right, and he had people working for him. So before you met your husband, where was your family living?

Theresa: We were living in California until we moved to Nevada.

And then where did you live when your dad was working at the site?

Theresa: We lived in Las Vegas.

You did live in Las Vegas?

Theresa: Right. Yes.

So you drove up every morning?

Theresa: I was working here to begin with, and my dad drove up and he stayed out there all week and come home on the weekends or his days off. And then when I started working there I stayed in the ladies' dorms during the week and then the weekend when I was off I'd go home for the weekend. And then after we got married, there was no place for either one to live together so we rented an apartment in Las Vegas, and we drove every day, 140 miles back and forth for a couple, three months.

Oh my gosh. Now when you first come you're in the military so there are barracks out there that you stay in, I assume.

George: Right.

But once you're married and you're military, then you're allowed to move off of the site.

George: Right. Yes, once we were married the military had provisions for a supplemental income to help you afford the off-base housing and food, so it added a little extra pay to your regular military pay by being married, and they also provided medical and dental support for your spouse.

The facilities were rather limited as far as recreation and sports activities and stuff on the site. The main thing was the cafeteria which served three meals a day and each meal was a dollar a meal.

Amazing.

George: Went through a little turnstile-type people-counter thing. And they had a recreation hall that served beer and snacks. And the military had a small theater, showed movies nightly for a quarter a person. And late evening activities, if you wanted to get off the site for a while, on many occasions we drove to Vegas to get a cup of coffee and then back to the site.

Wow. So it was really a different kind of a sense of space and time and what you'd be willing to do because you were so out in the middle of nowhere.

George: Well, it was actually, from a military standpoint, the test site was considered an isolated tour of duty and we got an additional six dollars a day pay for being isolated.

OK. Interesting. And what was it like when you first—well, let's start with you, Theresa, what was it like the first time you went out there? Let me put it this way, the first time I saw the Southwest desert, having come from the East Coast, it was something like I'd never seen before. I'm wondering what you thought of it when you first went out there.

Theresa: Well, I liked the desert [laughter] so I really enjoyed, you know, seeing the different sceneries, and we did go on, you know, I worked off the base too, in the control area.

Oh you did?

Theresa: For a while, yes.

So you would get out.

Theresa: So I was out in the middle of the site, yes. And of course you seen a lot of things, you know, like the big holes that used to be there from where bombs were for and things like that, and it was very interesting.

Right. Yes. It was. And what put you then as a badge person sort of out at the control area?

Theresa: Well, I switched jobs and I went to work for Jim Reno was his name; I believe it was REECo [Reynolds Electrical and Engineering Company].

With REECo. OK.

Theresa: Yes. And I was a secretary for him.

OK. And what was his position?

Theresa: Security.

Oh he was security also. OK.

Theresa: Yes.

So that was your area.

Theresa: And I have to say, every job I had out there was very interesting.

I bet it was because interesting things were going on.

Theresa: Right.

Now you said you saw the craters. You must have seen some actual tests also or did you see any of that?

Theresa: Yes, I did see.

The atmospheric tests?

Theresa: My first experience with a test was when my bed went from one side of the room to the other.

Tell me that.

Theresa: Well, I was asleep one morning and they had an early-morning test and my bed was shaking and moved halfway across the room.

Oh my gosh.

Theresa: Because I didn't go to see that one. I had I guess just been there about a week and—

You were in the dorm and your—

Theresa: Right. And it was scary.

I guess. Did you hear it?

Theresa: No. Just felt it. But I did go out, you know, later and see a couple of the tests, which was very scary.

It was scary for you.

Theresa: Yes.

I would imagine that it would be.

Theresa: And hoped nobody ever had to use it.

Yes.

Theresa: But of course my husband didn't tell me at the time that there's a shock wave. So we had these big dark glasses on so you, you know, wouldn't blind you when you looked at the actual blast. And then all of a sudden about a few seconds later there comes a big shock wave and it really blows you, but nobody warned me about that.

So you were just hit by it.

Theresa: Yes, I almost broke his arm. [laughter]

So that must have been scary too.

Theresa: Yes, it was scary. I mean they were beautiful to look at but very scary to think what would happen if they ever had to use it.

Yes. Well you know it's really interesting to hear what you have to say because there's so few people in the world that have witnessed that. I mean within the test site community it seems common, but outside the testing community it's uncommon. And so what is interesting to me, and I want to ask you about it too, is you're a young person, you see this, and you're aware then. You're saying to yourself, `That would be really bad if it were used`. I mean you

understood the significance of it even though you were as young as you were, is that what you're saying?

Theresa: Yes. It would be very devastating wherever it was used, and we just hoped and prayed that they never did have to use it. But then on the other hand you were glad that they were doing things like this because we do need protection, you know, for our world too.

Correct. Right. And were you conscious—I'm curious because I'm a little younger than you and I experienced the Cold War in different ways—but were you conscious there of the arms race and of the Cold War and of the Russians?

Theresa: Oh yes.

You were.

Theresa: Yes.

So you thought about that and talked about that.

Theresa: Right. Another thing that was scary was the protesters, because I was there during the time of the big protesting that was going on outside the gate.

And what year would that be when you say—?

Theresa: Nineteen fifty-seven.

Nineteen fifty-seven, there were big protests.

Theresa: Yes, big. And they had, I don't know, a thousand outside the gate, all different kind of people, camping out there, staying out there, protesting even once they had a threat they were coming through the gate, and so at that time it was a little bit scary but—

And what scared you about that?

Theresa: Well, you didn't know what they were going to do if they did get through the gate. And see I worked close to the gate, so that was a scary time.

Yes. So you were scared if they broke through, what they would do.

Theresa: Yes. What they had in mind. But like I say, it was a good experience because you got to see a lot, do a lot, know a lot, and really learned a lot.

Yes. Would you see the, you know, the weapons that were being tested there, you obviously must have seen some of the—did you see the weapons designers, did you meet the scientists who came through, did that—?

Theresa: I met a lot of people. I couldn't exactly tell you who they are now, you know, I don't remember but—

It doesn't matter. I don't expect you to.

Theresa: Yes, because everybody that comes into the site had to go through the badge office to get a badge.

No matter who you were.

Theresa: Right. No matter who you were. So we did see a lot of people.

Yes, I guess so. And so while we're on the subject of the tests, George, what was the first time—I think I may have asked you this a little while ago, but at some point you're getting the sense from the security clearance stuff that it's high security that you're working in. What was your rank when you were there?

George: I was a specialist four, which was a pay grade of an E-4. It starts out E-1-through-7 at the time when I was a pay grade 4. And my primary duty was automotive mechanic and other engine-powered pieces of equipment, and we had a lot of generators that they used for lighting in the testing areas. And one of the duties was to go around before the tests and start up all the power plants for the lighting, because the majority of the shots were before dawn and the systems provided lighting for the tower and all that so people could know where the tower was.

And they could see it before the test and then have a chance to observe after where there was nothing left, because the whole thing went up in the cloud, completely vaporized. And sometimes, depending on the weather, a test may be delayed two, three, four days, and we had to go in and get everything going and come back out by three o'clock in the morning. And if the shot was cancelled then we had to go back in and shut everything down and come back that night and start it all over again, so sometimes we went like for forty or fifty hours with no sleep.

Because the distances are so huge out there.

George: Right. Yes. Vast areas around the ground zero location. It took a lot of time to cover that area. It took a lot of time to cover that area and plus we had to check oil and refuel everything and try to find a bite to eat somewhere. And personal facilities like restrooms were almost nonexistent. It was somewhat of a hardship, you know, you was living in a barren desert.

Right. Would you have to sleep out there sometimes?

George: Yes, sometimes we had to sleep out there. But usually when I did my sleeping was after we finally got everything started up and come back in to the control point and I'd have a chance to catch a two-or-three-hour nap before the test time.

Right. You know, one of the first things that the gentleman who's working in history with the Department of Energy said to me when I came on this project, and my colleagues, these professors I'm working with, said, `I'm taking you out to the test site`. Because when you talk to people you need to have a sense of the distances we're talking about, and this is a perfect example. We spent all day out there in a nice truck with snacks and food and, you know, outhouses spread around the site.

Theresa: I don't want to interrupt you but one of my funny stories is I used to get to drive the pickup truck out in the control area. And I really enjoyed that, because I had just gotten my license not too long and it seemed like a fun thing to do.

Oh wow. Absolutely.

Theresa: Every morning and every afternoon coming back I'd drive the pickup.

Absolutely. I remember, yes, absolutely, when you first get your license, to have those spaces to drive through. Interrupt me anytime.

Theresa: Yes. OK.

But I'm seeing—my comment basically was what I said, you know—he was right because the distances are so vast out there, that you experienced.

Theresa: Yes.

But before you saw the first test, did someone say to you, you know, We're making these atomic weapons or these nuclear weapons?

George: Well, my clue to actually what was involved was when I arrived at the Mercury test site for my orientation, and at that time it was explained to me that I would be involved in various operations of the above-the-ground nuclear weapons testing program.

OK, so they told you.

George: That was my first clue, and it was shortly after my arrival in mid-July of 1956.

Now would you have—given your age, again I'm just curious, were you aware of the atomic bombings in World War II, that those bombs were similar to the bombs that were being tested?

George: Yes, ma'am, I was well aware of that. I was a youngster, six years old, when World War II started, and I remember I was in school when the war ended. And I had listened to the news on the radio, that they had dropped two atomic bombs in Japan, one on Hiroshima and one

on Nagasaki and killed thousands and thousands and thousands of people with one single weapon. And I knew that what was involved had some awesome power to it.

So you were around ten when Hiroshima and Nagasaki happened, I would imagine, if you were born in 1935.

George: Yes, ma'am.

And even as a little kid like that, you're conscious of what that means.

George: Yes, and I had visions of at some point in time the threat of total world destruction, and it was real scary after you seen the pictures and the damage that was done in Japan. And then I later learned about the first test that was done in New Mexico.

Right. Trinity.

George: And of course being in the military I didn't have any idea that I'd ever end up being involved in the weapons testing program. It sort of came as a surprise to me, and also I was pleased that I was chosen because it was a special sort of a project.

Right. It reflected that you were trustworthy or you did your job well or things like that, that you were chosen, is that what you're saying?

George: Yes, ma'am. Yes. And I guess probably I was chosen on the skills that I demonstrated from the time I entered the military. And to be granted a security clearance that it required to be at the test site, you had to have a pretty clean background, so I guess I had done everything right. [laughter]

Exactly. Exactly. Yes. Theresa, you were nodding your head a little bit when he was talking about the bombings of Japan, and again because I'm, you know, I wasn't born until a little after the war, I'm curious for what children—you read a lot about what adults thought about it, but I'm curious about the awareness that children had.

Theresa: Blank.

What?

Theresa: Blank. [laughter]

Blank. You were a little too young, I think.

Theresa: I remember the day it was over—that it ended—because we were visiting my aunt and uncle at their house and—

This was—?

George: August 6, 1945 was the day the first atomic bomb was dropped. August 14, 1945 Japan surrendered.

Right. And you were still in New York or were you in California then?

Theresa: No, we were in New York then, and I just remember that it was on the television and they had a little round television or radio. And it was real loud, you know, they said it was over and everybody was yelling and hollering. And I do remember that day, but as far as the war itself I don't.

Yes. You were too young.

Theresa: Yes.

My husband—

Theresa: You don't think about things at that age.

No. My husband's a year older. He was born in 1936, so remembers that everyone was excited.

Theresa: Excited. Yes. Yes.

But I think by the time you're nine or ten you start to get another view of the world, that you can understand some of the larger implications.

George: Yes. Yes, and I came from a military family. Most of my uncles were in the military, drafted when World War II began, so I had a large number of family members that were in World War II. And I had two or three uncles that were killed in the war, and I had one uncle that spent five-and-a-half years in a Japanese concentration camp and came out weighing sixty-eight pounds. He was 220 when he went in. And he came out minus toenails and fingernails from poisoned bamboo strips in the torture, they was trying to make him talk. And it kind of put a bad taste in your mouth, you know, for that country. And after looking at some of the pictures that one of my uncles brought back from Germany, he had pictures of all of the Jews that were mass-murdered and stacked up outside the ovens to be burned, that really sticks in my mind, looking at those black-and-white pictures. I don't know, it's hard to believe, you know, that the world is so cruel. And then we just had a recent experience in Iraq with all the atrocities that Saddam Hussein come across with. I don't know if I can go into it. But to get back to World War II—I'm sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

Theresa: That's all right. You just hope and pray that, you know, one day it'll all stop but it seems like it just keeps going over and over and over into something else all the time.

Yes. Yes. You just hope that there's some little tiny bit of progress.

Theresa: Right.

But what you're expressing, I'm just curious, had your uncle been involved in liberating any of those camps? Is that why he had pictures?

George: Yes. Yes, the uncle in Germany that had the black-and-whites of all of the murdered Jewish people, he was involved in the takeover of the prison camps and I think he referred to it as Jewish concentration camps.

But to get back to reality, I see some positive things happening now, like the major powers have agreed to dismantle X-number of weapons of mass destruction.

Correct.

George: The testing proved that you had the total capability to destroy anything you wanted to, and people have the foresight now to look for ways to prevent it through dismantling, and it looks like the nuclear research is leaning toward peaceful use of nuclear power.

Right. That's really interesting, what you just said. I never heard it expressed quite like that, that the testing proved that you could destroy anything. Sometimes people will say, `Well, we did this with the test. It was weapons effects or we were seeing how a new little gadget worked.` But that's really an interesting way to look at it. There was no question, if anyone had any question, that you could really blow everything up with these weapons.

Theresa: Definitely. Yes.

But what I'm curious about, at the time—it's hard sometimes to look back and remember what you thought at the time because, you know—

Theresa: It was a long time ago.

It was a long time ago and the layers of what you've learned since then layer on top, but we're not going to worry about that. At the time, because you remembered so vividly your uncles coming back, how horrible World War II was, at the time, because it was so soon after the war, were you sort of thinking, `This work is important because we have to prevent this from happening again`? Did you think like that or, `We have to make sure that we stay ahead,` or am I reading too much into it? And you'd been to Korea.

George: Well, after World War II I noticed the beginning of a world power struggle. Everybody wanted to dominate. We were in World War II allied with Russia, and after World War II we became enemies. And we were two of the superpowers that were in the nuclear arms race, and

then we began to struggle on the space race. And the Russians consequently, they beat us into space because they were willing to take more risks on their equipment than we were, for personal safety. And then we succeeded in putting a man on the moon and so that put us a step ahead of the Russians. And then we finally joined with Russia in a space station program. So we have a station up there now with Russians and Americans aboard.

And one of the things that I rely on now that is related to atomic power is the time checks from Colorado, the atomic timekeeper for the world, and you can buy a watch now that receives the signal and every so often—

I didn't know that. How ignorant am I?

George: Oh yes. Yes, the atomic timekeeper, I believe it's in Boulder, Colorado, broadcasts a signal to all the atomic clocks and it resets them within a thousandth of a second accuracy. And that's one of the things that I'm fascinated about, that atomic energy is, you know, a peaceful thing that serves a useful purpose.

Exactly. Exactly.

George: And of course we learned a lot about radiation hazards after this testing from the stuff they used in the hospital because the chemo and radiation therapy treatment for cancer, they have ended up with a lot of nuclear waste and there's a big power struggle now between Nevada and South Carolina because we have one of the major dumping grounds in Savannah, Georgia.

I didn't know that.

George: Yes.

So the question of where the waste is going to end up is also relevant to you all as it's relevant to Nevada.

George: Yes, because see right now all of the nuclear waste on the East Coast, I guess from about halfway across the United States, is going to Savannah, Georgia for storage, and they're trying to stop it and they want it stored somewhere else so they're wanting to ship it to Nevada and Nevada's running out of storage. But the—

Theresa: I always wondered what this testing did to the water supply under the ground and around Las Vegas. You know, we've thought about Pahrump valley, and then I thought that's pretty close to the test site. And I just wonder how the water and everything is from all of that.

Yes, when you were talking about moving to Pahrump, that was something you thought of.

Theresa: Yes.

There's a question about that. You know, they do a lot of research about that. This Desert Research Institute [DRI] looks into it a lot. But I heard on another interview I was listening to, there was another woman who'd been out at the test site who became interested in environmental issues. She asked the same question during this interview because she was there a long time and she was there early and she just really wonders about that. I don't know. I know that they do a lot of research about it.

But this is a good subject matter for us to look back onto. When you were there in the 1950s, how much sort of official education did you have as an employee in these—you were in the military—of the dangers of radiation? That's an area that remains controversial to, you know, to some atomic veterans.

Theresa: I didn't have any.

George: Well, from the military standpoint we had minimal training, and they didn't really know a lot about the hazards of radiation. And their monitoring process wasn't really that great, because one person will test you with one piece of equipment and they would say, OK, you

have this reading, and then you would go to another area and they'd test you with a similar piece of equipment and it'd come up with a different reading, and of course we wore film badges which supposedly were checked for dosages.

Theresa: Weekly.

George: And I got a copy of my dosage report from your location here.

Right. They have them here.

George: And I feel that it doesn't accurately report the dosage I received because I was exposed a couple times and went through a lengthy decontamination process. I had to go like four times through decontamination before they determined that we were OK to go back and join the public. And my records have no indication of that portion of the exposure. And my military records—I'm not able to get any records of any reports because my records were destroyed in the fire in Missouri when the Army personnel records—and the only thing I have to rely on is in the dosage records center in Nevada.

And why were you wanting—you wanted to get those records because—?

George: I had skin cancer and it could've possibly been due to radiation exposure. And some of the offspring had birth defects. And after doing some of the research that I've been doing on atomic-related conditions, I was affected possibly. One child and one grandchild may have a condition that was related to ionization [ionizing] radiation.

Yes. How awful.

George: And I know several people that have died from different cancers that was caused by—and the VA, or Veterans Administration, had confirmed that it was on one of the cancers that the atomic weapons program said that were caused by radiation exposure. And the military has recently started a compensation program for veterans that were exposed. And the protection that

they had at the time—they didn't really know what type protection they needed, so for the most part, the Marines and the soldiers that were in various locations around ground zero had either limited protection or regular duty uniforms which offered nothing more than a layer of clothing. And the similar situation in the Pacific testing, they had no protective clothing or anything and they were, you know, in close proximity to the blast.

Do you remember specifically incidents that happened, I mean sort of backwards, before they had you go through this decontamination? Do you remember what happened that made them want you to go through this decontamination that you're now not seeing on your official records? Were you looking at a test or were you walking into an area or—?

George: No, I was sent into an area in a couple of hundred feet of ground zero like three days after a test. And ground zero's a pretty hot location after, and we were suited up, myself and a Navy person went in to retrieve a piece of equipment.

I see. This was after an atmospheric test?

George: Yes, ma'am. And they knew it was going to be hot so they had us put on three layers of rad-safe clothing and when we came back out they had a large arch, a monitor, with a live buzzer on it which went off, you know. And then they started stripping us down until we got the third suit off and went through naked and it's still ringing the bell, and we went through the shower three times, and ear swabs and nose swabs, and they would give us a new badge when we came back out and go into the holding area and wait for a period of time and then come back, and the fourth time they finally cleared us to go back to the living area.

And I remember a couple other guys that—one particular army individual that I remember wandered into a hot area with no protective clothing and he was shipped to Walter Reed Army Hospital almost immediately.

I remember on one occasion a test yielded more than they anticipated and it shattered windows in downtown Vegas. And people that had gone to Mount Charleston on their own and had been warned, `Do not look at the fireball`, and a guy was watching the test through binoculars and it blinded him. And I remember that because they had the article in the newspaper about the guy on Mount Charleston that was blinded.

But I think the whole entire Plumbbob operation, for the most part—all of the fallout that went northwest up into Utah, at one time it circled around and came back and we had to evacuate the living area at Camp Mercury. I remember that one incident out of the entire series of tests.

Now when this incident happened where you went in three days after, were you and Theresa married at the time or was this before?

George: No.

So you don't have any memory of that.

Theresa: No. That was before I met him.

But you were saying you didn't have that much awareness of the radiation.

Theresa: No, I didn't really. I knew it was dangerous. I just didn't know how much or where you were at or how close you had to be or how much was all around you. But they did, like I say, you had a badge, film badge. Changed it once a week and made sure that you wore it and weren't getting any overexposure.

Yes. Well, I don't think certainly non-specialists would have any way to know what that was. And even the specialists were not clear on what it would do. Were you afraid when they were doing all that stuff or were you sort of irritated that you had to keep going through this thing over and over again?

Theresa: Cleanest man in the world. [laughter]

Lots of showers.

George: Well, I was rather fascinated by the first test that I experienced because it was wow, you know, this is—

Theresa: Unbelievable.

George:—you know, something else. You know, it's dark and put on a pair of dark glasses and you can't see anything, and the first test I experienced was we're standing at the observation point, which was about twelve miles from ground zero, on this particular test.

Which test was that?

George: The first test in the Plumbbob series.

OK, the first test in that series.

George: And I don't remember the name.

That's OK, we can look it up.

George: But the first sensation was you felt the heat, and then you could see the fireball begin to form through the dark glasses. And then it is announced over the PA [public address] system that it's OK to take your glasses off, and you take your glasses off and you can see the mushroom cloud starting to accelerate vertically, and the awesome colors, and then they start to disappear. And that white mushroom cloud, which was later explained to me was ice particles forming on the top of the mushroom cloud—and you were totally unaware, because it wasn't explained that there was going to be a shock wave. And everybody's looking upwards at the fireball and the shock wave hits you, just like breaking the sound barrier. And so the second or the third test after that I looked at the ground rather than look at the mushroom cloud and you could see the shock wave actually coming. It looked like a blanket about four feet high of dust. And when the shock wave came by you the dust was almost head-high. And it's moving at the speed of sound. And

when the shock wave would hit you, it kind of moves you back a little bit because it's putting pressure on you. And it was several tests later and probably halfway through the test series, the first time I went to the observation point with her [Theresa] and I didn't tell her because I wanted her to experience the shock wave like I had.

So you didn't tell her on purpose. OK, now I understand.

Theresa: Right. [laughter]. *Wham!*

It wasn't just something you happened to forget.

George: That's when she almost pulled my arm off. [laughter] But I had the experience of seeing, you know, what the effect could be on the human body in close proximity to the test, because I went to the field hospital that they had for the animal research and seen all of the different specimens they brought in.

You did.

George: Yes. And some still alive, some dead, some half-dead, some fried on one side and, you know, depending on what side was facing the heat. And it had to be an awesome amount of heat because it vaporized tons and tons of steel, five-hundred-foot towers. The only thing that remained after the test was they had long steel cables running off, anchored in concrete, and about the only thing that remained was the cable ends imbedded in the concrete several hundred feet from the base of the tower.

Theresa: My dad used to guard those towers. Him and the little animals that were out there, you know, running in the desert. And, you know, he'd have to stay there till however long they worked and then till the tests went off.

So he'd be out there guarding it day and night, there'd be people out there.

Theresa: Well, they would have shifts.

They'd have shifts obviously.

Theresa: Yes. But he did that a lot. Because he used to tell me about the little animals that run around the desert.

Oh yes, I guess because there's nothing else—

Theresa: Lonely out there, yes. I know they did a test where they had a city. I can't remember the name of that. Do you remember that?

George: Well, they built this model city that had different type structures and had dummies in them to see which structures would hold up better under—

Right. When you go on the tour, they've left some of those things.

Theresa: Have they?

And this gentleman that you met next door, that's one of his areas that he works in, is the preservation.

Theresa: I've seen it but it's been a long time ago.

There's also some books that show some pictures that are downstairs now. But I'm curious, from your stories, you were there in that year when they were putting those things together?

Theresa: Yes.

You remember that.

Theresa: Yes.

So they said, `We're going to build a city.` I think that's right. When we went they were explaining to us, they had different kinds of cars.

Theresa: Yes. Just like a regular town.

Oh, so you actually saw it when it looked like a regular town.

Theresa: No, I seen it after.

You saw it after.

Theresa: Yes, right.

OK, but you heard about it.

Theresa: Wasn't much to see but yes, it was after. That sticks in my mind.

Yes, what do you remember from that, because what's out there now is probably—

Theresa: A big hole, and I don't remember seeing a whole lot of stuff left, you know, just kind of—

Do you remember seeing a building or a car or anything?

Theresa: No.

Wow. Wow.

George: I remember seeing a great number of military vehicles on one test because I had to help take them out and position them. And I had seen them before and knew they were set up, and then, you know, what was left when it was all over. And I got a chance to see the aluminum domes that were being constructed and I saw what was left after. And I remember going to the site where they had the railroad bridge, I believe, I saw that after, what was left and the effects on that piece of structure. And the craters from different angles and the effects on the vegetation, you know, for several miles around you could see the effect on that. And just the change in the environment.

Yes. Yes. Now you say your dad was guarding the towers. Would he ever talk to you about that, that the tower was there and then it was gone? I mean—

Theresa: No.

You guys never talked about that kind of thing.

Theresa: No. He always talked about the little animals he'd see running around the desert. But not really anything about the testing, only that he had guarded the towers way out.

Right. Way out in the middle of the Frenchman Flat, I guess it was then.

Theresa: Nowhere. Yes, yes.

And his name again?

Theresa: John Healey. He worked for FSI, Wackenhut, REECo, I think just about every one they had out there, for twenty years.

For twenty years.

Theresa: Yes.

And then did he retire here?

Theresa: Yes, he retired here in Las Vegas, and he was working in town at the REECo office when he retired. And then they moved to California and with their age and health and my sister lives in California so that way they'd be—could help them. And then he passed away about five years ago.

Well, that was a good long life though, then.

Theresa: Yes. Yes. But he started way back, you know, when I was in high school, was gone for that year over in Enewetak, and—

I wonder, do you know how he got into that work or what—how would you end up there?

Theresa: Well, we moved out here from New York and he had a job promised him at some church because he used to be a church custodian in New York. And I guess he worked it for a little bit and he really wasn't too happy with it, so then he had a few other odd jobs. And then I don't know how he stumbled on to the testing over there, and had to put an application in and was accepted, so he was gone for a year.

That was from California that he went.

Theresa: Right.

Yes, because those were the labs—

George: Livermore.

Livermore wasn't built yet. Part of the Pacific testing, Livermore did. What part of California were you living in?

Theresa: Pasadena.

Oh, Pasadena, OK. So yes, so there were the—

Theresa: So when he got home after Enewetak we moved to Nevada.

They transferred him over here.

Theresa: Yes, I was out of high school by then and the move wouldn't hurt me, so....

Now were you an only child?

Theresa: No, I had a sister but she was married already when we moved to California.

So you were the only one left.

Theresa: Right.

So they waited for you to graduate from high school.

Theresa: Yes. Pasadena City College.

Oh, you went to Pasadena City College. That's a good school still.

Theresa: Yes. We drove by it. We got married right across the street from it.

Oh, you were married in California.

Theresa: Yes, we were from Nevada but I really didn't want to get married in Nevada.

[laughter] Kind of a quick *pssht*.

Yes, the image of it, right?

Theresa: And everybody I knew lived in California, my friends, and my church was there and so we went to my church and got married, right across from PCC [Pasadena City College].

That's great. It's beautiful. It's beautiful now but it must have been really beautiful then.

Theresa: We went—well I went, probably about three years ago, to the church for the first time in many, many years.

What kind of church?

Theresa: It's a Catholic church. And it's still beautiful.

It must be beautiful, yes, and it's the old Pasadena Catholic church. It must be beautiful.

Theresa: And it's still big. Yes. St. Philip's.

Wow.

Theresa: The college has changed a lot.

Yes.

Theresa: I mean got bigger, more—

Yes, it was big. I was there a couple of years ago.

Theresa: It used to be a little more compact but not it's just...

Sprawling.

Theresa: Right. And then the church is right next to it.

Oh, OK, all right.

Theresa: So we went to Nevada and spent our honeymoon at Lake Tahoe and Reno and back to Vegas. And here we are today.

[01:07:22] End Track 2, Disk 1.

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

OK, so we began talking in the hall about the atomic veterans association and you were telling me what they did in Australia [Australia Nuclear Veterans Association]?

George: Yes, ma'am, there's been several groups that organized associations in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and several groups in the United States. One is the National Atomic Veterans Association [National Association of Atomic Veterans], and the Navy has their atomic vet group that served in the Pacific.

Oh, our Navy does?

George: Yes, ma'am. And I believe Australia or New Zealand, one or the other, their government has created a atomic veterans medal for the military that served in atomic weapons testing programs. And the National Atomic Veterans Association [National Association of Atomic Veterans] group has proposed a bill to our Congress to create an atomic veterans medal that will give the military atomic veterans the same priority in the VA hospital system as Purple Heart combat-wounded veterans. Because right now the Purple Heart, they're considered a Category 3 on the treatment priority list. Atomic veterans are in a Category 6, which is right down at the bottom of the barrel, so to speak.

OK, I know nothing about that but that's pretty far down.

George: Right. And one of the primary means of obtaining compensation—and a lot of people that are not aware of—and it's available through the Internet by doing a search for atomic veterans or atomic programs on the Internet. There are also programs available for compensation for civilian personnel such as uranium miners, on-site mine workers. Another category is Downwinders. Another category is observers, participants—I think a total of about six or seven different categories that are eligible for compensation, and the information is available through the government web site under the Department of Justice.

Interesting. So it's not under the Department of Energy. The Department of Justice.

George: The Department of Justice. And it's under Compensation. And as for people who were exposed to all forms of radiation, that were related to the—I guess from the time they started mining the uranium until they actually produced a weapon and did the test and the after effects, so from beginning to end, there's categories that make people eligible for compensation.

Yes, what you're saying raises a whole bunch of questions. From a historical perspective, what I'm curious about is, you worked there, then you—I'm guessing now—you left there and at some point later you began to either have symptoms or to hear about or to think about how there may have been negative effects from what you did on your health?

George: Yes.

So how did that come about, and Theresa, feel free to interrupt, jump in with whatever you remember about that too.

Theresa: Not too much. I didn't really give it a thought.

You didn't. At the time. But then later did you begin to—I mean you didn't leave there thinking, Gee, maybe this hurt me. Or did you at the time worry about it?

George: Well, at the particular time I—later on after the Plumbbob test, other testing, they were learning more about the hazards of being exposed, and then they began to make the military aware that there was some possible side effects from being exposed to radiation during testing. And that, short of my interest in, you know, what the effects are, and after I retired from the military I started doing research on it and looking at some of the people that are being treated in the veterans' hospitals for different cancers which are abnormal for the general population.

OK. So let me just get a sense of the time line. You left Nevada in 1957—

George: Nineteen fifty-seven, December of 1957.

December of 1957, and then you stayed in the military—

George: Until May of 1974.

OK, so that's seventeen more years. And it's after you retired that you started to—

George: Yes, ma'am.

—look into these things because you began to hear things or—?

George: Well, I experienced skin cancer in 1970, and every time you have a physical in the military they have a little blank or a little spot, Have you ever been exposed to radiation? And I answered Yes to it. At that point I had the skin cancer. The doctor said, Well, it could either be sun or, he said, it could have possibly been.... But he wouldn't say for certain that it was due to radiation exposure. And if the doctor said Yes, I would immediately be eligible for compensation. But you have to prove your own point before you can be eligible.

Just so you know, I have done some reading on that whole problem of the difficulty of proving that it is one thing and not another and why that's made compensation such a difficult thing, so I do understand what you're saying there because—

George: But from the military's standpoint, they put the burden on the individual rather than accepting the responsibility. So that's why I'm doing the research. And I've talked to several guys in the last five or six years that were involved in the 1940s in the Pacific when they did the first tests, and then in the 1950s and the 1960s, that are not even aware that there is anything available to the veterans that were exposed. And I'm sure that the civilian personnel, there's probably a good number that say, Well, you know, I had a good job and I made good money, and they probably don't know the consequences of being exposed. And it's also not being made available to them. Maybe just a bit more than the military makes available, but I'm sure

that there's a good number of the civilian population that were exposed that have no idea that they can be compensated.

Let alone, then, the general public or the Congress, I suppose, just it being out there as knowledge that people are even aware of. This struck me when you said, We want to make the atomic veterans' work on a par with the Purple Heart. Let's say most everybody who's not completely out of it knows what a Purple Heart is, but many people wouldn't know what you're talking about if you said, I was an atomic veteran.

George: Right, a lot of people are totally unaware of what the atomic veteran is, and these organizations [that] are being formed now by what few people that are left that are atomic survivors are making the people more aware. And that was one of the reasons that they created this category under the Department of Justice for compensation, because see, the VA, the Veterans Administration, didn't make people aware or didn't publicize it. A group got together and went to the Department of Justice and said, you know, We need some recognition, and this was after either Australia or New Zealand created their atomic veterans medal. So now the bill, I think, was voted on and passed at the last annual meeting of the atomic veterans annual convention, I guess you would say, and so they voted on it and passed it, so it's been forwarded to Congress and it's—[See Radiation Exposure Compensation Act (RECA), Public Law 101-510].

Right. So that's recent, that's since the last meeting?

George: Yes, ma'am, it's in the last year, I think.

Do you go to those meetings?

George: Well, I found this on a web site and I just recently joined, you know.

Theresa: Computer whiz. [laughter]

Well great, that's great. Theresa, what do you think of all this? I mean do you think that they're being given their due by the military?

Theresa: No, I think they ought to be recognized more than they were. Seems like they recognize everything else but not much said about people that did anything at the test site.

Yes. Why do you think that is?

Theresa: I haven't got a clue.

Was this one of the things, when we stopped before you said you wanted to make a point about, or were there some other things that you wanted to say? I have a couple of questions but I want to wait on those.

George: No, I think I've pretty well covered all I had in my little brain bank, which is very small. [laughter] But I think overall I've pretty well covered everything that I can remember. I will probably remember things after we finish here—

For sure.

Theresa: I remember Camp Desert Rock.

What do you remember about that?

Theresa: About the military setting up all their tents and their whole living area because at some of these tests there was, oh, thousands come in for the tests.

Thousands of soldiers.

Theresa: Right. Military of all kinds. And no room, you know, on the site for them so outside the gate they set up all this little town called Desert Rock, and that's where they had their tents and everything.

Now I'm really glad that you brought that up because when we went to the test site, we went outside the gate at the end and the man taking us on the tour said, And this was Camp Desert Rock. And all you see are some concrete, you know, base, but you remember actually—

Theresa: Oh yes.

What, just trucks and trucks of equipment coming in?

Theresa: Everything. People, tents, trucks, yes. Everything. They eat there. They did everything. That was their little town.

George: Yes, they were basically living in the field, so to speak. They come out and set up their tents and their mess hall, and everything was portable. They had their little portable hospital for health treatment and their sanitation facilities they set up. It was like a little tent city and it was—

Theresa: And everyone had to have a badge. [laughter]

And every one of them had to have—Theresa, I never thought about that with the military.

Theresa: Yes.

What, so they'd just line up outside your place or how did that work? You went over there or...?

Theresa: They basically sent it before they got there and they had it pre-approved. Of course when they got there they all had to come and have a picture taken and have the actual badge made of where they could go or whatever they was allowed in. So it was interesting.

I guess so. And so Desert Rock wasn't permanently set up. It would be set up at certain times when the military came in for certain tests.

Theresa: It was there for a good while while we were there.

George: Yes. Well, it was there from the beginning of—but it was an area that the military primarily used and it was off-site so they didn't have to worry about checking in and out of security all the time, so when they come out they were free to do whatever until it was time to go

back in for being involved in the test. So it eliminated a lot of work for the FSI or Wackenhut security people because they didn't have all those people to keep an eye on.

Theresa: That and the protesters. [laughter] Busy little area out there.

George: Yes, I remember one particular incident, we had a guy that ran a security checkpoint. And the guard was a really good shot, because he fired a shot at the back of the car using a .357 Magnum, and it went through the trunk lid, through the back of the seat, through the far wall under the dash, and hit the engine and the car stopped. [laughter]

We hope that that was a good shot and not just dumb luck.

George: But that was in our little Mercury newsletter and they had a picture of the car and they apprehended the guy and handcuffed him and put him in—I think he ended up in the military facility at Nellis [Air Force Base], confinement facility.

Theresa: Now I wish we had saved all the papers that you got weekly from Plumbbob.

You got them?

Theresa: No, I said I wish I had saved all of them. We have the one where they have our wedding announcement in it.

Oh you do?

Theresa: Yes. And it's got, you know, stories about people. Forgotten all that stuff.

Yes, well, I don't know the state of those kinds of archives. I'm sure that they have lots of things but I don't know if they saved them all, I don't know.

Theresa: They probably have them.

You keep raising interesting questions. Speaking of security, do you know, I mean if your dad was out in the middle of somewhere or you were thinking about security, OK, you have the protesters who are Americans. Was there worry about actual spies coming in or people—things

like that, or was it more that you just wanted to make sure that no one, you know, disrupted a test or something? I ask because I know at Los Alamos during the war they were worried about spies as well as getting the tests done.

Theresa: Anybody, right. Yes. Well, it'd be anybody that wouldn't want to do something inside or spies trying to get information or, you know, anything like that.

So it'd be anything like that.

Theresa: Yes.

Because a lot of what you hear about security now is about the things that happened when the protesters came.

Theresa: The funny part is when I worked for the one security guy, he was in charge of all the people's files that worked there. That was interesting. [laughter]

So you had access to the background files on everybody.

Theresa: Yes.

Yes, I suppose it would be.

Theresa: Yes, that was interesting.

And so what did you find interesting about it? You had to go through and put things in them?

Theresa: Yes. There's some stories that I won't go into but— [laughter]

Of course not. You can't.

Theresa: Like I say it was very interesting.

You have to enjoy them on your own.

Theresa: Yes.

George: We have probably, you know, from the military side of security I don't think any security system is 100 percent foolproof, and you have a bad apple slip through every once in a

while. And we had some guys that—a couple of people that had falsified their information, and they were granted a security clearance and gained access to the site, but they were eventually suspected and they questioned them and found out that they had falsified their information to obtain access to the site.

And what do you think that—what was the motivation?

George: Probably trying to gain access to highly classified information, you know, from the standpoint of being a possible spy, or trying to get information to sell to like Russia, which has happened, you know, on numerous occasions. And I know we had—not any group that I was assigned to, but in the group that was at the site during Plumbbob there were two people that were singled out and taken into custody. It's like the people they got guarding the Iraqi prisons in Guantanamo Bay, they've had I think the number is now four that they're supposed to be trusted security personnel and they're mishandling and giving away classified information.

Interesting, yes. I didn't know it was four.

George: Yes, I think it's up to four now. That's another thing that I've been keeping a close eye on. But there's always a breach in security somewhere, you know. Security's really a tough thing and with—we have a lot of foreign nationals in our military system now, you know, much more than like during the World War II-Korean period. And one of the articles I read about here a while back was a foreign national that was in the military that was wounded and was denied medical and compensation for his wounds, and they were going to discharge him and deport him. And that's being worked on by the Department of Justice now. You know it's one of the hazards of all the people that we got that are becoming American citizens. Like the Iraqi area up in Detroit, I think, has a large Iraqi population and you never know who's working for who, you know.

Right. Yes, it's one of the strengths and one of the--when we're in a situation like this, a lot of people say one of the worries about security in this country.

George: Yes.

But yes, things are different. I think another way things are different is the numbers of contractors that the military now uses. But at the test site that was true early on. There were a lot of private contractors that worked—

George: Yes.

Theresa: Did different things.

That did different things. I think that's now become more prevalent in the military as a whole.

George: Yes.

When your—let me think how I want to phrase this. George, when you're thinking about the injuries that you sustained—you believe that you sustained from working at the test site—and you can sort of think of them in terms of being like the Purple Heart, like an injury you got during your duty, does that cause you to have, you know, mixed feelings about the test site itself or about the military? You're saying the military doesn't want to acknowledge that?

George: Yes.

But you also must be proud—I would imagine you're proud of the work that you did too.

George: Oh yes, yes.

So how did that work in your own mind?

George: Well, you know, a guy in a Purple Heart situation is either a rifleman or a machine gunner or something that is going to go out there and know that he's going to take that chance on getting shot. And when you go out and get involved in the weapons testing program you're not made aware of all of the hazards. And if something happens that harms your health they say,

Well, we're not sure, so they're kind of reluctant to recognize the fact that your medical problem was caused by being exposed. So by prolonging it they're thinking—my line of thinking is if they keep prolonging it you're going to die, and then they won't have to settle your claim. And I think that if they do create the atomic veterans medal and award it to the remaining survivors, that it will serve justice like the World War II memorial that's being dedicated this year.

I understand.

George: See, they did the Vietnam veterans things and then they did a little Korean veterans and now they—in fact the World War II memorial is going to be dedicated, I think, in July.

Yes, I've read about that over the years.

George: But I've been approached about making a trip to Washington for that but I'm not sure about if I'm going to be able to make it or not because I got to have some surgery when I get back.

Oh, I'm sorry.

Theresa: Falling apart.

Pardon?

Theresa: Falling apart. [laughter]

Oh yes. Yes, you're getting to be that age. I'm watching my husband start to fall apart.

George: Yes. But I think eventually that they will—and one of the things that I believe is going to help it is exactly what is being done here, that this museum [Atomic Testing Museum, Las Vegas, Nevada] being created is going to make people more aware of what the weapons testing program was about, and it's going to create a lot of interest in it. And hopefully people will

realize that those people that were out doing their work to make our world a better place to live should be recognized and compensated, and I think this is going to be one of the key factors.

Theresa: I think this is great, what you're doing because if it wasn't here there's nothing.

People wouldn't know.

Theresa: What happened.

Yes. Yes.

George: Like I say, long after the atomic weapons program started everything was so classified and hush-hush and, you know, even if you tried real hard you could find very little about it. The only thing that I remember from the past that was made available to the public was, see, they had a small museum in Albuquerque and they had a mock-up of the bomb that they dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. And one I remember in particular was called the Fat Man and I think that was the one that they dropped on Nagasaki, Japan. I remember it was a huge blast. But we were involved in the testing and everybody had an idea of what a bomb looked like, but even when they took it from the storage area to the testing area they had a big canvas shroud on it to keep the prying eyes away. Even the people that worked and handled and were pushing on their trailers and stuff didn't know what they were pushing because they couldn't see it. And it was a select group, you know, that put the weapon together. And there was only a handful of people that were actually doing hands-on work on assembly and arming and, you know, things of this nature prior to the test. And that thing stayed under the canvas cover, like on the tower shots or the balloon shots, it stayed under the canvas cover even when they hooked it to the balloon. Because, you know, even though cameras weren't permitted, I don't think they had spy satellites up but people out with long-range cameras and stuff could get maybe a little picture. Probably nothing helpful but—

But I think they did and do still worry about design issues, so if you had a spy that could see some little shape, they were concerned that that would be a piece of information that they didn't want to let out, I would imagine, but that's so interesting that actually as it was being transported to the site it was—"shroud" is a great word you used.

George: Yes, I think they did that more to—on their configuration design on how it would be shaped and, you know, which shape would better get to the target without, you know, what kind of steering system do we put on in? What shape nose do we want? Will they want it to penetrate or whether we want it to stop suddenly or—I think that little canvas cover was, you know, meant for more things than one. It was to, you know—and primarily design features, you know.

So in coming here to this museum you don't have a concern that it might just glorify it without saying the things that you're concerned about, health issues and things like that. I ask because some people have expressed that concern. You like coming here and being able to be reminded of what happened in your past, even though there was some harm to you from it.

George: Yes, I enjoyed coming here because on this particular trip I found out something that even all the research that I've done—the other day, let's see, was—what day did we come down here?

Theresa: Last Wednesday.

George: Wednesday? Last Wednesday was the first time I was ever aware that that plane crashed on Mount Charleston. All the reading and all the stuff, I was well aware, and of course that was a group that was involved in the U-2 program, but I was never aware that that group crashed into the mountain, and I was stationed at Eielson Air Force Base and we flew U-2s out of there and I knew—well, they called them weather planes but, you know, and I was assigned to

a reconnaissance outfit at Alaska that they used the U-2s, and we were never told that they were, you know, flying over Russia or other restricted areas but we kind of suspected.

And which air force base was this that you said?

George: Eielson Air Force Base.

Eielson. And where was that?

George: In Fairbanks, Alaska. Well, it was twenty-six miles south of Fairbanks but it was a Strategic Air Command reconnaissance air force base, and it was another highly classified operation.

You went there after Nevada.

George: Oh yes.

Yes. I think the plane in Mount Charleston was not—I think that was not known for a really long time, was it?

George: No, it wasn't. Even their families weren't made aware of what happened or what they were involved in, and that was before people even knew that Area 51 existed.

Right. And I think part of the dynamic—we should probably round up because I've taken a good chunk of your time. Thank you very much.

George: Oh, I've thoroughly enjoyed it.

Great. I have too. But I think part of it is that now that the Cold War is over, we can maybe begin to know more about what happened during that time. Some people are still concerned about what they can talk about and what they can't talk about as far as secrecy and classified information. But at the same time I think that it's important that people tell their stories, whatever they are, and we can sort of understand what our nation was about.

George: In fact we have one of our real good friends that we were stationed with in South Dakota and he had transferred to the reconnaissance outfit in Alaska before I did, and I was on a tour in Thailand at the time, it was in 1969, but one of the reconnaissance airplanes out of Eielson crashed with—well, they said it crashed. There was twenty-one people aboard and one of them was this real close neighbor of ours, and they have never yet determined what happened to the airplane—

Where did it crash?

George: It crashed off of Shemya Island—Eareckson Air Station—in the Aleutians. And it was right in the Bering Sea, sixty miles from the coast of Russia. And they haven't determined whether the plane was shot down. All they know that they heard of, from the radio transmission they heard a loud boom like possibly a missile or a weapon hitting the airplane. But our close friend was aboard the airplane, and they never found a survivor, never found a piece of the wreckage.

That must be hard for the family.

George: You remember Herbert, the couple that lived next door to us, had two little girls?

Theresa: Yes.

Well, any final thoughts before I turn off the machine?

George: Keep up the good work.

Oh we will. And what I was going to say about follow-up is—

[00:39:42] End Track 3, Disk 2.

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

OK, go ahead.

George: OK, one of the things I forgot to tell you, that when I first was assigned to the Mercury test site I still have a copy of my orders with the names of seventeen people that were assigned at that time, which is going to be sent in the package that we're sending. And I've been trying to see if there's any other survivors on the list other than myself. And I've been unable to track down any names. And I guess there's two or three more ways, resources that I have, you know, through either death records or whatever. But I'm just curious about the other sixteen people.

Right. Let's do this. What would be really nice, and I'm glad you brought this up, not only that but any other documents or photographs you have from the time, even a copy of the announcement in the Mercury from your marriage. What we would like to do on our end, and this is separate from what they're doing here, although we're coordinating, is in the little transcript and book of your interview, we'd like to scan in photographs, your orders, any of those kinds of things, so if—

Theresa: Badge request card?

Things like that would be fabulous to put in so that each of them is like an individual book. And then once we have those names I'll certainly be on the lookout if we hear of another person that sounds like they were on Plumbbob in the similar kind of test, once we more systematically look at atomic veterans, look at these different groups of people that we're looking at, because you're my second interview on a three-or-four-year project so you're right at the beginning. Once that starts developing, sure, we'll be happy, because I'm having researchers work for me, we'll be happy to see if we can assist you with that.

George: Yes, I think most everything I have, I've scanned it and I have it on CD, and I've got one book left and it was the old handout they gave us for Operation Plumbbob after, you know, the fact, but it covered from start to end of it.

Now if we could get a copy of that CD, or how could we do that?

George: Well, I'm going to send the paper documents.

Here, because it's a museum.

George: Yes, ma'am.

They should have the paper documents.

George: Right.

Theresa: Because it means nothing to nobody else.

Right. But for our purposes we don't need the archival stuff, but if we can have copies of that we'd be really happy.

George: I can send you copies of it.

Great.

George: And I can also send the copies on a CD.

That'd be great. Because what we'll do then—because the purposes are a little different. See, this is someone who wants to look at the actual, original piece of paper. With us, that's important but it's also important because it gives us more about your particular story. So anything that you think works, either on CD or hard copies and we'll scan them, whatever's easiest for you.

George: Well see, I've already scanned them. I've got them on my computer and I've got it on two different hard drives. I don't want to gamble on losing—you know, because computers crash so I'm—

Can files that large be sent or do they need to be sent on the CD, I wonder? They can't be emailed, those kinds of files. You need to send us a CD.

George: I could email them but it would be easier to put it on a CD and just, you know—

Yes, let's do that.

George: I can send it express mail, you know, or regular mail or whatever.

Don't worry about express. Just send it regular mail because by the time she's transcribed, and then we have the typed-up thing, then we'll think about if you're referring to such-and-such, like when you mentioned being in the paper. We'll scan that in on that page.

Theresa: Like I say, I have a lot of stuff of my dad's but I really don't know what it all is, or they might.

Yes.

George: But we've got pictures of her dad and some original pictures from the Pacific testing and we have a couple of original pictures from the test shots out there, but you have those pictures in the gift shop already.

Yes, so we can coordinate. If you send all the documents here I can coordinate and you don't have to do that work. But if you could send us the stuff you've already scanned, then that will supplement your stories and it'll be really nice.

George: Yes, as I say I have it all either on CD or—see, I made one CD for my backup copy, and I have this one document I want to scan and it's the overview of the test and it's I think about thirty pages.

That sounds great.

George: So it doesn't take long to scan it and when I do I'll scan it and save it in a text file. Some of this stuff, when I first started scanning I was saving it in Microsoft Word and the text, it puts it in gibberish, so I save it as a picture and then you can print it on eight-by-eleven and you got the document.

You've got the original document basically. Right, that's what we want. That's great. Terrific.

OK, well we can stop it.

[00:06:34] End of Track 4, Disk 2. [End of interview]