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

Interview with Curtis Amie

January 21, 2005
Las Vegas, Nevada

Interview Conducted By
Mary Palevsky

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

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

Recording begins after Mr. Amie provided some background

Mary Palevsky: *You can say you started there [Nevada Test Site] in 1959.*

Curtis Amie: Nineteen fifty-nine. I worked as a laborer. Then I went into the tunneling part as a bull gang. I did that work for—started in 1966, and I retired in 1978, around September. During that time, we laid track, dug ditches, and did menial work, like. At one time, they upgraded and I took a cut in pay for six months, then I went to the mine as a trainee, which I graduated from the trainee school.

OK. So here's a picture of you—?

That's a picture of me graduating in my class. Right there, that's me over there.

Right. Right. Yes, there you are.

OK. Before then, you will see that's me here.

Oh, great!

And we were inside of the tunnel.

I'm going to get something to label those pictures. So this is number 1, is your graduation from the class. And these are the guys that trained you up here?

Yes.

I recognize [William] Flangas. And these are the three guys that did the training. This is miners' training?

Yes.

And then this is you in the tunnel. This is picture number 2. OK, great. Sorry I interrupted you. Go ahead.

OK. Then after I graduated, I was still doing what I call just degrading work, digging ditches, laying the track, and all that. So I really wanted to—since I had completed my training to be a miner—I wanted to be the drilling and do all the aspects of mining which my cohorts, see, Caucasian people, were doing. And I protested and I threatened to quit because of that. Finally, I was allowed to drill on this big machine they call a jumbo. Four people can drill on that. You drill through so many holes you'd have to drill, the formation was really hard, but you drilled and you set up the dynamite and you blast and that whole thing.

But I wasn't allowed to do that, so I finally—one morning I decided I wasn't going to—I went through all the channels and they said, OK, we're in a hurry. Right now we got to get the shot off and we'll let you drill later on.

I said, Well, I think I'm qualified. I went through the training. I want to drill.

And they said, No, we can't do it.

I went from my shift boss up to the supervisors, the walkers, and even to the project manager, which was Bill Flangas.

On that particular morning, I didn't catch the bus and I went over to the rec hall and he came through, said, Curtis, why are you in here?

I said, I decide I'm going to give it up, Bill.

He said, What's the problem?

I said, Nobody will let me drill and I was trained for drilling and I want to drill.

And he said, Can you drill?

I said, Yes.

He said, Well, hold on. I'll see about that. He said, Stay here. I'll go make a call and I'll come back.

So finally he came back and said, OK, I have called– I think it was E Tunnel–and **[00:05:00]** they've set up. When we get there around ten or eleven o'clock, we're going to let you drill. He said, Can you drill?

I said, Yes.

He said, OK. If you can't drill, if you're lying to me, if you can't cut it, I'm going to run your a-- down the road.

I said, That's fine. I'll accept that.

So OK, eventually we went up there. Now I didn't know offhand but I had—there was a Caucasian guy that trained me, that helped me drill. He said, Curtis, they're stacking the deck on you. They went over to another tunnel and brought in two of their topnotch drillers from over there and they said, I want you–old Curtis, he's trying to make trouble here, can he drill? He said, Yes, I think he can. They said, OK, I want you to make him look bad. That was exactly what—his name was Naff [sp] told me. He's passed away now.

Naff?

Naff. He said, OK, Curtis, you take the top. On the jumbo there were two machines on top, two on the bottom. He said, You take the left top. I've changed you a new bit so it'll go fast. He said, I know you know what to do. He said, Don't force it, but just–. And also we had a spray can. Think we were drilling eight feet deep. He said, I marked it on the rod what—the drilling deal. That's it. When you see the blue mark, then you bring back. You know you're eight feet deep. And he said, Also,

you start, go across, and drop down— because if four people's drilling, that jumbo, the big arm, the main arm that brings it up and down, it's a hydraulic-like deal. He said, All of them, they could jam you and you won't be able to come back up. He said, Really, start over. When you get to your line, then either you just push the button, it will drop down. Then you just swing it on across. I think we were drilling about two feet apart, one, two, three, it was probably about six lines that we drill, each part.

So OK. So when I got in there, they said, OK, it's all set. Get up there, Curtis, and start drilling. I started drilling. There was the motorman that brought the train in. So he said, Curtis, he said—Bob William was a religious guy. He was black. And he said, Curtis, you think you going to make it? I said, Yes, no problem. So I start drilling. So believe it or not—oh, about fifteen minutes through the drilling, I was really, you know, bringing it down. I was about halfway through. So finally I completed my drilling. I wrapped the jumbo up, the drill deal, and they had those big hoses. It was run by air and water. So I wrapped it up, came down off the jumbo, which it was a tall deal, and Bob William, he was the motorman, he was pushing the jumbo in, going to bring it back out.

And he said, Curtis, he said, you just can't cut it, huh? He said, Go back **[00:10:00]** up there. Don't give up.

I said, Bob, I'm through.

He said, Praise God, you can't be.

I said, I'm through.

So finally Mr. Flangas and the walkers and the shifters and all that, they were up the drift a ways. They saw that I had got through and I was standing on the back of the motor, the train, talking to Bob William. So they came down there.

They said, Hey, shut it down. They said, What's the problem? You can't cut it?

And I said, I don't know, I said, but I'm waiting on the damn dynamite.

So he got up and he said, Give me a tape.

Bill Flangas himself went up on that jumbo, got his tape, he borrowed a tape, he went in several holes to see was it eight feet. So it was eight feet right on the nose. He came down and then he—I'm searching for the words, that he kind of rebuked them or something like that, the rest of them. He said, I want you guys to—what's the problem here? You let this trainee beat you out? He said, Get to getting!

So once we drilled out, then it came to putting up the charge, putting the dynamite in the hole, putting the blasting caps and the whole works. Now each one of those other people had a helper to carry the dynamite, the boxes were quite heavy, to lift up there. So Bob William,he wasn't supposed to do that because he was a motorman, he wasn't a miner, he was a motorman. He said, Curtis, how much dynamite you need? The powder? He said, Just get up there and I'll lift it up to you. I said, OK, Bob, that's fine. So I finally went up there and I had to pack and load all of my holes by myself, but the others had help. Finally when we got through, we blasted, you know, the hole, we'd tile it in and blast it. So my workers and the project manager and all that, they said, Well, we will see after the blasting, because you're supposed to be a smooth deal, what you call doglegging and all that, like chuckholes like on the roadway, you wasn't supposed to be—supposed to be a smooth deal.

Oh, so it's not supposed to have any potholes or anything like that?

Right. Up into the cavity. So after that, they went back up on the big rock pile and they looked. Mine was perfect. After they mucked out and the whole business, then Mr. Flangas told them, `Listen. I want Curtis on this jumbo. Each time it come in, put him on there and let him drill.` So after that, I didn't have any problem drilling.

That's amazing. Let me ask you a technical question about the jumbo. All four of you are drilling at the same time?

At the same time. Two on the bottom, two up top. It's a four-man jumbo. Big machinery.

I've seen pictures of it, but I don't think I've seen pictures with people on it. And then the motorman, Bob Williams is driving it in as you—?

He pulls it in, brings it back out, because it's huge.

Yes. When you say that you were set up, was this by the other miners, you think, to make you fail?

No, it was probably through the walkers and the upper echelon.

OK. In the tunnels.

In the tunnel.

[00:15:00] *OK. And were there any other African-American men working in that kind of job at that time?*

No. There were several more miners but they were doing menial work like me. Now when it come to the jackleg, which is something—it's expanded like a jackhammer. Now this jackleg, it's on a tripod and you could drill vertical-like.

Jackleg.

Jackleg. That's a heavy piece of machinery. Now I was allowed to do that because it was—you had to have on the rain suits and all that. It was kind of strenuous. So they let me do that. And the mucking and all that. Laying the track.

But not doing the machine like the jumbo.

Not that machinery because once you drill out, it was probably thirty minutes or maybe an hour to drill out and set up and blast. So while the people's mucking the muck out and getting ready to lay the track and another round of shots, then the four drillers, they had privileges. We could go to the lunchroom and—which I didn't drink coffee, but we could go there and we would take a break, which was probably thirty minutes or more. So our primary job was drilling. It wasn't all that laying the track and that mucking. I wanted to be a part of that.

So about what year was this? This was in the sixties?

I started in '66, but this was probably '76 through the time I retired in '78.

So this was really at the end of your career that you finally did this.

Yes.

Wow. And did you keep doing that work on the jumbo, then?

Well, they phased that out and they went into another type of machinery called the Alpine [Miner™], but at that time I think that was the later stages of using the jumbo, blasting, so they went into the Alpine thing that it drilled more smoothly and didn't have to use all that blasting, the dynamite.

So after that, then I worked with Bob William on the motorman, what they call a break-in, it's just like throw the switch, you go out and haul things, and all that.

But when we started, right before I turned it on, you said something about this book [James Carothers and Robert Knipes (2003). Building the Cage. *Las Vegas, NV, NNSA, DTRA: OMB No. 0704-0188], that you had some thought about the book or—?*

Yes. At that meeting, Mr. Bill Flangas was there. I confronted him about—after I read the book and I saw in there where there was no mention of not one black person, African-American

person, on the whole [Nevada] test site, the drilling or the laying the track. This was book was really offensive and I asked him about that.

I said, Why you didn't include not one black person? I said, You could've included me because I was your number one miner. I proved that out. I beat them all out. I said, You could've proved that.

And he said, Well, maybe I could've said that you got bit by a snake in the tunnel.

I said, I don't find that funny, Mr. Flangas.

So anyway, out of all those people that worked up there, I was wondering when those people, you know, report who worked up there and who got hurt and all that, were there any black people that worked up there? According to this book, *Building the Cage*, there was no black **[00:20:00]** people worked there, when we did the frame work, the heavy work, digging and laying the track, and all that. But there was no mention, not one black person in this book. I found that *very* offensive.

Yes. That's why I'm happy you agreed to talk to me.

Yes. I have no axe to grind with nobody, but I know we're still living in the day and age that people of my color and my race, that the playing field is still not level. Just recently had the Martin Luther King deal, came by, there was a weatherman, the newsman, he made this derogatory statement about Martin Luther *Coon* Day. We are referred to [as] *coon*, black people, because of the black and white color of a coon. Martin Luther *Coon* Day. This weatherman was eventually fired, and I think he should've been, for using that derogatory statement.

This was here in Las Vegas?

Yes, during the—just recently.

Just now.

Yes.

Wow. I missed that. Hm. Maybe we could talk about how you as a black person got to the test site and some of your memories of the early days of what all you guys were doing. Because that helps us correct the record. You know it's important to have these things in the record. And of course I want to talk to other of your cohort that were out there that aren't appearing in these other places.

Yes. And when you come to supervision, there was no black person that was upgraded to be a, what they call a boss, a shift steward or a walker or of that capacity.

Yes. Now—what was I going to say? You're an employee of REECo [Reynolds Electrical and Engineering Company] at this point?

Yes.

You are. OK.

I was hired at REECo and when I did my last stint up there, which was around September of '78, I was a REECo employee.

OK. Now when you came in 1959, where did you come from? What had brought you to the test site?

I came here to Las Vegas, Nevada in 1952.

Oh wow. From—you said Texas?

From Texas. I recently had spent a stint in the Army from 1946 until 1949. I was honorably discharged. After that, I worked in Texas for a while, then I found out that—I heard about there was—they were doing a lot of construction work building the hotels and things in Nevada. So I migrated here. I joined the labor union as a laborer. That was basically digging the ditches and shoveling and sometimes carpenter helpers or plumber helper or something like that.

Yes. Now you were—let's see, you said you were seventy-seven, so just so we get it on the record, you were born where?

I was born in Marshall, Texas in April 27, 1927.

OK, great. So you were a young man. In 1952, you would've been, what, maybe twenty-five years old. I'm doing it in my head.

Not quite.

[00:25:00] *Yes. So when you got here. So you were—so—I interrupted you. So you were doing that work. And what was that like in those days in Las Vegas? Did you experience—what kind of discrimination did you experience?*

Quite a bit during '52, '53, up until the sixties, we weren't allowed to eat in the cafeteria. I wasn't a drinker anyway, but wasn't allowed to drink beer or that type of thing in a bar. I experienced in 19—probably about '56, I was working with a Caucasian fellow. He and I were pretty good. He was a truck driver. I was going to help load the truck and unload. I was more or less like a swamper for him, you know, guiding him and helping him back it in. So we were coming down, oh, I think it was Paradise Road, something like that, and he drinked a bit, and he pulled in there and he said, Curtis, let's swing in here and get a beer. Well, I knew they weren't going to serve me in the first place.

So we went in this joint. It was called Maxine. This lady was—she was kind of like a tough lady type or whatever, Maxine. So we went in her joint and he proceeded to the bar. He ordered two beers. They brought one.

He said, I ordered two. He said, Well—

The bartender, which was a lady, said, He can't drink here and he knows that. You know you can't drink here.

I said, Well, I'm just sitting here with him.

He said, Why not? This is my friend Curtis. Give him a drink.

They said, If you got to come up with that attitude, we prefer you not stop here anymore. We can't serve him and you know that.

So we came out. That was my first major experience with that. I knew they've set the bar where things that you could do and you couldn't do, so I tolerated that. Coming from Texas, I wasn't allowed to do that. I would've had to go to the back to eat and things like that. So it *was* a problem with me, but it wasn't no *big* deal because I could tolerate it.

So how did you get over to the test site? How did you know about it?

So I joined the labor union and I went out on several jobs. Finally at that time, they would call people out maybe fifty a day, a whole lot of people, because at one time they were doing a lot of hiring and a lot of firing. Because they would work maybe four or five months, and once they got a test off, then they would do some laying off. So I started in '59. I think I worked maybe four or five months. I was laid off. Then eventually I went back probably 1960 and I stayed there continuously until 1963 or '64. I was laid off again because of what they call reduction in force, which I had no problem with that. So eventually I went back in 1966. I started working at Tunnel 16 as what they call a bull gang.

And what is a bull gang? I've heard that expression, but what does that mean?

Well, it's exactly what it means. Bull. You worked like a bull, like an animal. You dig the ditches, **[00:30:00]** lay the track, and those ties weigh about eighty or ninety pounds. You dig holes to lay the track and the railroad, that steel was heavy, the rails, so we packed them and laid down. And when the miners would do that. Eventually I, you know, suggested that why couldn't they train us as actual [miners]—? Finally they did. They went into this trainee program. So I took that up. Had to take a cut in pay.

Yes. Let me ask you about something else. What percentage of people working that real hard labor, would you say, were black or were other minorities? Or were there white people working that, too, or—? Everybody?

I would say the bull gang people were about 98 percent black. Maybe one or two Caucasian people, a few of the Mexican people, but other than that, it was entirely black.

OK. And I had another question. When they're hiring and laying you off, are you being hired then by REECo?

I was hired through the Laborers' Union 872, which REECo would call in and they would, say, request needing maybe fifty miners, and we would go through the medical tests and the background of what they did, the criminal and all that.

Right. So once you had that clearance, then you could be hired off and on. Did they have to do it every time, to check your background, or just that first time?

Well, mostly they would run a background test on you for about three weeks. But while I was there, they did an extensive background test on me—it started out from my high school—to get what they call a Q-clearance. That's qualified to work in the sensitive areas and things and that. You had this green badge which you call a Q-badge. Now my mom—or the people that—I think they spent high as three thousand dollars to classify, to Q, one person. It wasn't, you know, about the color issue, but they wanted to know were they Communist or whatever. So when they went and contacted my mom, she was reluctant to tell me anything because she finally called me and said, Curtis, there were three people. They were in suits and they were asking questions about you. What have you done? Are you in trouble, baby? I said, No, Mom, I said, it was just about the job. I said, If they come back, tell them anything they want to know. I said, It's about I can a badge which will entitle

me to get a better job and stay on longer. So eventually I cleared the—got the Q-badge, the *green* badge.

After that particular time, we were working in a place called Jackass Flat, which was that they was working on a thing called the Kiwi. You know the kiwi bird, he doesn't fly, he's like an ostrich. So they were working on that project over there. So I worked there for up until, I think, '63.

And what were you doing there?

At that time, I was helping the users, which are LASL [Los Alamos Scientific Laboratory], Westinghouse, and all that. They would set up the instruments and we were helping—we were general diggers, doing a little bit of ditch digging, but basically we were helping them place their instruments and did some sandbagging, but it wasn't like the bull gang work. It wasn't too bad. I was a carpenter helper and things like that, which wasn't bad. But once I got the Q-clearance, the other people that didn't have the Q, they had the red badge, and elevated to a green badge, the people with the red badge, they couldn't even go in the restricted **[00:35:00]** areas and use the toilets there because they would have to have a man like me with a Q-badge to escort them in there, bring them back out. So that wasn't too bad. So there were very few at that time had the Q-badge. It started in Jackass Flats.

Very few—

Oh, oh, either white or black had Q-badges at that time, you know, just the workers.

Oh, I see what you're saying. Very few of the workers had Q-badges.

Yes.

Got it. Well, that's interesting.

So eventually, oh, I think, what was that? Some outfit out of Florida took over and that was the end of Area 400. So then I went back to Mercury, Nevada, where that was the main beginning of the test site. So I worked there as carpenter helper or laborer and we did—several of us, but it wasn't too strenuous.

This was actually building buildings in Mercury?

Building buildings, setting up the trailers, and that type of thing.

Got it. Got it. So as a REECo employee, you're sent as needed to these different areas of the test site?

Yes. And we'd have to have a foreman. Most of the foremen were Caucasian.

Right. Now were you generally working with a certain group of guys? Did you get to know certain guys really well, or did they move you around so you were always working with different people, or how did that go?

Yes. Mostly I think I worked from 1963 up until probably '64 in the area in Mercury, right around the area, because we were probably put on like a maintenance crew when they would help the build the roads and the signs. When they'd bring the wide trailers on, if they knock them down, knock the signs down, we would have to put them back up, and that type thing. So I worked there a while. Then eventually—the bull gang work paid more money, *much* more per hour, than the laborer. Once you went underground, you got the underground pay, and it was quite a bit extra. So that was the incentive for me to go into the tunnel work, the bull gang business.

Right. Right. Just some personal things. Were you married at the time?

Yes.

And did your family live here?

Yes.

OK, so would you commute back and forth, then, to the test site?

It was ninety-five miles from here to the test site. We drove and mostly carpooled. You had to have a fairly new car. Every two years you had to get another car or put another motor in it because you were putting lots of miles on that car. And they called that the Widowmaker, that highway. Just a two-line highway, and people were driving crazy and there was no speed limit. If your car could do 120, sometimes you let it out. So that was a problem up there. Lots of people—wasn't too many got killed but there was lots of them got maimed with wrecks and things like that.

But I was married at the time, had five kids, and can happily say that I put three of my kids through college. I have one daughter now is assistant principal at a high school.

[00:40:00] *That's great. Had you met your wife here or did she come with you?*

No, we were more or less a family thing from Texas.

I see. And her name is?

Ruby. Her name was Ruby. So she had the same forethought that I did. She didn't like maid work because she finished high school and she just didn't like that, and so she worked at a hotel a while and they let her polish the silverware and things like that. So she finally upgraded herself to work for Sears, Roebuck. She started out there as a salesperson, but she encountered a bit of discrimination there. Because it was funny, she related to me one time that she worked in the, you know, at that time Sears, Roebuck, it was a credit thing like Montgomery Ward, you had the card and things like that. So she said some lady from Texas or Florida someplace, she was getting her kids school things, and my wife was working in the kids' department, you know, the garment. So she was there and so she said, `Girl, could you help me pick out things`

for my kids? And so she got a whole arm—well, she helped her out, brought it up to the counter, and she laid all this on there, and so my wife Ruby said she went around there to, you know, to ring it up. And then she said, Oh, she said, I'm sort of in a hurry. [She] said, Would you get somebody to ring me up? She said, Oh, by the way, [she] says, that's my job. That's what I do. So she encountered that. But luckily we came a long ways and now I am seventy-seven [years old], so think I did pretty well.

Yes. Now when you left the test site in 1978, why did you do that then? Was that a choice? Was it based on some of these issues that you've talked about?

It was really, I'd say, 90 percent based on the issues that I—I wasn't upgraded and I was relegated to just menial jobs and things that I wasn't doing any strenuous work, so I said OK, it's time for me to go. So I requested a—I had enough credits in at the union, so I could retire. At that time, if you had twenty-five credits in the union, you could retire. So I checked out and I found out that I had thirty credits. It was time to go. And I requested through my project manager, I want to retire.

He said, You can't do that. We are not laying off. We're hiring.

I said, Can't I get a reduction in force?

[And he said], Not now.

So I eventually talked to the right person and he said, OK. Just check out. Come downtown at the main office there and check yourself out, and that's it.

But once I retired, I wasn't depending on the test site work anyway because in 1973, I had acquired a Dairy Queen, which was a national franchise. I went through the Small Business Claim, filled things, got a loan, and I had this Dairy Queen business. So I knew I had something to back up on.

[00:45:00] *Right. Right. And so you kept that business for a while afterwards or—?*

I kept it, I ran it, I had employed probably about sixteen people at one time, mostly teenagers, high school or school kids, to work there. In I think about 1980, I was approached by an Italian fellow, because I was doing good business. I had a brother that had cancer and I took off and went there and spent about three months with him at the cancer institute in Little Rock, Arkansas. So those people, they were real good at the gizzards of the chicken, they had a special deal that they could take those gizzards and they were quite good, and so I learned how to do that. So my specialty when I came back to the Dairy Queen, I got those gizzards going. I had a special sauce that I put into that, and I had the recipes just like Colonel Sanders had, and I didn't let nobody know about it. But people just would flock there. They'd say, We're going to the Dairy Queen to get those gizzards, and all that. So that was my biggest deal, and the gizzards were cheap.

Facts about it, the guy I was getting my chickens from, Desert Poultry, he said, he just mentioned it, he said, Curtis, I got— said, Do you sell livers and gizzards, them type things like that?

So I said, Yes, I think I could handle the gizzards.

So he had *cases* of them. They were sixty pounds each. He said, I got about four cases, can't sell them. He said, You just take them and do what you do.

What a story! That's a great story.

So I took them all and I prepared those gizzards. So then I went back.

I said, You got any more? I need about—

So he finally got onto me. He said, OK, I got to charge you now. I understand you're making a profit off of it.

I said, Well, yes.

Yes. That's a great story. So yes, I never heard of it. Dairy Queens, I'm always thinking of just—oh, do they serve hamburgers over at Dairy Queens, too?

They sold hamburgers, fish sandwich, grilled ham and cheese. Barbeque beef sandwich was one of my specialties. Chili dogs. French fries.

Where was your place?

It was on the corner of H andBonanza. It wasn't an elaborate place. It was a walk-up. The seating wasn't inside but I had benches and things outside, but it was more or less a walk-up. But the [*Las Vegas*] *Review-Journal* was down the street from there, and the post office, and the Moulin Rouge was, oh, they called it the MoMa, they had people staying there, and then the project was there. So I had good clientele, just local people ran in. Then people would drive through. And the KCEP, the radio deal, played over the loud speaker. They played different type music, what they call soul music, so they would say, `Oh, I'm going to the Dairy Queen on my lunch break. I'm going over there and get some of those gizzards from the Dairy Queen.` So then I was really doing good, believe it or not. At that time I had to have at least three or four girls just for bar, you know, they handled the counters, to help make the—we were making banana splits or milkshakes and malts and Cokes, Sprites, all type of drinks. We did the **[00:50:00]** whole business there. So people would just be lined up, but I had it so that if people were in line for ten minutes and weren't served, they got it free. So those girls had to excel. I paid them a little more and they would really get them out. Sometime we'd have ten or fifteen people in line with those two windows, but we got them out fast. And the people drive through there and they'd see that big line and say, `What's going on?` And they would stop. I would say 50 percent of my clients were Caucasian people. They'd drive through, stop, and get the banana splits and things. On Sundays, I would open up a little bit later because I knew when the people come from church, the kids, what they would demand. `I want ice cream!` And so they

would swing by there. That was a good thing for me. And then Saturday night and Friday night, the people, construction workers, their wife would say, I don't believe in cooking. I don't want to cook. Take me to the Dairy Queen. So Friday and Saturday was one of my big days.

I held it professional-like. I had a time clock. A time clock. The people when they'd come, they'd clock in and punch out. And I had an accountant, certified accountant, did all the book work and made the checks out. Her name was Wilma Dietrichs. *Very* good woman. She taught me the ins and outs of lots of things.

About business?

About business, the whole thing.

Yes. Wow. Now I have to ask you one thing about these gizzards. Would you serve them like on a plate or were they on a stick or how would actually people eat them?

No, we had a little container, just like they do, oh, sell the French fries or something, maybe it was like a little—

Sort of long and thin?

Little box-like container. It was a process of boiling them. You'd boil them quite a bit. And the trick was, gizzards are normally tough.

That's right.

So I'd boil them overnight, put the lid on them, let them soak there, and they would swell a bit and then they would come out to be tender. So then I make up my batter, put them over in the batter and stir them up. And then I had a process, a big container where I would meal them, you know, like batter them all up. Then I had a tray where I put them on this tray, put them in the freezer. I had a big upright freezer with lots of trays. And I'd put them individually on those

deals and freeze them. Then I would bring them out, get this pan and bring out maybe a hundred or so, and deep-fry them. They were frozen. It's amazing how easy it was to fry them. I sold them by the dozen, a dozen gizzards, and I had the special sauce, which was boss, different type of sauce. It was a little expensive to do the ingredients I had in there. And I had the little plastic containers where as you eat them, you dunk them in there, and they're called finger-licking good.

Oh, so you just eat them with your fingers. Yes. Great.

And you just dunk them in there and eat them. But they were tender and quite tasty.

Yes. Because you'd already cooked them slowly, and so you're just deep-frying them to get that crispy—

Yes, just to get the crispy brown deal to them.

Sounds great! Yes, it sounds great.

Yes. Good eating.

Yes. So how long did you have that business?

I ran it from, I'd say, '70 up into the eighties, about ten or twelve years. Because I had this loan and I paid off the loan ahead of schedule. And finally, like I said, the Italian guy—I was just **[00:55:00]** sitting out one day on—I was taking a break and he came by. And he said, `Gee, you do a lot of business here.` I hadn't in my faintest idea had no inkling about selling.

He said, `Would you like to sell?`

I said, `Yes, I'll sell` *me* `if the price is right.`

And he said, `You do good business here.` He said, `Could I come in and check things out?`

So he went in and checked it out and he tasted gizzards.

He said, That's good eating. And finally he said, Oh, I know people lie a little about the income. He said, How much you making here? He said, Could I see what you did on the file of the income last year there?

I said, No problem.

So I had it on file because Ms. Dietrich, my accountants, they left it there in a cabinet. They kept all the records.

So I let him see that and he said, Oh, yes, you did quite well here. He said, But what I would like to do is to be here or be around here for three days and see the actual take.

I said, No problem. I said, When would you want to do that?

He said, How about tomorrow?

That was a Thursday. So Friday I knew was my bonus day, and as luck would have it, it was the end of the month. People were getting their welfare checks and all other types, and the hotel was getting their [employees] paid off, so that was a bonus weekend for me. So he worked in there Friday. Every time that I had this—my—the machine that—I'm groping for the word.

The cash register.

The cash register, it was an IBM brand. It could tell each item was sold and how it sold. If a twenty-dollar bill, the change. I had the girls trained so I had a metal box where they put on top it before she would get, like if a twenty-dollar bill, she'd lay it on there and she would give them the change before she would put it in there.

That's smart.

That's why they wouldn't have any problem, I gave you this, and all that. So then this cash register would like speed up to, oh my God, you could take bills that were—every so often we would go take a reading.

Oh, I see what you're saying. Yes. It would tell you how much you made.

How much I made on that day. So he would go, he'd take a reading and come back.

And he said, Geez, it's only 12:15 and we made three hundred. And he said, I just can't believe that.

And people was just really going. So after the second day—he worked there that Friday and Saturday—and I said, Well, we won't open up until about eleven o'clock Sunday.

And he said, No. I won't be back. He said, I'll tell you, come Monday, I need to get with your lawyer and your accountant, and he said, I've seen enough. I want to buy.

So I said, OK.

At the time, I had the top lawyer in the country, which was Michael Hines, with the big cowboy hat and the parades. He even rode this big Angus bull in the Helldorado parade and things like—he was [a] top lawyer, but he took a liking to me because he was a big eater. He liked barbeque and he liked my chili dogs and those gizzards and things like that. So Michael Hines was my lawyer. So I told him, I said, Wrap him up. So within I'd say less than two weeks, I had sold the Dairy Queen and I promised the guy I would give him three weeks of **[01:00:00]** training free. So I taught the tricks in trade. I taught him a little bit about the gizzards, but I didn't give him the full recipe on that.

So after I sold, I went to Texas. Because my mother was living in Texas, during the summertime I would go down there and spend time with her anyway. So I went down there and spent time with my mom. Believe it or not, she lived to the ripe old age of ninety-six. She passed. She was just sitting in a chair like that and she just had a big one, I guess, but she just slip away. Ninety-six.

That's so great. Wow. So did you move to Texas or you just went to visit your mom?

I would just go visit. So I spent, say, about three months down there because I had my second marriage, I had a son, teenaged young son, he were in school, so when school was out, we'd go down there and we'd spend the summer down there and then bring him back for school. He eventually went into the Army and that was that.

And what was your second wife's name, or is your second wife's name?

Her name was Billie.

Billie. OK. How interesting. So I guess you didn't miss working at the test site, having your own business.

No. No. And believe it or not, one of my walkers or supervisors or something, they would all come by, you know, and eat the gizzards and things, but they degraded my place. They said, Well, you know, Curtis, you— One of them asked me something about—oh, I had an incident with a walker just before I retired. You know they would grade you every six months or something, the forms and all that type thing, just like a school grade card thing.

Every six months.

About every six months, they would grade you. And this particular walker, the shifters and all that, so he graded me as knowledge of the job, A; or good worker, B; and the whole thing, you know. There was different—same as they went on. And when it come to, what it said, something about—something in the neighborhood of cooperating or getting along with the, oh, the walkers and things like that, he knocked me down to a B-minus. I had a problem with that.

I said, OK, I said, why are you giving me A's and B's and then this B-minus about the cooperating or something like that?

And he said, Well, the reason why I did that is because you're not being submissive.

And so I almost hit the roof. I said, My man, I said, that's why I left Texas, because of this business of I had to kowtow to people. I said, Up here, I thought this was a nondiscriminative job up here. I said, Why are you— I said, You seem to be like you owe a favor with somebody that I have to kowtow to you, being submissive?

He said, Well, you just seem to be, when we tell you something, you just said, 'Yes, OK.'

Well mostly, this walker, he started up through the rank. I remember when he came there, he didn't know nothing about it, but then by him being Caucasian, then he rose through the rank to tell me things that I knew more about it than he did. So I took a little offense to that but I wasn't really belligerent about it, but I just didn't like it. So I refused to sign that report card. He took it outside to the project manager and it probably went further.

[01:05:00] Came back to the next, Curtis, you going to—?

I said, No, I'm not.

[And he said], Why?

I said, I didn't like that derogatory statement that was made about me being submissive.

So believe it or not, they got a hold to this walker and they checked him out and they said, Well, you retract that.

So I was upgraded from a B-minus to a B-plus.

So that was just before, you know, my end of things. I found out the hanging was writing on the wall [the handwriting was on the wall] that they said, Curtis, being— Then he said, Well, Curtis, I know you got that little hamburger joint down there and you seem to think that you don't need to work up here anymore.

I said, I worked hard and I bought it. I went and got a loan for it. I said, By the way, it's not just a little hamburger joint. It's a nice little thing. It's all over the country. When you travel, Dairy Queen.

So that led to me to get away from up there. I just had enough.

Yes. OK.

[01:06:39] End Track 2, Disc 1.

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

[Recording resumes midsentence]—with the shelves protruding out of there. They knew. Believe it or not, I was broken in and burglarized so much that I had to put bars around that there to curtail that. But it was—the dope business and all that was a problem so I—

When you had the Dairy Queen, that stuff was going on.

Yes. So I told him. Believe it or not, that was one of the reasons why the guy, Bill Dugan, sold the place. Because I worked in Boy Scouting for years just—

Did you?

Yes, I was a Boy Scout troop, scoutmaster and all that. We even went to Denver to the Jamboree, took first place there. Believe it or not, the guy that—Gates, Lee Gates, he's a district judge there, and his wife is Yvonne Atkinson Gates. I tutored him. He was my number one Boy Scout. I turned out some good kids. At that time, it was no nonsense. It was about character. They didn't swear, all that. I had thirty guys in my troop and it was sponsored by the Zion United Methodist Church. And, you know, they were a good bunch of kids. So during that time or just before that, I'm thinking about it could've been the Rodney King thing [April 1992 riots] or whatever, this man was family. He had the Dairy Queen, he built it there, and it was family-owned-and-operated. I think he built it around '56 or '57.

This is the guy you bought it from.

I bought it from.

Dugan, you said his name was?

Dugan. He was William Dugan. He had a franchise for the—he eventually had three, four more Dairy Queens, but he was the top man that brought Dairy Queen *here*. But it was just family. His wife and sons and daughters worked in there. But it was predominantly more or less on the west side with the black people. And I would bring the kids there, my whole troop. I wore out a lot of station wagons, do you know, hauling them there. So we would take drills, run in the mountains, and things like that. So it was hot and I'd bring them there and I would treat them. I'd give them all a dollar apiece. I said, Spend it the way you want to. So they'd buy ice cream cones or whatever they wanted. And Bill would come out and he'd sit with me. And finally he would say, Well, Curtis, this is only how I feel. He'd bring me a shake or something like that.

So then he was wondering why—I think they broke his windows or something during that rioting or something—and he said, Curtis, I treat all these guys good, and he said, Why are they doing that to me?

I said, Well, Bill, look around. Look inside. I said, Do you have one of us working in there? I said, That's what they were testing. They want jobs.

And he said, I hadn't thought of it like that. He said, By the way, he said, maybe I need to do some recruiting.

I said, Well, you don't need to recruit. I say, I've got some kids here, some of them in high school. I said, Well, you need to start off with a couple of boys. I said, I don't know anything about the girls, I said, but start out

with a couple of boys. I said, Number one, my son here, Michael, I said, Give him a try.

He said, Facts about it, I'll take two.

So my son Michael started out working there and eventually Michael learned the job so good that he let him be, you know, when he'd go up into the Mormon country in Utah on his vacation, he would let Michael run it. So eventually he hired two more girls to work there. So finally he decided, Well, I think I want to sell. So that's when I went in the process of buying from him.

[00:05:00] *And you were saying that when the Italian man bought from you, he didn't know how to keep it secure? You were saying how you had it set up so people wouldn't try to break in and things?*

Yes, they knew I was no-nonsense about it. When they'd look through there and see some of them, you know, them little young guys, that they would talk a lot of trash. And I hired smart girls, but most of them were beautiful. And I had uniforms on them, not too long, but they showed a little bit of the legs, attracting. They were really training. But I had a couple were really hard to round them up. I had one where if some people were unruly, then I would let—her name was Sandra—I said, Sandra, you take over. And she'd come over and say, May I help you? And you know she was cordial about it, and if they gave her a lot of problems, she said, Well, sir, my boss tells me that you—, [she'd] say, He doesn't believe in profanity in here. If you have to talk that kind of business, I don't think I'm going to serve you. Say, You have to tone it down. She was just straight-forward. [He replied] OK, young lady, I'm sorry. And I remember the guy that just died, [Joe] Williams, he was a blues singer. Everybody knew him. He sung with Frank Sinatra and all

that. But the young people, they weren't into the blues, like B.B. King and all that. So he came there to order something.

So she said, May I help you, sir?

He said, Yes and no. He was looking at the menu.

So she asked him again, Could I help you, sir?

He said, Young lady, do you know who I am?

She said, No.

He said, You sure you don't?

She said, No.

He said, Well, I'm the Willams man. He said—

Was that Joe Williams?

Joe Williams. So I'm Joe Williams. She said, Yes? Just like it was no biggie when she said, May I help you, sir?

So he said, Well, OK, I'll order this, this, this. Who's your manager here?

So then he came out and said, Well, you need to train, give these girls an attitude. Said, They need to be more—. [He] said, This girl never cracks a smile or whatever.

I said, Mister, she's not here to sell smiles. She's here to sell. I said, She's going to be courteous to you. If you ask her what you want and all that, you tell her. She will get it out for you quickly. I said, But being a celebrity, I said, Nobody's a celebrity. The only celebrity that I have is the George Washingtons that come through here.

And he said, Well, OK, then, but you need to—

I said, Well, sir, I think I been running this successfully pretty good. Now I think I don't need any input from you.

[And he said], Well, OK.

So that's just the way it was.

And I had one. She was really sweet. She had the little baby boy. Like [in high, whiny voice], May I help you? And all that. And so then sometimes those guys, they would give her a hard time. So I said, Sandra, get to the window.

She'd go up there, Yes? Can I help you?

[And they'd say], Well, what's wrong with her?

She said, Well, you're giving her a bad time, sir, so can I help you?

So that was just that.

Yes. That's good business.

Yes.

Yes. OK. That's great. Thank you for that.

Should we talk a little bit about the medical piece? Would you talk to me a little bit about—? We were talking when I first came in about the different kinds of illnesses that people have from the test site and how you've been involved in that.

Yes. At one time I had met another person, he was a Spanish guy named Pasqual. We were **[00:10:00]** working in a drift when they said there were batteries big as a pickup truck, these batteries, about four of them. They came from Sweden or someplace and nobody really knew what type of acid or what they kicked out. So one of those batteries erupted, and we were working in the drift and I start coughing and we got—the fumes went down through there and it made me sick and I just started coughing and coughing, couldn't stop coughing. So eventually

they sent me and my partner, because we were close by, we went to the hospital. And I stayed in there probably about a week or maybe more. One of my left lungs had, what do you call—

Collapsed or something? Collapsed?

Yes, deflated or something like that. So I had the breathing problem in the hospital, and I went through all of that, me and my partner, and finally we got back kind of OK. But I thought that contributed to my coughing, the throat business, and all that, but they never did say that was the cause of that. They never owned up to that. And I just found out that it was just—it was related. Then I had to, later on after I retired, I think in ’78 or ’79, I had the thyroid gland problem. Took out—I had that operation there. And they checked that out and said it was nonmalignant and they say it wasn’t job-related. Then by me using all that heavy machinery, all that noise and business, I went through the test of—the ear test right now. Sometimes my hearing—like I’m looking at you, I can hear pretty good, but some mornings I get up, I have the TV, my daughter came in, she said, `Dad, why you got it so loud?` But my hearing is bad. I can hear loud noises but low deals— And finally I took it on myself when I’m talking to people, I’m not trying to be offensive or something, but I look them dead in the eye because I took up a knack of reading the lips. I could tell, you know, mostly, because one time I went to the doctor, he was talking to me in a low tone of voice and he said, `Curtis, something, something`.

And then he said, `Did you hear me?`

I could read his lips. I said, `No, I didn’t hear you.`

He said, `Well, I asked you something about that.`

I said, `No.`

And then he said, `You having problems hearing?`

And I told him, `Yes.`

So that's why I would more or less look them in the face and, you know, if he talked low, then I could, you know, explain and hear what he said. But I took the test and it turned out that my hearing was *really* bad. They gave the test up there.

Who's "they"?

At the test site. You know after I retired, they went through that deal and I took the test and then they told me that because of the test—it says it wasn't work-related—that I finally picked up this business of hearing after I left there. I think I got it some—

Here's another piece here. Is it this one?

Oh, see, that's just a deal where I started.

Oh, I see. Let me take a look at this. So this is saying—?

When I started—

Oh, when you worked.

—and worked and all that. But through this deal here, it stated that—yes, right here, I got it where when they gave me the test—let me see what it says here.

[Reading] "Moderate to severe loss all frequencies."

"Moderate to severe loss."

"All frequencies."

[00:15:00] "All frequencies." That's my hearing, then. I took the test there and *they* determined—now I was supposed to have been, oh, what's it called? I'm groping for that word. Compensated for it?

Yes. Yes.

For that. And they didn't do it. They said, `No, because when you took the test after that happened, the last test that you took up there, you passed it.`

Oh, I see.

So OK. I'm trying to see something here, what they said. And so once they finally, I request for them to give me a reading of the last test I took up there.

[00:16:19] End Track 2, Disc 2.

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

So when I got the report back from the test site about my hearing, I found out that the last test that I took up there was in April of '77. I worked up there all of '77 through '78, so I worked almost two years. And at that time when I made the protest about working with that machinery, that caused my hearing because I did two years of all that noise business. So then I put the claim in about that, and then they wouldn't, you know, they said, `Well, it's not job-related`. But how could it not be when the last hearing test I took up there, which was about normal, what it said, baseline, but right here it says baseline. So now after I took this test what they gave me in the last test I took, which they said that my hearing was really bad, then I wasn't getting any pay for that. They denied it.

So let me see if I'm understanding you correctly. The last time you took the test up there was before you had started the mining, is that what you're saying? That's when your baseline—?

No. I took the test in '77. That was during the time I was taking more or less—see, I was working with the jackleg and all that, but from '77 through '78, which was almost two years, I was working with the machinery, blasting, when we drill out and blast with that dynamite and it was a heavy noise, *boom! boom!* I'm almost sure that that contributed to my not hearing, my hearing problem. But they want to say that it wasn't—I picked the hearing up because of old age or it wasn't job-related. So I refused to buy that. Then when I took this other sample that they found that I had beryllium test, the beryllium business, that so long or whatever, they found out that was abnormal, below normal. But at the time I wasn't being compensated for that. Then I

filed a claim and it came back denial for that because they said it wasn't chronic, that I have it, and they said there's no cure for it, but it wasn't chronic about it. So that's the deal on that.

So this is part of this big NTS [Nevada Test Site] study.

Right. See, this one I took from the Nevada, the lab deal, and you can see where those, the X's where it says "normal" and "above normal" beryllium tests, the X's there, "abnormal" and all that. But I submitted all that to them and they said, `No, at this time, no.`

So they look like in this letter they're telling you—this letter of July 29, 2003—they're telling you you should keep repeating the tests because sometimes things can show up.

Yes, when they've already had a—it been checked out two times that it showed up that I had **[00:05:00]** this deal.

So what's that experience like, working with them? My understanding of that program was it was to really help the workers, but what is your impression of what kind of job they're doing, these doctors in this program?

I think it's more or less like city hall. I think it's been scripted. The doctors that do the tests and all that, they are, I would say, NTS doctors or something. It's just like you go to—you're not being allowed to have a family doctor to put the input on that. It's more or less, the way I see it, it's, oh, test site-run or—I'm groping for a better word.

I know what you mean. It's interesting to me because I'm trying to understand this process, that I think it was set up to be independent but you're—?

Yes. But it's more or less the rule of thumb, it's their rule, their doctors, they're the whole input. So there's no outside people that can put an input into that. So I think the deck is stacked against the people that have really been, you know, hurt up there.

Do you know people who've gotten the compensation?

Not one of them of my color. But I've talked with people that I worked with closely, at that breakfast meeting, [REECo retirees'] several people that got the $150,000, and they look healthier than you do. No ill effect or nothing. And they told me, OK, I got it, but they more or less, they didn't go—they went to a cutoff point in saying it's who you know, strings are being pulled. But far as I know, and I know a lot of my black people that worked up there that *died* of this cancer, all types of cancer, and none of them have been compensated, including me. Number one, when I was—that battery thing exploded and I had that long deal, I think some of that was contributed to that, but then they asked where did they get this battery from. It was a huge battery but they were built, you know, in Sweden or someplace, and they didn't know all the components that were in this battery that caused it. They just said it was kind of acid-like, but it caused a reaction. I was just coughing up phlegm and blood, I just coughed so that I just got just really nauseated, just sick, and they knew that. So I went through a lot. I got to give them credit that they gave me good treatment, went through the inhalation therapy and took shots and all this other stuff to get me back. But it took a week or so for me. And I was ready to pull the plug then. But due for that—during that time, they were getting kind of a medal-like for no major injury or something, or something like that. So they would let you come back and work, oh, I'm groping for the word, not a strenuous job but you could, you know, work until you got better, but **[00:10:00]** they want you back on the job as a result of no injury. So that's one thing, they believed in safety. Now they dealt in safety. You had to wear those safety glasses at all times, which was a good thing because the rocks were flying and all that other stuff. They dealt with safety quite a bit. But I figure me that they should've dealt a little more about the workers, you know, have a little more concern that, like I say, that main bull gang, it inferred to exactly "bull." You're treated more or less like [an] animal. It was strenuous, hard work in the mud and digging

and all that. Course, you got paid a little more than the outside labor, but it was worth it. Quite strenuous work.

Is the thing with the battery, so you're thinking—what is your thinking? That it could have a longer effect?

That's sure, it was probably a longer effect because my deal, they couldn't come up with—it finally took them a while to find out who built this battery and what was built up in it and all that. They were *huge* batteries because it was a side drift what they put them in. When they blasted, these batteries had to supply the electricity for the instruments that the users used to—you know what I'm saying—all the electric power is cut off, but these batteries, *huge* batteries, were used for that. They were tall. It was big as like a—what's those type of—like a Ford Expedition or something.

You're kidding! That big?

Yes, they were that big. It was, I think, about four of those batteries, they were off in a drift there. So this battery, one of them, just erupted and it let off this toxic fume, and me and my partner were working right next to that. We were putting up the vent line. And we got the brunt of this deal.

Yes. So you're saying that when the electricity from outside needed to be cut off, the users would use these batteries?

No, once the test, you know, that was part of the test. They had instrument[s] in there that had to be electrical-like. So that was part of these batteries, was hooked up to some of their instruments. Once the shot went off and all the power's off, these batteries was just like at a hotel, you have the—

Like the generator.

The generator, or backup-type deal, OK?

Backup. Got it. Got it. OK. That's interesting. Yes. Speaking of the test itself, when a test would actually take place, an underground test, what would happen? Would you know about it? Would you be told something?

Oh yes. During the day of the actual test, nobody was allowed around there because, you know, it could be blowout and all that. They had that. Once we dug this tunnel or drift thing there that we had to set up, and they'd—what they called ground zero. They'd bring the bomb itself in, they'd hook it up, and then we would—like that picture I showed you here where we were—me and my partner, we was in this drift here, that was part of that. Once *all* that deal was there in, then they poured this with concrete *all* the way back out. If the drift was a hundred feet or five hundred feet or whatever, two hundred feet, it was out of there. Once they did the testing, this thing would just blow all that to kingdom come, and then they called the reentry. We would go back in there for the scientists, like LASL, LLL and Westinghouse. There were a lot of scientists that **[00:15:00]** they had instruments in there, and we would go back and help the users retrieve those instruments.

Let me ask you about that. When you did this, were you part of the bull gang at that point?

No, I had been upgraded to miner.

So as a miner, you went back in to get those things.

Yes. Well, the bull gang, they worked, too, because they had to relay the track. But there were two classes of people. There was the bull gangs and then the miners and the electricians, the pipe fitters, and the plumbers. There were lots of crafts that worked there.

So tell me a little about what a reentry would be like. What would happen? The test would be completed.

Yes. Then it would be so hot, the radiation part, well, it took three or four days to cool it off. Once we were in there and then the bulkhead, you know, just like a steel door or something, you had to go through that and drill a little bit to get back in there. At some time, they'd bring a jumbo in, but not the big one, you know, to drill the holes through, and they'd blast and get back in there. At that time, we had the people called the RADSAFE [Radiological Safety], radiologic people that you'd have to be suited up with gloves and the rubber boots and the extra cover and coveralls and things like that, probably wore gas masks or masks or something, to go back in there. Once they found out that the radiation had deteriorated a bit, then you could go back and get the instruments out.

So would the scientists or the engineers say, you know—well, you knew—I don't understand. You knew where they were and you would go get these instruments or—?

Yes. Well, they had an idea before. When they put the instruments in the ground on the wall, well, they had, you know, a reading, how many feet this drift was and all that.

Like a map or something?

A map. So then we'd go back and we used little deals, what they call little chipping guards or something, small machinery to find these instruments for them. But the meantime, they have—sometimes it would tear up the track and all that, and so the water line and all that, that had to be replaced. So that was called reentry. So that's when the miners took over. So I normally, I got a good rapport to the users because, you know, I was likeable and the things that they want to do, you know, I would get it done for them. I was the type that would get it done, you know, like that. I didn't, you know, shirk on my job. I would just figure the quicker I get it done, that's what it should be all about. So sometimes they would request me—`We would want Curtis`—to work

with them. So I found out working with the users wasn't bad. I would work with them and, you know, it wasn't too bad. That was reentry, which is like a recovery.

Right. Right. And so the walls would be collapsed and the tunnel would be collapsed and you're having to dig it out again, or would there be something left of the tunnel?

Something left. Not really. Like I say, the concrete and all that, because some of it was sand and, you know, different stages of that. But when that deal went, it was awesome. Most of that deal, it was amazing, you know, all of the concrete in that tunnel, when you went back in there, I guess it just vaporized or whatever. It just went. So you start all over again. Even the metal tracks, if you're close down to ground zero, *poof!* It went up in smoke or whatever. Yes, it was amazing.

Yes. Did you ever see one of those subsidence craters happen or—?

[00:20:00] Oh yes. In the fifties, they had—which is one deal before they went underground, they were doing the, you know, atmospheric tests. Then they finally, when they're doing the down hole, they would drill so many thousand feet down there and they would set one off there. So one of those deals went, it was just more powerful than they ever did, and I think they backed down from having that big a deal because of the Sedan crater. That crater was something like probably a quarter of a mile in diameter and it was a big huge hole. It just blew everything up. And that was a quite a deal there.

Yes, I saw that. I mean I saw the crater. Were you there when it actually went up or—?

Well, you know, I was working there, but what I'm saying, when they shoot it, what they called the CP [control point] was the checkpoint. We were miles away from that because of the radiation stuff, you just didn't—but during recovery, you know, people went back and worked and doing that. But that was part of that. And then you could see if they know what time that they were going to blast off and you could see that big mushroom deal. And believe it or not, it

was just like an earthquake. Three or four minutes after it shot, you could see the telephone, if you were in a building like this chandelier, you could see it swaying from that, even here.

But that's the atmospheric tests, right?

No, the underground.

Oh, the underground. Underground tests. Oh, OK. Wow. Did you see any atmospheric tests?

Well, from a distance.

From a distance.

Yes. We couldn't—

Yes. I don't mean—yes.

Yes.

When you were at the test site. Wow. So you feel it like an earthquake with the underground tests.

Oh yes. Like a shock wave, it was. Rippling effect.

What did you think about or did you think about the work itself, that you were doing weapons work? Did that play a part in what you'd think about when you were out there working? The power of the weapons or the Cold War, things like that?

Yes. But see, I was in the service. I was in the infantry. And believe it or not that most of the people that went—I volunteered in 1946, and most of the people that went in with me, they were farmers and they didn't have too much education. At the time they phased out the people that they didn't have a good job, menial job wise, if they were just like a manual laborer or something, they gave them some type of—it was an honorable discharge but it was something like a 590 or something like that that they weren't really useful, weren't in the top line. So after I took my basic training, then there was an incentive that if you want to upgrade yourself, you

could take another course. So I took truck driving, which I knew about that. Then I took, oh, mechanics, which I wanted to learn a little about. Anything that I knew was going to keep me in the Army because I had a classified job as a classified, I think, truck driver where this classification was 345, or MOS [military occupational specialty], and a mechanic was 014, and a cook, and all that, they had different numbers for that. So when I finished the training on the truck driving and the mechanic deal, then I decided I wanted to upgrade myself a little bit further. So then I transferred over to the infantry, 24th Infantry. That was where I learned how to **[00:25:00]** shoot. I qualified by me being a country boy and we had to—we killed rabbits and squirrels in the bush and all that little stuff. You killed them for your livelihood, to eat. So OK, I was good at that. So when we took it on the rifle range to shoot, I come out, I had three medals. That was sharpshooter, marksman, and expert. I had the three medals that I achieved there in the shooting. So then when I got into the infantry, then I decided I didn't want to be, you know, doing menial business as a cook and peeling the potatoes and things like that. I wanted to be part of the action. So then that's why I went into the infantry and I took the training for that. The seventy-five recoilless rifle, which is a big gun that really blasts, and then I was good on the BAR, the machine gun, and all that. So when I went overseas, the war was over but I just in case that anything happened, I was trained to do that.

OK. Where were you stationed overseas?

I went over in, oh, I'd say probably '47, the middle of '47, I went to the Philippines. Because I volunteered and you could choose the theater of operations that you could be in. So I spent a year or so in the Philippines and I learned more or less from the local peoples there, Tagalog. Before I left there, I could speak it fluently. Like if I were gonna ask you your name [speaks Tagalog at this point]. That's "What's your name?" And so it was funny about I saw the tsunami deal, most

of those people, they speak that same type of language. Because [speaks Tagalog again] that means "help." So it was funny about that when I saw they said some guy was out there and he was hanging on to something and he was hollering [speaks Tagalog]. And he was meaning, "Help. Help." So I learned, you know, to speak that, the language there. The Filipinos, they have about seven hundred dialects but it's just like Spanish, once you learn a little bit of that. I learned a little bit of a lot of languages, like Japanese, I learned [speaking Japanese] and you know to say "hello" and things like that. And of course you had to learn if you got stranded, they had a booklet that would talk a little bit and, you know, ask for help and tell them about if you want to ask for food or something like that. So I was in the survival mode. I learned a little bit of that.

So after the Philippines, we went to Okinawa. And that was my last stint in Okinawa. I went into Japan for a couple of times in my stint in Okinawa on, like I'd say, a vacation, a furlough, or something, just for recreation, like. But I was in the 24th Infantry. After I got out in '49, I was, you know, retired out from that outfit. My whole division was the 24th Infantry Division. They were over there close to the Korean conflict. Had I not got out, I would've been a **[00:30:00]** goner now because I would've been in the front line because I was a machine gunner and all that. So most of the black people in the 24th got wiped out because the Chinese and North Koreans, they just took over. And in Okinawa I saw I don't know how many graves there. *Lots* of people got killed in Okinawa. Lots of people.

I was going to ask you what Okinawa was like. That's very shortly after the war [WW II].

Because those people, you know, they believe in cremating, the Japanese people. And up in the hills they have those little bunkers, like a mausoleum-like place, so during the fighting time up in the mountains, they kicked them, you know, the deals out, and they would be in there fighting. They looked down on the hill. And the fighting people had problem of getting up there because

they could—thousands and thousands of people. Okinawa had one of the biggest grave deals there that I've seen. Lots of people got killed there. So they had—well, they got more modern now but you can imagine like a flamethrower or thing would shoot fire just like a torch, a welding torch, or something. They used a flamethrower to burn those people out, but you got to get close enough to light this propane thing to get them people out of there, and so a lot of them got slaughtered. You're trying to get up the hill to use a flamethrower, which I don't think was a good idea because lots of people got killed.

And when you're stationed on Okinawa, what was your mission? What was your job? What was the infantry doing there?

Well, at that time when I was in the infantry, you know, the war was over then. So it was more or less like guarding the people and—. Believe it or not, before I left there, it just scared the bejeebers out of me, my first encounter with a jet—over at what they called Naha [airport]. Up on top of the hill, they had those jets, the jet planes at that time, and they brought them in and they put them in sections, putting them together and all that. And once those things came off and the first jet flew over and I heard it, wow! I thought [laughing] in the war. So I hit the ground immediately because of all that noise of that jet deal.

So I soon, you know, like I say, came out of there. Then I had a little more time before my three years were up. I went back to Fort Lewis, Washington. That's where they do a *lot* of training. By that time, I had made sergeant and I was more or less, you know, an instructor deal. I was teaching, more or less, the recruits how to shoot these guns and all that because I was really good at the shooting business.

Yes. So that was up in Washington?

Yes, that was in Fort Lewis, Washington. The nearest town was Tacoma. So that's where I got discharged out of.

Yes. Interesting. So having been so close to the—well, the Korean War came—you didn't have to be involved in the Korean War.

No, luckily.

But you were obviously conscious of it, having been over there.

Yes. My son, the youngest one, he went over there. He spent a year in Korea, and of course he volunteered, and he had to spend four years in there. He spent, I think, almost a year in Kuwait, but he didn't really—he was in the medics, like, and he was glad to get away from that. But he **[00:35:00]** was in Kuwait and that other fight over there.

Was it during the first Gulf War that he was there, or more recently?

He was during the—right after the first Gulf War, after they had, you know, settled things down and the fighting wasn't bad then, after the—but he, you know, he spent a tenure over there in Kuwait and in Iraq. Then he came back and his time was up and then he had to do a year in Korea. South Korea. So he finally got out and luck would have it was he got out, he had to do another two years in the Reserve. Each month or so, he would have to go someplace on the weekend for the—he was in the National Guard thing, so he had to do two years with that. And luckily, he just didn't want any part of it. He saw what happened over there, so he got out. But had he stayed on in there, he would've been over there in Iraq right now. Because he was in the medics.

Right. Well, it's 12:15, so we've been talking a long time. I appreciate what you're telling me. We should probably wrap it up for today, and I wondering if there's any—?

Yes. Would you like a pop? Excuse my—

I'm fine.

Some water or something?

No. I'm fine. But is there anything else you wanted to tell me about the test site or anything? You've told me a lot, so it's very helpful.

I think it was necessary, what I did. I went into the service to help my country, and I have no regrets about that. My work at the test site, I think it was necessary for us to procure these weapons to take care of business. I have no problem with that. But just, say, the treatment that I endured there, which I have problems with that. And, well, I guess it goes with the territory. Even today, after the Martin Luther King incident, he said that everybody should be free, but I just feel now that I'm still not free. We've come a long ways but there are places that we can't go, the golf courses is for—it's the have and have not, more or less. If you got it, OK. If you don't have it, no.

And what about your kids? You said you put your kids through school. Do you think they're facing discrimination still today?

Of course. My daughter, she went through UNLV [University of Nevada, Las Vegas]. She went to UNLV and National University and got her two master's degree there. She's qualified, been teaching for, I'd say, since1979. So she's been looked over for the principalship. She taught at Rancho High School for a while as a Math teacher and a counselor. Then she went to K.O Knudson, Western High School as a dean and an assistant principal, but she's been looked over. She's been an administrator for thirteen years. She knows she's qualified to be that. So she's been relegated to, oh, assistant principal. When the principal take a vacation or something, she runs things. But they pat her on the head, Gwen, you good, we need you, we can't let

you go. But she speaks up for herself. That's the **[00:40:00]** price we have to pay for being, oh, having that suntan, OK?

Yes. But I think it's good, you know, she's learned from you to stand up.

Yes. And one son that I have, he went in construction. He took school training for the pipe fitter and plumber, and he went to Compton College, graduated from there. So at one time, they gave him a job as, you know, being foreman. He ran a lot of jobs. But being a supervisor, he never has reached that plateau yet. But he's good at what he does. But I think that because of that suntan, he's been held back. But he's outspoken about that. And I have another son that's named Michael. He is a computer analyst. He works for the, what is that, the Mirage thing there, and he was recently promoted to vice president of Information Services. My other son graduated from UCLA and owned his own graphics business in Carson, California. He passed away two years ago.

This is my daughter Gwen. That's the school where she teaches. [Showing business cards] OK.

Oh wow, look at that.

She's assistant principal there.

Sierra Vista.

Yes. And my other son, Michael. Like I say, I worked hard to try to get those kids through that.

Oh, the MGM Mirage—oh, Information Systems. Wow. So he directs it. That's great.

Yes, he's second-in-command there. But you know, because of that, oh, suntan, he will never reach the status of being top man. He'll be always second-in-command there. But he's good at what he knows. He's in the computer business and that's it.

Yes, that's great. You must be—

My daughter's good in *her* trade.

OK. Great. I think that that's—I've taken enough of your time for the day. Thank you very much.

No problem.

[00:42:55] End Track 3, Disc 2.

[End of interview]

C.Amie 1

C.Amie 2