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

Interview with George and Theresa Maynard

February 16, 2005
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Suzanne Becker

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Produced by:

The Nevada Test Site Oral History Project
Departments of History and Sociology
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 89154-5020

Director and Editor
Mary Palevsky

Principal Investigators
Robert Futrell, Dept. of Sociology
Andrew Kirk, Dept. of History

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Suzanne Becker: *OK, so I guess if we could pick up just where you left off with Mary [Palevsky]. You had briefly mentioned that you were getting involved in the atomic veterans movement. Is that correct?*

George Maynard: Yes, ma'am, we were in the design and development of the nuclear weapons for aircraft and missile delivery systems. That's basically what [Operation] Plumbbob was about. It was Armed Forces Special Weapons [Project] out of Albuquerque, New Mexico that was a joint operation with the Department of Energy [DOE, actually the AEC in that era], I believe, at that time.

Right, the DOE.

George: And the Atomic Energy Commission [AEC]. They was all a joint operation. And that particular operation just happened to be the design and development of, I guess you'd say, the military weapons, sort of thing. And I guess everything basically got worked out because they went on to use them in the missile silos in various parts of the states and the nuclear submarines and the B-52 and B-58 and B-47 delivery.

So they were pretty heavily used.

George: Yes, ma'am. And it was the Cold War. Actually it was well into the Cold War because the U-2s and the reconnaissance flights that they were doing, it was all part of the Cold War thing. We were checking to see what they had and they were checking to see what we had. It was just like we were trading secrets but we weren't.

Without talking about it.

George: Yeah. But it was a learning experience. And I eventually ended up out there. I left the Army and I went into the Air Force and got into the B-52 program. I was in the Strategic Air Command [SAC] for sixteen years, and their responsibility was airborne alert with the nuclear weapons aboard the B-52s and the older B-47s. That in itself was another experience.

What years was that?

George: Nineteen fifty-eight to nineteen seventy-four.

OK, that was quite a chunk of time. So you've had quite a career as part of the Cold War and participating in that.

George: Yeah, we spent a lot of time apart. Not as much time as some of the people that I knew. I had one tour in Southeast Asia in '68 and '69, and then I had a lot of short ninety-day and 120-day trips.

"Short ninety-day."

Theresa Maynard: Wasn't short for me.

Yeah I bet.

George: Different support units in—

So please, Theresa, feel free to add.

Theresa: OK. Pack and unpack. Hello and goodbye [chuckling].

George: But she was the cook and the babysitter and the auto mechanic and—

Theresa: Everything.

George: And the pet vet and all that stuff when I was out of country.

So how was that when he was gone?

Theresa: Stressful. Especially with small children.

How old were your kids at the time?

[00:05:00] Theresa: Anywhere from nine months to about three and four.

Wow. That's hard.

Theresa: But we made it.

Yes. Definitely.

George: Yeah, they were kindergarten, then grade school, and then right before high school when I retired.

So a pretty good chunk.

George: They were brought up in the military, basically, up until their teenage years.

So what is your involvement now? It sounded like, from your last interview with Mary [Palevsky], you had mentioned something about the Atomic Veterans Association.

George: Yeah, that's an organization that—just a group of guys got together and what they were trying to do was to gain some recognition for some of the health problems that was caused by the effects of the weapons testing. Because a lot of—well, if you were an onsite participant, or like in the Pacific and they had a ship real close to the test area, [or] out at the [Nevada] test site we had observation areas that were a few miles from ground zero—

Right. So it was very close to the ground zero.

George: Oh yes. There was a lot of ionization radiation problems and the military wouldn't acknowledge that there was any problems caused by the ionizing radiation. And then the atomic vets formed this organization and they went to Washington and lobbied the Veterans Administration [VA], and they finally got the government and the military branches and the Veterans Administration to acknowledge and recognize some of the health problems that the ionization [ionizing] radiation—it's like twenty-some cancers that they're willing to compensate for now. [See Public Laws 100-321; 102-578; 106-117]

And when did this happen? When did this "movement" happen?

George: I'm not sure of the exact date it started. It's about fifteen years ago when they first—but it's not a well known thing. People are not too interested, or don't seem to be too interested, in the support of the people that were involved in the nuclear weapons testing. Like Greenpeace broadcast about how bad it was and all the bad they did, but there was also a lot of good did and they failed to recognize that and they don't want to. But there's a couple, three more organizations now that are starting and they've gotten more members and more people. Each state has its own state commander in the atomic veterans organization, and then they have a national commander. And the state commanders, they try to keep the veterans in their state informed. And unfortunately there's some states that don't have somebody filling the state commander position.

So these are state-by-state, then. And is this formed under a military branch?

George: It was all former military members, and it's also open to civilian personnel that were involved in the—

Everybody that was involved in the testing era.

Yeah. Yeah, anyone that was involved in the testing that was exposed to the ionization radiation **[00:10:00]** is considered an atomic veteran.

So even Downwinders or, say, folks in Utah would be able to—

George: Yes. Well, there's like five different categories. There's the miners, the onsite participants, which basically involved primarily military personnel and the civilian personnel that worked for the contractors, and then they had the Downwinders. There was a site in Alaska, and then there's one in Paducah, Kentucky, and then Oak Ridge [National Laboratory], Tennessee and—

So where the reactors are or where the—

George: Well, see, in Oak Ridge I don't know what particular part of the development took place, but you had Los Alamos [National Laboratory] and— But whatever all these different agencies did, they put it together and they either tested it out in the Pacific or at the atomic [Nevada] test site.

OK. Involved one way or another. And so the atomic veterans association [National Association of Atomic Veterans] is one big group, and they have different sections where everybody's housed, or you can join in the different sections, correct?

George: It's set up similar to the Veterans of Foreign Wars [VFW] and they try to keep you informed and help you with health problems and benefits that are available that are not made public. It's a news source for people that were involved.

OK. So I'm assuming there's a web site and that kind of thing?

George: Yeah, they have a—I sent—

I think [mentioned that—yes.

George: Yeah, Mary [Palevsky] has a list of about twenty different web sites that has the information on the atomic veterans and all that. And a lot of, oh, the declassified information itself, I just ran across a new one the other day about Area 51, you know, that didn't exist and it wasn't there. And when we were here last year, I looked at the Gary Powers display that they had in there [at the Atomic Testing Museum] and they had pictures of the plane that crashed into Mount Charleston with those people on it. And the Area 51 project when it was really, really classified, now they've declassified all that, and they have their own organization now.

Area 51 guys?

George: Well, it's the guys that were flying out of Area 51, the CI—gee, I forgot the name of the group.

Oh, that's interesting.

George: Brown Dogs or Good Dogs or something but if you just do a search on in there for Area 51 and it'll give you, well, I don't know how many. There's probably a couple or three hundred different things. But it shows all the pictures, it shows the airplanes, and shows where they developed and built the U-2 and the Y-12 and SR-71.

A lot went on.

George: And it was the "Skunk Works" that was the name of the company that built the airplanes.

[Laughing] That's a great name.

George: But I found that rather interesting. I was reading about two or three hours on just that one, what it looked like.

Theresa: Now you know what he does with his time [laughing].

Well, actually I was wondering what inspired you to become involved with this, to start looking it up.

George: I felt for years that we were not recognized and all this was denied and like they **[00:15:00]** falsified our exposure records. And more and more people are coming forward now. For example, there's a guy that was in charge of radiation monitoring in Operation Plumbbob, and he finally made it public that they had to maintain two sets of records, one good set and one not so good.

Really! When did he come forward with that?

George: It's been about three or four years ago.

But yeah, that's what was going on.

George: You know, for years you were told, like when you were discharged and on your debriefing, you were told, `You don't know nothing, you didn't see anything, and if you divulge any information, that you are subject to disciplinary action.`

Wow. What did you think about that?

George: I thought about it from the time I was discharged. And then after I got involved in doing research on the Internet and I found more and more things, that's why the more I research, the more I find that is the fact now, rather than fiction. But it's still not widely available to most of the people that were there.

Right. You have to go actually look for it.

George: Yes, you've got to look for it, and then you got to pass it on to people.

So this is how this association grows; you guys all have a network, have established networks.

George: We share information. Yeah, like the atomic veterans group; there weren't too many of them aware of the [Atomic Testing] museum here. So I wrote a letter to the national commander and made him aware of the grand opening and all that.

Yeah, that's interesting that they wouldn't put that information out into the community.

How did you feel, coming across a lot of this information? It sounds like you sort of thought about it or maybe suspected it but—

George: Well, I was looking for answers and I knew there had to be an answer somewhere. And I wasn't satisfied with—

What they were telling you?

George: Well, that [it] didn't happen or it didn't exist. I'm sure that there's a lot more information in it. And there's a lot more becoming more readily available. But you know fifty

years ago is history. A lot of people don't look back at history. And from the nuclear weapons standpoint it's something they would rather forget than to relive.

Yes. But still a very big part of our history.

George: Yeah. But I think it's an important part of our history because if it weren't for the nuclear power plants that we have in use today, we would be scratching for light. There's probably well over a hundred plants in operation in the United States, that if we didn't have, we wouldn't have the coal source or the oil source, the way our energy situation is, to supply the electricity that we have.

And you know we need that.

George: You know, that's one of the good things that came out of it. They found out that they could do it safely if they went by the rules and regulations and they followed all the safety procedures. And then they had that goof-up at Three Mile Island and a couple of other places, and then the Russians melted one down [Chernobyl]. But it's like anything else; if you follow your training and **[00:20:00]** your safety guidelines, for the most part it's safe. Done a lot of good.

Yes. I mean, it's part of our life.

Theresa: A big part.

What were your thoughts? I mean it sounds like once you left, you had some thoughts in your head that maybe information wasn't as straightforward as it could be.

George Maynard: Yes. Because I had a couple health problems that I felt was related and so I had to do about five years of research on coming up with—and you know I finally found out, hidden deep in volumes of Veterans Administration files, that yeah, we finally recognize all that. So it took me five years to put together the paperwork that I needed to file a claim.

Do you mind if I ask what some of those problems were?

Skin cancer and artery problems.

Arteries? And there's evidence that they are linked to the work done with the test site?

George: Yeah, they've admitted now that—

Yeah, that these are common.

George: That ionization radiation exposure possibly contributed. They don't deny that it didn't, so therefore if you got the medical background and your medical records from your treatment on these certain conditions, they will eventually compensate you for it. There's just a long drawn-out thing and I've had a little trouble with my paperwork. And they keep saying, `Well, we need this, we need that.` I told one of the VA officials, I said, `I think you're beating around the bush and you're hoping I'll die before you have to pay a claim.`

So it's pretty bureaucratic and they put you off pretty well until you call them on it, it seems.

George: Yeah, uh huh.

Wow. So Theresa, where do you stand on this? What are your thoughts about this particular issue?

Theresa: I think it's good that they're recognizing them now. They really needed that, because up till now they haven't had anything. But everybody else has been recognized. So I think it's really good.

Right. Other veterans. Yeah.

Theresa: And I think the organization is a good start.

Did you guys know people that were already involved in the organization, or did you come across it in your research?

George: On the atomic veterans? I just ran across it. I was doing a search for atomic tests, and then I found the Nevada Test Site, and then it linked to some more sites. So I kept checking each lead, and every time I'd go to a site it'd have another couple of links to go to. But there was one, the children of atomic vets—there's a lot of the children and grandchildren of people that were exposed have health problems but that's really kind of hard to get them to recognize, but they *will* recognize. We had one son that had a health problem and I think in my own mind that maybe his problem—and we have a granddaughter that was autistic. **[00:25:00]** I haven't found a lot of evidence that will support that that caused it. But there may be some evidence that supports it, but I haven't found it yet. Other people suggest the same thing. And I've studied the geographic locations, like in Utah and areas around the test site, and there's a lot of information you can find on the cancer death rates for a given area, as opposed to West Texas or the same type of environment. But they have maps on the Internet now that shows all of the fallout areas, and it basically drifted northeast up through Utah, Wyoming and Montana and across the Dakotas, all the way out into the northeast up in Pennsylvania, New York, New Hampshire and Maine.

I remember reading something about finding fallout in New York and in that area, and I thought that was just really quite interesting.

George: And I just ran across one article the other day that I read that I didn't know happened during Plumbbob, that one of the tests—well, they knew that it knocked the windows out downtown here [Las Vegas], but at the same time it knocked out windows in Los Angeles. And it took them a long time but they finally admitted that the weather pattern, the way the weather was on that particular day, that the shock wave knocked the windows out in Los Angeles.

Wow. Do you have any thoughts on why they decide to classify certain things versus *why they don't, and the types of information that actually get classified?*

George: Well, when you go back to development and testing, you have a lot of unknowns.

Yeah, that is true.

George: You know, you can put so many sticks of dynamite in a box and say, OK, this is going to do this much damage. But when you're trying to calculate the yield of when the nuclear detonation occurs, because it hadn't been measured before, you don't know a given amount. Say you put this much in this box and you don't know whether it's going to be twenty kiloton or whether it's going to be a hundred. And that happened on one of the Plumbbob tests. Hood [07/05/1957]. It went way beyond what they anticipated.

So there's uncertainty. You can't predict what can happen.

George: Probably a lot of that was classified because of the uncertainty. And the scare factor had a lot to do with it. If they said, `OK, this is going to create this much destruction`, the people would have raised such a fuss that they would not have—

That's a good point.

George: And see, they denied for several years that there was no thermonuclear testing done at the test site, that that was all done in the Pacific. Well, in Plumbbob they was doing thermonuclear **[00:30:00]** testing. They declassified that, so it's now public. And I ran across that the other day.

So they're declassifying things, yet you still have to search for it, is what it sounds like.

In your interview you mentioned also to Mary [Palevsky] that you guys were trying to put through a bill that would make an atomic veterans medal. Has anything happened with that?

George: Well, they're still trying to get the Congress to recognize and design and make it a medal for the atomic veterans service. Something or other foreign countries did. I think Britain and New Zealand. Canada, I believe, was the latest one.

So they have medals for the folks that participated in the atomic—

George: For the people that participated in atomic weapons.

Just like if you were to be in World War II or the Korean War or Vietnam or something like that.

George: Well, they're kind of wiggling around a little bit. Now they're working on a Cold War medal. So maybe they plan to include the atomic veterans in that. But that should be coming fast, I'd say in the next two or three years, at least on the Cold War end of it. And who knows how many things are going to be involved in the Cold War recognition?

Well, that's another interesting aspect is we don't really recognize that yet.

George: But I feel like they still should do the atomic veterans separate from the rest of the Cold War involvement because of the hazards and the exposure that we weren't told about.

You do think they should do it separate or you don't?

George: I do think they should.

Yes.

Theresa: Well, they have medals for everybody else. Why not them?

Right. Why do you think? Why do you think there are no medals? Do you have any thoughts on that?

George: The reason I think that it should happen is because we weren't told about all the hazards and the dangers and all the other unknown things, and it was hidden from us for so long. Now they finally started to recognize and admit that the hazards were more and greater than we thought at the onset of the testing. And the number of people that have died from the cancers and

stuff that was caused by the radiation ionization, and problems with the offspring. And it wasn't a real big group. It's only around 260,000 at most, I think.

That's still significant.

George: You know, this is all the military personnel, and I understand, civilian-wise, they got a great number of them. But the military people was doing it because we were told to do it. The civilian people, they did it because they wanted to. That was their job. But from the military standpoint they say, `OK, you're going to go out here and you're going to be involved in this test`. If you didn't want to, you had no choice.

[00:35:00] *So you didn't have a choice. This wasn't like you got a job at the test site and this was your job. This is where you were sent, these were your military orders.*

George: Right. It was things that you were ordered to do and you had to do it or face disciplinary actions. And if a civilian person didn't like the job he was getting ready to get into, he always had the option to quit.

Right. If he knew of the dangers that were going to happen.

George: Right, yeah.

How was it as a job, though, for the time that you were out there?

George: It was a lot of long, hard hours, and when the weather didn't cooperate, that meant the test that was scheduled for this morning was rescheduled for tomorrow or the next day or the day after. So the preparation for day one was going to a long day, maybe eighteen or twenty hours. And if it got rescheduled, then you got maybe two or three hours [of] sleep. I know we had one that went five days before it—we were walking around like zombies. And the little old corpsman we had was giving us pep pills [chuckling]. Which the military says that you're not supposed to do, you're not supposed to take uppers, but—

They give them out, don't they? I hear.

George: But they said, We've got to do it, we've got to keep going. No break. *So I'm also curious, what was it like when you found other people? Was there any sense of, I don't know if "relief" is the right word but, having these questions that you did and finally doing some research and coming across this organization existing? Have you been able to talk to other veterans about this experience or have you guys shared any of the similar experiences?*

George: I've only met three people personally that was involved in the testing, and one of them was involved in the Pacific. And he's in the early stages of developing Alzheimer's. He has a lot of his paperwork and I've been trying to help him with his claim. But he's hard to communicate with because of the Alzheimer's onset. A couple of other guys that I've met, I just had a brief chance to talk with them. After we went to South Carolina, I worked at a naval museum and we had a lot of people coming through. I was doing airplane work on the aircraft carrier that they made a museum out of, and some of the old guys would stop by and we'd get to talking and they [said], Well, What'd you do in the military, and this and that. So I just accidentally run across a couple guys that were tourists and didn't have a lot of time to talk. They said yes [they] were there, but they'd rather forget it. Some people, they kind of just want to wash it out of their mind.

Sure. Just rather put it behind them.

George: Yes, but I think this atomic veterans organization, they just had a reunion in San Diego this past year. They put out a quarterly newsletter, and their circulation wasn't real good on their **[00:40:00]** newsletter. The former commander didn't really have the organization going like it should.

This is at the state level?

George: No, this was national. But they weren't getting the information out. Like the first year I belonged to it, I only got one newsletter, and it's a quarterly thing. So they were trying to figure the best way to disseminate the information, and they decided at their convention in San Diego that they would give you the option of receiving it by mail or by e-mail. Now they publish their newsletter on their web site every quarter. And there were people that were filling out the application forms for the membership, they had a form that you could print from the Internet, and they were filling it out and sending their check with the applications. They had an address to mail it to but it never got to the treasurer.

So not very well organized.

George: Well, they weren't, but they're making a lot of improvements this past year. I know I sent my renewal in and it was taking an awful long time. So I looked up the phone number of the guy that was in charge of membership and he said, Well, we've got a problem. And he said, I can't say whether we got your check or not. But he said, I'll give you a number to call, and I called the guy and sent him an e-mail. It wasn't long that we had my cancelled check back and so I sent them a copy of my cancelled check and everything to the right place and they sent me—

So it all got squared away.

George: But now they're finally getting the money going into the right pot and the membership cards are being sent off like they said they would. I guess it's like anything new.

Sure, you [have] to organize.

George: When you start off unorganized and you don't know who's in charge and who's leading and who do you follow [chuckling].

Right. Sure. Like any group. Is there anything by you guys locally?

George: No. In our local area in Charleston [South Carolina]? Nothing.

Would it be something that you would ever consider getting involved in and starting something locally?

George: Well, when we get back, I want to visit with our state commander. He lives only fifty miles from me. And I'm going to give him a call and see if we can't get together and identify and contact all the people in our state and see how we can better make the information available to them, from the compensation standpoint. I feel like there's a lot of people out there that are not aware of what their rights are and what they're entitled to. Because the government is sure not going to tell you, `Hey, we got all this money and you're entitled to it and all you got to do is come and see us and we'll give it to you.` You know, they don't do that.

No. For anything. Do you think that there are people out there that would be interested in being involved but are hesitant to do it just because they—I don't know how to phrase it but perhaps just because they feel almost like they would be betraying the time or the test site or the **[00:45:00]** *job that they were doing? Or do you find more that people are pretty open and—*

Theresa: [Laughing] I don't want to start anything.

George: I don't know. I think if the right information got publicized in the right way, directed to the right group of people, that for the most part they would accept it and see that somebody has done some good. It's for, well, for the benefit of mankind; the people that were involved would benefit. So I think it would be a good thing if we get a lot more people involved. For example, the State of Nevada doesn't have an atomic veterans state commander.

Yeah, I was going to ask you about that.

George: And I thought that was—

That's very interesting.

Theresa: They should've been first.

George: But right now the state commander for the State of Nevada and the atomic veterans organizing is open.

Very interesting.

George: But I'm sure that with all the people that the military that were involved at Nellis Air Force Base and Indian Springs—

Yeah, there's a lot of military around here.

George: And Camp Desert Rock and all that, that there's probably a lot of retired atomic vets living around here in Las Vegas.

Do you guys interact at all, like online or anything, beyond e-mail?

George: I've sent e-mails to a couple, three people and I've got responses from a couple of them. And these different web sites, they have a guestbook and you can put your comments in it and then—

So you can go and see who is there.

George: Yeah. And I find that most of the people that are visiting the web sites and are signing the guestbooks are people that are dependents, either sons or daughters. Or maybe a wife [whose] husband has died from what they suspect is caused by the ionization radiation. And what they're looking for is information on how to get compensated. It's not a widely publicized thing. And the Department of Justice will work a lot quicker than the Veterans Administration will.

That says a lot.

George: It's a general damage award section for different things. But the atomic test participants fall in there, and they also recognize lots of cancers. But in my case, skin cancer is not one of them.

That's very interesting.

George: But see, they're not talking to the Veterans Administration. But other cancers, there's twenty-some other ones that the Department of Justice, for a claim they pay one lump sum, seventy-five thousand dollars, which is not a lot of money. But there's a lot of widows and children that [are] eligible for that compensation. And you can find that information on the Department of Justice web site.

OK. So what types of things, if any, have come about as a result of this particular group or **[00:50:00]** *groups, I guess? Do you know if there has been, for example, maybe just the more public acknowledgement of related illness or medical screenings or anything like that? Do you know of any larger issues that have resulted because of the work that has been done by these groups?*

George: No. Well, maybe I haven't been looking for any one thing in particular, other than making the people that were involved aware of what the government and the Army and the Veterans Administration have admitted and say, `OK, we will compensate you for these conditions`. And so that group is helping to spread the information to more people. I think that was their objective, to get the information to as many people as possible. I think that's starting to happen.

If you don't mind me asking, do you think that the types of compensation that they're now offering are fair? The types of compensation that they're offering now for different illnesses or problems that may have arisen.

George: Well, the Veterans Administration, they do it by a percentage of certain things. Like one of my problems is hearing. They'll give you a 20 or 30 percent disability for that. So they base your payment on a percentage. Then say if I could prove that my hearing loss was caused by—but it wasn't, but it was jet engine noise, but the cancers, there's like certain cancers they will give you 30 percent, some 50 [percent].

So they basically determine [the percentage].

George: Yes, it's an individual case and it depends on who in the group. Maybe the guy over here that's working today is not feeling good and they say, `Well, this guy's only worth 10 percent`. But maybe two days later the other guy, if he'd have looked at it, he says, `Well, you know, 70 percent.` So it's one of the deals. Of course you always have the right to appeal, and they always tell you if you get legal help, to turn down your first award and appeal it because they'll up it [chuckling].

Because it'll be more. Interesting. It's kind of a long process to go through but—

George: But I think eventually that it's going to be too late for a lot of people. Eventually that for the most part the survivors now and in the next four or five years, they may not be compensated to the degree that they should have been, but I think they will be to a certain standpoint. There's just not enough information available. Families are finding out now, and I think the Internet's been the greatest thing in the world as far as helping people with this type information—

And keeping them connected.

George: Yes, because the rule is that it is not allowed in the public library and it's not easy to find. If it wasn't for the Internet and Google, I'd be a total dummy when it comes to this.

[00:55:00] *Well, it sounds like you are an expert in this particular area, or reaching the level of expertise. You certainly have a big base of knowledge [and] a really good understanding of what this particular movement is all about.*

George: Well, I not only read stuff that's advantageous but I look at the web sites like the Greenpeace movement and some of the other ones that—

So you get at other things to see what's going on, too.

George: Yeah. I look at a point of view and see how it fits with what I think.

So I'm just curious, what are some of the most interesting things that you've found, or maybe some of the things that have surprised you that you didn't know about?

George: I think the thing that surprised me most about all that I've found is all the information that has been declassified and all of the untruth that was told to the general public when these things were going on. People had an idea that something was happening but when they asked questions and wanted to know what was happening, `We don't know. We can't talk about that. That's classified.` Like, when they dropped the bombs on Japan, they didn't come right out and say—you know they knew the operation was in the plan and there was a lot of uncertainty about when it was going to happen, what was going to happen and how many people they expected to be killed and the consequences of *our* troops. There was a good number of them involved that were in the area at the time. And some of those guys are still living that were involved in the cleanup end of it and treating the people that they could and stuff like that.

So you're saying that this is something that the government was aware of but they did not really make this public information?

George: Right. I guess you could say the information was too sensitive, or it may have jeopardized the operation had they made it aware sooner than they did. A lot of the information they could have publicized a lot quicker than they did after it happened.

Right. When was that publicized in relation to the bombing?

George: Well, that was, I guess, back in the late forties, ’48, ’49, somewhere along there.

So years, a couple three years.

George: Yeah, it was two or three years’ time period from what I remember reading.

So it took them a while to release that.

George: Yeah. Like that airplane that I was talking about that flew into Mount Charleston. Some of the remains in there went hidden for thirty years before they told the people’s families what happened.

It makes you wonder why.

George: Yeah. But I read an article on the web site, they kept it a secret for thirty years before they told their families actually what happened and—

So despite all of this information that you guys have, and it seems like you’re very involved, what **[01:00:00]** *are your thoughts about having been a part of this piece of our history and the work that you were doing?*

George: Well, I wouldn’t take anything in the world for the experience.

So it was good experience.

George: But I wouldn’t want to do it again.

How about you, Theresa? You spent a good deal of time out there also.

Theresa: I think it was a very good experience. And I wouldn’t want to do it again either. I think we learned a lot and it was very interesting.

But knowing now what you know, it's not something that you would go into or do?

I don't know about that.

George: I think if I had to do it again, I'd go into it with a different view on—

Theresa: Sheer knowledge.

George: You know, I'd say I need to know more than what I know now.

Did you have a sense at all, the time that you were there, that they weren't telling you things?

George: Oh yeah, you were just totally in the dark. I mean you had no idea of what—

Yeah, I think you'd mentioned in the other interview that they would send you out to do things but you really didn't know what you were out there to do yet. It took a while to figure that out.

George: Yeah. Like one thing that came to my mind after we had talked to Mary [Palevsky] and I mentioned the fact about the two sets of records on the exposures? If I remember correctly, it was the test Priscilla where they had a picture—you've seen the picture of the railroad bridge?

Oh yes.

George: Like three days after that test, I was up on that bridge getting some residue and I was helping another guy, and it was really, really hot so we had to put on three suits of what they call RADSAFE [radiological safety] clothing. When we came back out they hosed us down, and then they had a big archway monitor and it kept going off. And you kept taking layers of clothing off. Finally you had to take shower after shower after shower, and it took us about seven or eight hours before they finally said OK, you're [clean].

Wow! And that was three days. You guys were out there three days after they'd done the shot.

George: Yeah. So, you know, the radiation level was really, really high.

What did they tell you when they sent you out there, or didn't they tell you anything?

George: Well, they said, `The area's hot but, we need this sample.` And instead of going with one suit of clothing on they said, `We feel like you need three suits of clothing on.` So it was triple protection and it was still pretty hot.

Were you worried when you were out there? Did you think about it that way out there?

George: On the short-time effect, I didn't really think much of it. Then I got to thinking about a long-term effect and I thought about it off and on for a few years. Then it didn't bother me for a long time. And then when I got in a B-52 outfit, when we were loading the nukes, they always had a couple of guys with the radiation monitoring stuff because the design of the weapon—the Geiger counters they used for one test. They had another instrument they called a "sniffer" and it was to see if there was anything getting out into the air, the different types of radiation. Once in a while, you get to thinking about that, you know, well, is this thing maybe leaking a little bit? But they always did it, every time they **[01:05:00]** loaded them [the weapons] on the airplane and then when it came time to download it and take it to another airplane or take it back in the storage section. The guys that actually *did* the handling, they had some protective clothing on and we're a few feet away, you know, with nothing, so—

So it did cross through your mind.

George: Yeah, just in a wondering again.

Now we've got just a few more minutes left on this disc. And I'm just wondering if there's anything that you thought about after your interview with Mary [Palevsky] that you wanted to talk about. [Something] you didn't get to or if there was anything that we didn't cover in the interview that you feel is important. I've got another disc also….

George: No, I really can't think of anything. It's pretty well covered from the test standpoint. From the living environment, it left a little to be desired because from my standpoint in the military that was considered an isolated tour of duty.

I hadn't realized that.

George: Because it was a distance from here to town, so they paid us extra for being isolated. And we lived in the dormitory-style quarters and they had large cafeterias, but recreation was rather limited. For the movies, the military showed a movie—

So it was their choice.

Theresa: No slot machines [laughing].

[Laughing] No slots?

No.

George: The movie was a quarter. And then they had a recreation hall where I think they had soft drinks, and I don't remember if they sold beer. But about the closest place that you could go for off-base entertainment, say if you wanted to go out for a drink or dinner or something, there was a little place just the other side of Indian Springs Air Force Base. It was called Cactus Springs. There was a bar and they had a swimming pool and a little gas station. In fact, I worked part-time there as a bartender [chuckling]. But that was like, oh, forty miles, I guess, from—

Not exactly close by.

George: No, it wasn't. It wasn't close.

Theresa: That was where I met him.

Really. Well, I guess you guys were lucky that you were both out there at the same time and—

George: Yeah, I got there in July of '56 and I she didn't come out until '57.

OK. So you had a couple of years.

George: Yeah. I met her the first day she come to work and asked her out that night, and so we've been stuck together ever since.

That sounds like a good thing.

Theresa: That's one good thing that come out of it [chuckling].

Yeah. That's great.

George: Yeah, we enjoyed it. It was really a different experience. **[01:10:00]**

Well again, I certainly appreciate you guys taking the time again to talk to us.

George: Oh, you're absolutely welcome. Yeah, that was our excuse to come back to [Las] Vegas, I said.

[Laughter all around]

Well, I'm glad we could help you with that.

George: Well, one thing we were pleased, when we drove up we had a few minutes so we can walk around, and she'd ordered a brick for us for the Walk of History [at the Atomic Testing Museum] or whatever it is [called.]

Oh good! Is it out there now?

George: Yeah.

Oh good!

Theresa: And my dad's .

Great.

George: Her daddy worked out there for over twenty years, too.

Yeah, that's what I—

Theresa: And he was proud of that.

George: So it's real nice. I'm surprised there's not a lot more of them, though.

Well, and it may happen, now that the test site [museum] is officially opened. I think it's sort of been in that planning stage for a little bit now.

Well, I thank you. I'm just going to shut this off since I'm getting to the end.

OK.

[01:11:27] End Track 2, Disc 1.

[End of interview]