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FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT
Transcript

Name: Melvin "Doc" Cleeter
Date Interviewed: 7/1/99 Date Transcribed: 9/23/99 Tape: 46 Project Number 20012

Tape FLHP0100

07:01:14
Q:
Okay um, the first question is always the hardest right?

A:
Well, depends. Might be, might not.

Q:
Just give us your name and spell it to make sure we have it right.

A:
Okay. My name is Melvin Cleeter. M-E-L-V-I-N C-L-E-E-T-E-R. Probably if I tell people my right name probably nobody will know who I am. Uh, for some reason I went by the name Doc for years and years, probably before I started at Fernald and I think that's what I always went by when I worked there so anybody says Doc, that's who I answered by and that was it.

07:01:46
Q:
How'd you get that nickname?

A:
Well, I don't know I had that for several years. I had two sisters and uh they said to you know, they was older and they'd go run around, they'd go out at night. When they got home I'd have to go ask mom, what time did those girls get home. They said that was nosy like a Doc you don't have to know everything you know so. So I kind of blamed it on them giving it to me so I've had it every since. When you see my name in the phone book it says Doc Cleeter in there so you know.

07:02:16
A:
Of course everybody says if you have a name Melvin they say they can see why you'd have a nickname Doc. You know they always said at Fernald they said we don't need a Melvin on the job. I said yeah, there has to be one Melvin on the job to keep it going. So I kind of joked right back with them.

07:02:40
Q:
Great. Um, first of all when and how did you get your job at Fernald?

A:
That was back in 1954. Uh, there was a friend of mine I went to school with. He said I'm going to hunt for, I'm going to get me a job today. He said uh, I'm going to go to Fernald. I said, I've never heard of it, where's it at? So he went and I didn't go with him unfortunately. So he come back, he said he got hired. So it was about 2 or 3 weeks later when school was out and I went up.

07:03:08
A:
Being 35 miles from the little town of Dillsboro, I'd like to never found it but you know I did find it and so. I was very fortunate, they said they were hiring some people. So I got hired and they said it would be 2-3 months before you come to work. Of course I didn't understand why. And they said it's on account the security for the clearance.

07:03:30
A:
They said you'd have to have clearance to work there which would be a Q and it was a top clearance. They said you'd have to be investigated by the FBI. And you'd have to pass the physical and so they said we'll let you know. So that was in July I think so the summer went on and November I got word to come to work. So I was very happy that I got called. So I started on November 29th of 1954.

07:03:59
Q:
Wow, that's great. And um, what was the site like when you first got there?

A:
Back in '54, me being 18 years old and my first job really. I worked when I went to school but my first in a factory. When I got there I think I was in shock how big the place was and so many people. You know I think we had about a half-day of orientation and they said well here we'll give you some clothes and you go to work.

07:04:28
A:
So in those days everybody wore white uniforms and they gave you these little white hats, everybody had to wear this little white hat. I mean that's was a, you had to wear a hat. So everybody was wearing them white uniforms and they gave you shoes and so they said you'd be working in Plant 6 in the rolling mill.

07:04:50
A:
So they took me over there and showed me around a little bit and they said this is what you'll be doing and it was hot and noisy and I thought what in the world did I get into you know. There was, looked like maybe there was thousands of people but you know, but they were very, very busy. When it come to lunchtime they said well you'll have an hour for lunch.

07:05:09
A:
But they said, you got to change clothes and take a shower and go eat and come back to work. And I thought how in the world am I gonna do all that in an hour's time. I guess one thing I never will forget, it was funny, they said, they give me a combination for my locker where you could keep your clothes, and I hate to admit it but I had never worked a combination lock before.

07:05:30
A:
I thought how in the world do you work this. They give me those three little silly numbers and I thought well I'll watch somebody else 'cause I didn't want to play too dumb. So I did figure out how to work my locker and I got in my locker and got my clothes. So that was one of my first experiences when I first got there to get going.

07:05:48
A:
But it was amazing amount of people. I mean when you, when lunch time come there would just be like you know, the streets would just cover with people going down the road. And all these little white hats and white uniforms and go take their showers and you'd have your dirty clothes on one side and you'd have to take a shower and before you could get on the other side there was this stream of water coming through.

07:06:11
A:
Some people didn't want to take a shower, they didn't want to get their hair wet, but you'd, people would fly through these showers you know but you'd still get wet. So whether you took a shower or not, you'd still get wet. So then you'd go to the clean side, put on your clothes, go up to the cafeteria and eat, then do the same thing, go back to work.

07:06:26
A:
But it was so many, many people. Then there were a lot of young people you know. A lot of the jobs, you didn't have to have a trade to do it at that time you know. But so, when I first started I worked for the union and I was hourly and it was just so many people. I mean and the production just put out so much material and it just went on and on.

07:06:48
A:
And they worked overtime. It was, there were people there you know, since it was in the tri-state area, we had a lot of people from Kentucky and Ohio and Indiana. And you know, it was just getting to meet so many different kind of people. You know we were all kids you know we'd cut up, the bosses they were real serious about getting everything done. Of course, we wanted to play a little bit too you know.

07:07:08
A:
You know, they were very strict you know. They'd have smoking areas you could smoke, and you had to go into a smoking area to smoke you know, so it was, we were very busy you know. The building was so huge and so hot you know it was just, it was just kind of an amazing thing at that time.

07:07:30
Q:
And how much did you know about the process when you started there?

A:
Well, I didn't even know what they did when I went there. You know, I didn't, you know after I started there they told me it was whatever you were doing it was so secret. You know it was very confidential. And they said you know what you do here, don't say anything about it anyplace else. I mean, don't tell your wife or your friends or anybody about what you do.

07:07:56
A:
When you went out the door everything stayed there. You didn't tell anybody. And so you know we just kind of indoctrinated. It didn't matter if you swept the floor or if you were an office worker or, you didn't tell anybody what you did. And we believed that was what was supposed to be. And everybody, even though you do your one little job and you didn't know what was going on in another building because you didn't leave your work area.

07:08:18
A:
They were very adamant. If you was in a work area you stayed there. You didn't go wondering off into another building or something, you stayed right in your work area. And uh, you just did that and you know you didn't question you know you just did what you were supposed to do. It seemed like you know they told you what to do, and everybody had their jobs and we were very, very busy.

07:08:37
A:
And uh, it just went on and on. I know it was kind of strange when I first went there. You know they said this place won't run maybe 20 years. I mean this job won't last, you know so there was rumors up and down. There was, there was hirings. After we worked there for years they even started having layoffs so you know people, some people got laid off then they'd start back up again.

07:09:01
A:
They'd hire again. And uh, the work force went up and down for several years but it was very busy for many, many years. I mean, when we was putting out a product. So when I first, I worked in rolling mill probably 3 or 4 years then I wanted to try something else so I transferred up to the Boiler House. And I worked, they brought in coal 'cause we had coal fired boilers, and I worked on the coal pile assisting the guy running the bulldozer.

07:09:36
A:
And uh, it was kind of funny, he was the bulldozer operator and I was the helper. He said have you ever run a bulldozer before? I said no. He said well get on and try it. So I got on the bulldozer and I thought boy this is going to be easy. So I started pushing that coal and I started going up and down making real dents in the coal pile you know but it was kind of funny.

07:09:58
A:
But it wasn't too long and I got onto it and I could operate the bulldozer. I did that for a few years. And uh, it was a very busy place, the Boiler Plant was. That, that time we had 4 boilers and the production dictated how much steam we put out. So when we were very busy we'd put out a lot of steam and in the winter we used steam to heat the whole project too.

07:10:23
A:
So sometime we were operating just about capacity. We had 4 boilers and we'd be putting steam out from all 4 boilers. And everybody was very, very busy. Even though it was cold outside you know, the cold would freeze and we had to break it to get it out of the coal cars. And we was very, very busy but it was a very dedicated group of people you know.

07:10:45
A:
And we thought you know we got to keep it going because the life of the project relied on us working in the Boiler House. Because if we didn't do it they wouldn't have no heat or the production couldn't go. So that was the busy time. And, you want me to keep on telling you stories?

Q:
Sure.

07:10:59
A:
I worked there for a while and decided well I want to try something else. I transferred over to the water treatment and that was right next door to the same building. So I worked there for a while and I seen all these guys having good jobs and I said well you know I didn't want to do the same things. So I found I had to go to school. So, for some reason when I got out of high school I didn't go to college so at that time I started going to night school.

07:11:26
A:
And uh, over a period of time I took the test from the department, I mean the Ohio, State of Ohio and I got my waste operator's license, which you needed, to operator wastewater treatments in Ohio. Then after that I went to more school at nights and I got my water treatment operator's license so I could operator water treatment plant in Ohio.

07:11:52
A:
So I got that. Somewhere along a period of time I thought I wanted to be certified to operator the boilers in Ohio. So I went back to school at night and I got my engineer's license to I could be a stationary engineer so we could operate the boilers. You had to have a operator's license and engineer's license to operator the boilers.

07:12:12
A:
It was kind of a joke, they called them stationary engineer's license because everybody always teases, he says well they call you guys stationary because you work in one place. You don't work you just sit, so that's the reason they call you stationary engineers. But you know it was a very responsible job and uh I did that.

07:12:34
A:
Let's see. And I worked in the water treatment and one job the water treatment people did, they took care of like they called it the general sump. And that was a collection area for all the water that was used in the processing from around the plant. So I worked there for quite some time, did that. We received the water from the different areas of the plant.

07:12:58
A:
We would treat it and disperse it. Pump it out to different places, to the pits or if it met a certain criteria we would pump it off site to the Great Miami River. Then after that it was a few years, they had a job opening in the utility engineers department and so I applied for that and I got that position. That was my first salary job.

07:13:27
A:
And I think that was my final job, I worked that job. And the utility engineer job to me it was a very responsible job. I don't know if the people thought it was but we did because it was kind of a unique group of that time. We always said we had a lot of street sense, our group did, but you know, I think there was five of us and I don't think none of the five had a college degree.

07:13:58
A:
But you know the things that went on I felt that we knew as much about the layout of the plant, you know like the piping and the pumping and the ground water supply and all the, the lines and everything. We had so much hands-on experience doing that type of work that we were, I think we were a very proud group. You know to work with the people and to keep everything going you know.

07:14:29
A:
If we had a water breaks you know we had to know where to isolate them and still keep the plant going you know, it wouldn't disrupt the operations at that time. So that was a busy, busy job. That was

around-the-clock job. Somebody was there 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. So that was, and I enjoyed the job very much.

07:14:52
A:
It was a job where you wasn't tied down to one spot. You could go anyplace in the plant, or not want to go you had to. And but it was a responsible job and where you got to work with a lot of people and mix with a lot of people. I think one of the things that was stuck with me, how good everybody treated me and it was great.

07:15:23
Q:
So you were just mentioning how people were good to you and who were some of your favorite people on site and some of your friends that you worked with?

A:
I guess one of my favorite guys was Digger Pennington. He was my supervisor at my last, several people, but Digger's one of my favorites. You know when you can talk to your supervisor as a person you know, not, I think we were on the same wave level you know. We discussed things and it wasn't all work it was family but yet when the job had to be done you know it was serious.

07:16:00
A:
You know and we took our job serious and we, he was one of the nicest guys I think I've ever met. He was real nice. But they all were. I mean everybody treated me nice and because we mixed with the salary people and the hourly people and you know they all just treated me so nice. It was real nice. Even though we did work hard you know.

07:16:22
A:
Even the construction people, you know when they come in we didn't know what they were going to be doing, but you know the first thing they'd say you know for some reason we got to be doing real well and we'd know everybody on a first name speaking basis. I know when Rust came, Rust Engineering, they were big there for a long time and that was back, must have been early '80's.

07:16:48
A:
Our work force was down to about; it was in the low 400's. We weren't hardly putting out any, doing anything. I mean we were busy, doing what we were supposed to but as far as being productive, we weren't. And that's when they come in there and started doing things and that was a big thing at that time you know.

07:17:04
A:
Get somebody else to come in 'cause we all knew each other, everybody and they started hiring up and things started to go again. But it was very, very interesting, all the people. And being in the tri-state

area, you know there were people there from Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky. I think one of the things I really did enjoy at last you know the people all kind of got old together.

07:17:30
A:
You know there was a bunch of old people there but when we got the new people, when they started hiring, the young people and that was really interesting to work with the young people. 'Cause they brought in ideas and you know I never did like the idea when they said somebody would say well this is the way we always did it you know, we're not going to change.

07:17:49
A:
I didn't like that. And they'd bring in new ideas say let's try this. And remarkable the new people did have some wonderful ideas. And it was so the blend with the old, we had the experience but they had the new ideas and they was ready to try things. And you know when we went with them it was really a nice blend. I mean, it was, I mean there was some people that didn't want to but most of the people you know they want to blend in the old with the new.

07:18:17
A:
And it was very interesting. I mean, when we worked there first National Lead had it for several, several years and they had their ideas and concepts of doing things and we just thought National Lead would be there forever. Then when the, came out that they were not going to renew their contract, I mean the work force was in kind of an uproar.

07:18:45
A:
We were all wondering who was going to be the next contractor and it was very interesting. They would bring in busloads of people. We'd see them riding around from different companies, Martin Marietta, Babcock and Wilcox and Westinghouse. And finally Westinghouse did get it that time and it was kind of an end of an era when National Lead left.

07:19:12
A:
Because a lot of their top management left when the new company came in. And when Westinghouse came in, they were very PR minded, they met with everybody and made you think you was going to be a part of the team. Which we were you know. They were treated very nice. They had dinners, meetings in the cafeteria.

07:19:38
A:
Plant manager at that time Mr. Boswell, I never will forget him. He was so PR orientated and such a friendly fellow and he was so nice. And all the Westinghouse people, they were very nice people you know to get along with. And about that time, well it was still when National Lead was in there, I'm kinda getting off my story, they started a savings plan where the company would match part of it.

07:20:00
A:
That was started when National Lead was there and they had it projected if you put so much in and you'd have so much money after several years you know. So that was one, I'd say one of the best things, one of the best benefits that there was for the employees there.

07:20:16
A:
So when Westinghouse came in they kept that going and I guess I was one of the few that believed true blue Westinghouse. Westinghouse was blue you know and it was a big company so I thought well I'm going to put all my money in savings plan for Westinghouse. You could buy stock into Westinghouse. So very unfortunately I put the biggest part of my savings in with Westinghouse at that time 'cause it was doing great.

07:20:44
A:
But unfortunately down through the years they had some bad times and their stock went down and things didn't work out with my savings plan so I hoped it would you know. But I kind of recovered from it so I did learn a lesson. You know they say don't put all your eggs in one basket but it worked out pretty good.

07:21:06
A:
And when the time came for them to renew their contract, they didn't renew it. We were kind of disappointed. I guess there's some people who's happy but some were disappointed to see them go. So then that was well when they was, they bid and Fluor Daniel got the contract. Then it was a new concept again. Getting used to new people and new ideas.

07:21:32
A:
So even though we worked at the same place, it was like a different job. You know, 'cause each company had their own ways of doing things and different management. The end result was the same but they all had just a little way, different ways of getting there. So we all had to adapt to a different style. I guess they had to adapt to us but in the end things worked out.

07:21:56
A:
I know Fluor; they seemed to be more construction orientated. They weren't used to production type of thing it looked like. But it took them a while. They got used to people and things invariably worked out so it was very interesting. I guess one of the things down through the years, I think it was 1989 when we ceased putting out a product in what we called the production area.

07:22:26
A:
That was to some people it was a traumatic time and to me it was too. After working for someplace from '54 to '89 we had our ups and downs in production quota wise. But when production stopped it

was, I guess it was traumatic and kind of a dramatic experience to work at a place not putting out a product. And it seemed strange to me how we could work and not put out a product.

07:22:56
A:
So that was a different era and a different concept again you know. We had to rethink our ideas and things. So then getting everybody in the cleanup mode. To kind of take care of all our things that we did through the years to kind of correct some of the things what we did and it took time.

07:23:17
A:
Knowing that not putting out a product and cleaning up would be just as important as what we did before. So we had to kind of reeducate ourself to doing a different thing and it was altogether different. So it, that was a learning experience too, it was interesting too. But it was, you know people talked about maybe down through the years if we did do harm to the environment and to the atmosphere and the air, uh, a lot of people don't realize in the '50's that the Cold War at that time was in its heighth.

07:24:00
A:
And what we were doing up there at that time was just a small part of the complete circle. We were just like one little hub in the wheel. And the product we were putting out there, ours wasn't a complete product, we had to send on to some other different sites to complete, to get this whole things so it would be a complete thing so it would work.

07:24:27
A:
And if there was any inadequacies or things that we did wrong, hopefully the things that we gained by it outweighed the mistakes, if we did make mistakes at that time. Because I feel that what we did was for the betterment of all people of the United States. And if it wasn't we might not be in a free country today.

07:25:01
Q:
And during the Cold War what was the typical American's mindset, you know we were discussing the bomb shelters and those types of things.

A:
It was kind of funny at that time you know living in this area, Cincinnati being a very machine tool company, I mean where there's a lot of companies that make machine tools, so that was, we was high on the list if there ever was a hit from some other country. So you know people at that time, bomb shelters were a big thing and people were buying bomb shelters.

07:25:33
A:
And you know they were talking about fallout shelters and things like that. And at work it was kind of interesting, we were, I guess the management was quite concerned about it too because they even had K-rations. And we had a place where we had water stored in very secure areas. You know in case something like that did happen.

07:25:51
A:
But you know people today don't realize that the danger was right there. I mean we were living a very dangerous time. But after the Cold War subsided and went down you know that's when those things went away. And that's when our work wasn't needed as much as it was then because I think we ruled with power and that's what helped us at the time.

07:26:13
A:
But uh, it was very interesting what we did. I guess one thing I was thinking about down through the years as time goes along and you modernize. When we first started there, of course everybody knows we operated without radios we didn't have the computers, we didn't have pagers or cell phones and later years I look back and think how did we operated without cell phones and pagers.

07:26:45
A:
And but we did. We had, there would be certain codes you know if we had, we even had them for take shelter you know if we thought we'd be bombed or something, we had different codes that would send that over the alarm system plant wide. And some was for thunderstorms and some was for imminent danger and some went if we had enough time to get home, you know that was all in our thinking you know at that time, that type of danger was possible.

07:27:13
A:
But we did operate without radios and when we got the first radios it was, you know it was just a few people got them. These are really neat things, these are really handy. You go out to use a telephone, we was really getting up here in the age we was really getting modern. But then as time went along people got pagers and things and cell phones and we thought we couldn't operate without them.

07:27:36
A:
But at that time you know everybody else did the same things that we did. One thing that was probably interesting years ago, uh, there was no females that worked in the so-called production area. If you know any clerks job or anything like that, that would be done by males. And saving way for the union, there was no, it was all men.

07:28:04
A:
And uh, when it first started you know that was just an amazing thing you know to see women out in the plant. You know we weren't prepared, we didn't have the proper facilities for them so you know it

was, they had to get things ready for them you know so they could have everything for both people who worked there, I mean male and female.

07:28:20
A:
And that was very interesting at that time. When we had supervisors and clerks and things and that was quite a change for us to get used to. I mean, but they found out that it was no problem, they could do it just as good as anybody else _____, we hate to admit it but they did. So they kind of blended right in you know they could do the job and you know they would take their part. And it was just part of the, you know it was changing times.

07:28:47
Q:
Who were some of the first women that worked on the process side?

A:
Uh, there was a Harriet. She still works there. I can't recall her last name either, Wall, Harriet Wall. She was one of the first if not the first in salary, or in hourly. She was one of the first in hourly and one of the first supervisors we had. I remember that bridge distinctly. We talked about it a minute ago, I can't remember her name now.

Q:
Lucy.

07:29:20
A:
Lucy, Lucy, Lucy Rathgens. Yeah, she, she was had some very nice experiences I assume being first supervisor out in the plant. But after that it's just kind of a normal thing you know, they was, whoever had the qualifications, that's who got the jobs and which should have been years ago. I guess that was just one of the things that we _____ other places and didn't realize it.

07:29:44
A:
Other people could do a job besides men. But, and it was neat you know. They could do their work just as good as anybody else you know and they all worked together so it was no problem you know that they couldn't do it. So it was, it was, everybody just joined in and you know helped each other and it worked out real good. I think.

07:30:05
Q:
Great, we're gonna, we need to take a little break here 'cause we're.

08:01:03
Q:
Terrific. Um, yeah, go ahead and finish your thought.

A:
Okay. One thing at the cafeteria was a big thing at that time you know, I even joked to some people that the feed was so good they couldn't wait to get to work to get a good meal. But that time when they were busy, believe it or not, but they had three different aisles where you could go through to get food at that time.

08:01:25
A:
When they were real busy they served food on each shift, the midnight shift and second and first. And it wasn't food that was brought in, they had a regular baker that would bake pies and when we went to work in the morning we could stop up and get doughnuts and coffee and things like that. And the chef was, he was, they didn't buy nothing that was pre-cut or anything, they'd bring in like quarters of beef and have you know hanging.

08:01:53
A:
And you could get steaks, you know they would, it was really a nice meal and they put a nice, I mean it was really a nice cafeteria. That was one thing that kind of stuck in my mind is there was three serving lines and it just kind of went down to you eating out of the machines you know but the work force dictated as time go along, economics and things.

08:02:14
A:
But that was a very nice benefit we had at that time. And people enjoyed the lunch, you know visiting with people at lunchtime and getting a nice meal, that was a pretty big thing.

08:02:26
Q:
I just missed out on the cafeteria. I got there just a couple of years away. Something I do want to cover was um, the, something that you're aware of that a lot of people might not be aware of is the Nike missiles here in Dillsboro and around in the area. And I understand there was some missiles on your dad's farm. If you could talk a little bit about that issue just a little bit.

08:02:48
A:
Okay. Back in the '50's at that time you know relating to the Cold War and the, the world as a whole that time, Cincinnati was one of the cities that would have been high on the hit list for another country. So the government saw fit at that time I assume the way they did it, they had this anti-missile defense system to protect the Cincinnati area.

08:03:14
A:
So they had three of these they built and one of them was in, me being from Dillsboro, come off my dad's farm which was a very exciting time at that time. They were coming in and buying the ground and saying you know we're going to take it one way or the other. If you don't like the price, too bad you can fight it but we're going to take it.

08:03:35
A:
They come in and said this is how much we want. So it was, it worked out okay, everybody worked out and it suited everybody. And they put on of these here in Dillsboro and to the best of my knowledge, I'm not sure, I think there was two other ones. I think one was in Oxford, Ohio then the other one was in Wilmington, Ohio. And that was supposedly to help defend this area from any other attack from foreign country.

08:04:04
A:
Because all the things that did take place in this area. So what's kind of interesting since it came off my dad's farms, everything was underneath the ground, you couldn't see anything. But once in a while they had to test the mechanisms make sure they could raise them up. And sometimes you could come by and see where they had the missile raised up and you know like it was ready to fire.

08:04:27
A:
But that didn't last too many years, I guess it got outdated. And as time went along they found out since security wasn't like it was and that the Cold War dwindled down so it was another phase that went into history. But at that time it was very interesting and very important to the defense of the country and to the defense of the people that live in this area.

08:04:51
A:
So we felt rather fortunate to have them there because it kind of give us a sense of security knowing they would be here if something did happen, hopefully. So that was a big thing at that time, the missile defense system.

08:05:05
Q:
And also as a utility engineer you were part of the fire brigade. (comment – yes, uh huh) Can you tell us a little about that experience?

A:
Being on as a utility engineer uh, requirement was that you would be on the Emergency Response Team, or fire brigade whichever you want to call it. And being part of that, required quite a bit of training, putting on the suits and going into places and if there was ever any fires. Luckily we didn't have any bad fires. We had few years and years ago when we were operating on fuel, fires in Plant 5.

08:05:44
A:
But nothing ever real bad. Uh, and the big fire we had which was kind of the beginning of the end. When we had the Boiler House fire. I mean that was just, to most of us I think it was just about losing, like losing your house. I mean we fought that fire I mean we fought it with everything we had. But luckily nobody got hurt.

08:06:12
A:
And we had several neighboring fire departments in to assist us on that. And it was a very cooperative thing you know. Even though we trained with the local fire departments surrounding area, we didn't know how it would ever come out if we had to use them. But through our training with these people and knowing them and training with them it was a very cooperative effort that we had.

08:06:40
A:
Uh, nobody got hurt. But we did have considerable damage to our Boiler House. And that was one of the most, I guess one of the most disheartening things that ever happened when we was there. Knowing that we put out a service year in and year out. People just got accustomed to having heat in their building and things like that, and water.

08:07:00
A:
And when they didn't get it you know people realized how important it was and I think we felt kind of bad for not being able to keep it going. But through some very hard work from a lot of people uh, went off site and brought in a temporary boiler and people worked hard to get it hooked up. And we got temporary repairs made so we got back in business fairly quick.

08:07:25
A:
But the fire was one of the most traumatic things during my tenure at Fernald. But it was just one of those things that happened. It was an accident and I don't know if they ever did find out for sure what happened but you know it's one of those things that happened. And we survived from it and went on to bigger and better things hopefully and we learned from it.

08:07:50
A:
But we did have a lot of cooperation. We had several little fires. Getting back to the fires, being on the fire brigade, this, what we were working with at that time, this material was new to everyone. And you know we had this place where we'd take some of the residue and dump it in the K-65 area. And it was strange, if the weather conditions were just right towards evening, that stuff would just automatically start burning.

08:08:20
A:
And we knew it would just blow. And you know till we got used to how to handle it, people thought well smother it, put water on it, there was no fire you couldn't put out with water. That didn't work on

this. I mean you could put water and it didn't matter it just keep right on burning. So finally people, we got smart and finally we decided you could just smother it.

08:08:40
A:
So we'd smother it with more dirt and cover it up with more stuff. But you know it was a funny material. It would just keep burning and sparking and so. And it was unique the way it happened like I said, it wouldn't happen in the mornings. It would be about the same time every afternoon, we'd head out to K-65 here we'd have another little fire out there.

08:08:58
A:
We'd do our little thing again, take care of it. So, but it was very unique how it was. And the K-65 area was kind of a catchall area you know that's where we pumped our residue and sludge what didn't meet the criteria that we could pump off site. And we had these pits. When it first started they just dug the pits and put a high liner in them.

08:09:23
A:
But as time went along, everything got more sophisticated and I guess we learned and everybody else did too so we put the rubber lining in them. So hopefully that would kept the material from creeping in and contaminating the aquifer.

08:09:38
A:
So we did that and that helped a lot. Then they found out some of the pits were leaking. Then people got concerned about, we had these K-65 Silos out there, I guess everybody in the country knows about by this time, the infamous silos. So they were concerning about them leaking so they thought well they would kind of reinforce them.

08:10:00
A:
So they brought in these contractors and they hauled dirt around them, put dirt around them and we, at that time after they got it all fixed they said well we better get the grass to grow on them. So we weren't concerned about radon at that time too much so we took water hose out there and we watered the grass to get the grass to grow.

08:10:18
A:
The biggest thing at that time nobody wanted to go near the K-65 Silos, we weren't concerned about the radon, we were concerned about snakes. 'Cause that's where the snakes laid. It's nice and warm up there and said well nobody's going out there, there's snakes out there, nobody wanted to go out there. But some of us brave souls, brave souls, I don't know if we were braver but dumb but we did so we did.

08:10:40
A:
As time went along we did find out there, was being radon emitted from there so we started taking more precautions and as time went along they tried to cure that problem. And then they put pump stuff on top of it and it was very interesting. They put like a camera in there and we, this camera would look all around and we could see inside the silos.

08:10:59
A:
We could see the consistency of it. So they had off site construction people come in and we pumped this, or they did but we was out there while they pumped this material in this top, inside of the Silos to hopefully reduce the radon as it emitted through there. Hoping the radon would be emitted in this filter media they put in there.

08:11:21
A:
So that worked pretty good and that helped a lot. But then they put in this system where they could pump the gas off there went through like a cleansing system, like a filter and they did that for quite some time. But that was one of the big concerns as time went on, the silos and as time went along they're still working on it this day to try to figure what and how to get it out I'm not sure they will, as time goes along.

08:11:45
A:
And the pits, uh, they were huge. So back, they had this one Pit 3 it was huge. It was, I mean it was filled up, we got all the material we could pump in, we called it raffinate, that was out of the bi-lingo we used at that time, it was just a slur name. But it was just a by-product. And it was pumped out there. This one pit, Pit 3 I don't know how many, it was covered several acres.

08:12:11
A:
So it was filled up so staff or management, someone got the idea they was going to cover this pit with dirt. So they started hauling dirt and they hauled dirt and, I mean with and time heavy equipment had anything to do with it, they'd get their big yukes out and haul dirt. So they started working around it and you would have, they'd haul dirt and, and the stuff in this pit was like a slurry.

08:12:37
A:
So we'd be, or they'd be hauling it out there and all at once you know this stuff would cave in. The dirt would cave in then this muck would work up. So I mean we just had the bulldozer we just had the regular blade on it. So somebody come up with the bright idea, they said we'd put an extension on this blade. So we built an extension on this blade, well maintenance people did, we was part of it.

08:13:00
A:
So they put this huge extension on this blade, so when they pushed this dirt in there and if there was any cave-in and muck come up we wouldn't lose a bulldozer operator. So it was very interesting. As

time went along we kept dumping dirt all around that pit. And finally several years later uh we did get the pit covered up. So what's, what you see now on top is not what's underneath.

08:13:27
A:
So it was, I mean that was very interesting. I guess one of the things that happened out there years ago, we were all young and did crazy things so this supervisor decided they wanted sample this stuff that was in these pits. So me and one other guy, we got out in this boat and there's only about this much (holding hands about 1-foot apart) water on top and the rest of it is muck.

08:13:52
A:
So we got in this little rowboat and rowed out there and here we were taking these pipe samples and taking samples don't there, I don't know if we had a lifejacket on, we probably didn't, probably didn't who knows. We didn't bother much about it. So here we got out there, they was starting to pull us in and the rope broke and we sat out there in the middle of that pit.

08:14:10
A:
And of course we didn't care, we was young, we thought it was funny, we didn't care. So somehow or another they got a rope out there they pulled us in, we got in without breaking little rowboats so we got the samples and things. So we got the job done. So that was one experience that was kind of interesting at the time.

08:14:28
Q:
What other kinds of things did they put in some of the other pits?

A:
Uh, you know we heard rumors. That time I wasn't really directly involved in that. You know I heard rumors that we put a lot of stuff out there but I don't think there's as much put out there that some people claim to be. I think some people might have, there might have been I can't say. But when the latter few years I think the things what we put out there you know was in spec with what we could do.

08:14:58
A:
So you know I'm sure they'll find surprises when they start digging it up but you know that was just kind of the place where we put some of the stuff we didn't know what to do with. I mean you know the by-product, there was so much of it you know. Years ago when they first started when they unloaded the stuff you'd see 15 or 20 rail cars sitting there.

08:15:13
A:
I mean they was busy unloading it come in 55-gallon drums. And they'd bring it from all over. I think some of it come from, the raw material come in from Canada and we got it in from out West, Colorado out west. And some of it come from foreign country, I think at that time they called it Belgian Congo. I think that's where they said we got our best ore from.

08:15:33
A:
But there's no Belgian Congo anymore. I don't know what it is but they came there from all over the world. You know the better raw material you got the better it worked out in the system. But it was so busy you know. They'd bring in rail cars and people would be busy unloading you know it was just unreal how much went on.
08:15:51
A:
I don't think people realized how much tonnage of products went through there down through the years. I mean 'cause it came inn in a raw form called like a, I guess the best way to describe it would be like a mud. And through the process, the end process was a nice piece of metal you know. It looked like a well, it was like heavy, looked like a nice piece of copper.

08:16:19
A:
Well the things that was so funny used to somebody would come in there new and they'd say you know this stuff was probably one of the heaviest metals there is. They'd say give me a piece of metal so big, you'd think a person could pick that up, they'd say go pick that up will ya? You try lifting, you couldn't even budge it.

08:16:33
A:
'Cause you know it was so heavy. You know that was a very heavy dense metal. And that was one of the very amazing things how little that metal could be but it was so dense and compact it was so heavy. And that was very interesting, how many tons of material went through there. One experience we had years ago in the wintertime, I guess it was kind of a memorable experience to me, it was a very cold winter and somehow we were waiting to get some water out of our water tower one day and we couldn't get any water out.

08:17:08
A:
So after we checked around a little bit we found out the bottom part of the water tower froze over. We couldn't get no water. So here we sat up there with a water tower, we couldn't get any water for fire protection. So we fiddled around with it we said how are we going to get this taken, rectified because you know it wasn't going to thaw by itself.

08:17:28
A:
So we come to the bright idea that we'd take pipes up there. So anyways we got the young people who was daring and dumb I guess and didn't care. So I happened to be one of them. So they said well climb up on top of the water tower. So we got up there and it, middle of winter, 20 percent below zero, so me and another guy got on top of the water tower, the biggest one on the west side.

08:17:54
A:
So we got up there and they pull up sections of pipe and we were standing on top of the tower and we had these sections of pipe we just put them together and we'd stick them down in there. So after we

got them stuck down there we pulled up the steam hose. So we put the steam hose down there and here we was standing on top of this tower in the middle of winter, put that steam in there and we did thaw out the water tower.

08:18:15
A:
So it was very interesting you know the things we did. Uh, that had never happened before. We didn't realize it would get that cold. But after we did have one freeze up problem we come from another deal and put in another system where we could pump the water, recirculate. So we didn't have to do that again but it was, 'cause it was a very memorable experience.

08:18:40
A:
'Cause it could have collapsed the whole water tower. That was one of the crazy and daring things we did for the good 'ole Fernald to keep it going. It was, it was one of the things that was something else.

08:18:56
Q:
Now in uh, of course in 1984 and subsequent years directly after that, that's when a lot of stuff hit the media about the dust collector leak in Plant 9, and uh there was a lot of media attention. And how did you as a worker react to that?

08:19:19
A:
Uh, after working there all the years with not ever seeing no news people or media on the site, no TV cameras or anything, then when the big story did break in the middle '80's I guess it was about the dust collector in Plant 9 failing and not doing what it was supposed to do. That was changed the way from then on you know it was just different. We had news people there and they even let them on site and we couldn't believe it.

08:19:50
A:
When they'd say well here comes the news media, you know Channel 5 or 9 will come on site it was, it was very different for the work force. I mean because we just couldn't believe that would ever happen to let somebody in there. But when that happened with Plant 9 the dust collector on Plant 9 it changed the way everything was because that was when people on the outside you know found out what we were doing and they magnified a lot of things that weren't you know as they were.

08:20:21
A:
And they didn't know what was going on. But it changed from then on because after that the news media was interested in seemed like every time something happened they were right there. And you know, seemed like we were just in the spotlight from then on. But that was very uh, well it was a trying time for all of us at that time because nobody did anything intentionally.

08:20:48
A:
And a few people on, I knew them very well and it was kind of a tragic thing for one of the persons that was directly involved 'cause his life had some very direct changes after that in his family life. And you know it wasn't because people were trying to be dishonest, we just didn't know. And we were still wrapped up in doing what we were supposed to be doing or you know what we thought was the right thing to do.

08:21:18
A:
I don't think we did anything wrong intentionally. And I think that's what a lot of people don't understand. I mean it was did because it was for everybody's good. And few mistakes we made, they weren't intentionally.

08:21:38
Q:
So what was it like finally when they did shut down the plant? Like I know it was kind of a long process to shut down the plant but there was a moment when they finally threw the switch, tell me about that.

08:21:49
A:
Yeah, there was rumors back several years ago, when we were putting on a product there was Plant, I think it was, well we used to call it Weldon Springs out in St. Louis and they did some of the things that we did. And they said well, you're either going to shut down, it's either going to be you or Weldon Springs. So finally the word came out that we were going to pick up the work and Weldon Springs was going to be shut down.

08:22:12
A:
So that made everybody happy. So we operated fairly steady for quite a while. But we did have our ups and downs. I remember one time when was very busy, this was years ago, I mean we were busy putting out a product, we went to lunch, come back from lunch they said, I think they said shut down the N Reactor out in Washington, in Hanford.

08:22:34
A:
Part of work just stopped right there. I mean there wasn't, the machine shut down at lunch and that's just the way it was, if they didn't need it we didn't put it out. And things like that you know it just happened so quick. Uh, then in 1989 when Westinghouse was there they almost just stopped, I mean production, we always thought they'd start back up we just thought it was a matter of time.

08:22:56
A:
And as time went along we all kind of got the idea hey this is for real this time. And you know after it was down so long you know we was operating with antiquated equipment anyway you know. So it was

you know we all kind of could see the handwriting on the wall that this was the end. And uh, you know of course everybody was wondering what's going to happen to their jobs and everything.

08:23:18
A:
So after that they started getting into cleanup mode and doing that so that was, that was something else at that time too. It was very big but it was one thing that was very interesting to me years ago, we'd work in these buildings and later on I couldn't even walk in these buildings where I used to work. You know I teased the rad techs you know I know they had a job to do, but we cut, those rad techs were always kind of a pain in the butt we always thought.

08:23:51
A:
We had things to do we wanted to do it you know. We wasn't used to them being there. One time we had one rad tech on the project, just one. He'd carry his little Geiger counter around you know and check something, that was okay, 'cause we were busy. Then when we didn't put a product anymore these rad techs come in in swarms. We wonder what the hell's going on here you know, we don't need you guys.

08:24:12
A:
And you know we finally realized you know that maybe we should have had them years ago. But just something you know we weren't, it wasn't to be at that time. But uh, like I said you know the building I used to work day in day out when I first started there, later on when I wanted to go in there, oh, you had to check in, you had to put on shoe covers and things you know.

08:24:35
A:
And I always teased these guys I said hell we used to work in there and he said oh you forget about what happened in the past you can't do that anymore. But it was, you know and I, it took me a little while to get used to that mode too. 'Cause you know I said well you know I thought these kids, they don't know what they're doing.

08:24:50
A:
But you know they were doing it for our good. But that time you know we was, we just had normal work loads. I mean we'd go in there and work, then you'd have to suit up, put on two pair of gloves, a respirator and that just to go in. You'd have to sign in and sign out you know that was, I guess I was kind of in a hurry anyway.

08:25:12
A:
Utilities engineer jobs was one of those jobs where you covered the whole plant and you know if I wanted to go somewhere or in our group you wanted to get it done and get it, if you wanted to go in that building you couldn't go in until the rad tech was there. And that was a little bit hard for ole Doc to get used to.

08:25:29
A:
'Cause they knew me and we got to, they'd say well you can't go in there and we you know kind of joked about it. But I know they had a job to do too. So, and eating and smoking used to was pretty lax years ago and they got so you can't eat out here. We thought that was funny 'cause we always did. We'd have little snacks and things you know that was some of that took place, smoking especially.

08:25:54
A:
I don't know about eating so much as smoking, but you know that was just part of the rules you know they found out that it shouldn't be. But it was something you had to adapt to as time went along. And it just took time to get into it. So it was a different culture and I guess I feel pretty good. Hopefully I adapted from being an old timer to survive all that and then getting in with the new people.

08:26:20
A:
I knew they thought I was an old hag but I you know I always liked all the new guys and they always treated me good. I always said I said I think they felt sorry for me that's the reason they treated me so good. But they were good, I liked all the guys. You know it was neat and people in the garage you know when we weren't doing much, you know we kind of got to know everybody.

08:26:39
A:
We knew everybody's family and how many kids they had and whether they went on vacation you know and knew, we just, 'cause we weren't that busy you know and didn't have that many people. But then we started getting new people and that kind of changed. But like I said before, when the new people come in it made it very interesting because they came from different parts of the United States.

08:27:00
A:
You know, they'd have interesting stories and everybody had things to tell. But when it got right down to it everybody was the same. They all had the same worries and things to talk about you know everybody's the same when you get down to it. So that was pretty neat. Uh, then when they had the last, well in '89, they started talking about the RIF and had to get rid of some people.

08:27:26
A:
So they talked about how they was going to do it and who they was going to get rid of. They had this rating system, everybody got rated you know and you was wondering if you was going to be rated good and everything. 'Cause everybody was concerned about their jobs. So I'm sure it was a big hardship for the company to find out who to get, you know to put on the list. I'm sure it'd be hard for anybody.

08:27:48
A:
But finally they did decide how many people they had to be RIFed. And they said well if you're not on the list you can put in for it. You know so the benefits they come up with sounded pretty good. So I

thought well, I'll put in for it because it was getting close to, I wasn't going to work past 60 or 62. So the package they had was still good, so I put in for it and they accepted it.

08:28:17
A:
So they said you could work up until a year after that. So I worked there for a year knowing I was going to retire. But uh, you know a lot of people say well Doc you shouldn't do this you don't have to worry about it, you only have a few months to go. But I guess you know being hardheaded or dumb or stupid you know I think I worked just as good the last day as the first day hopefully.

08:28:44
A:
You know you couldn't stop you know if you had things to do. But it was, it was very rewarding. But when we did finally have the last, when everybody left that day it was kind of a sad time too, 'cause you know I left a lot of people you know that I'd worked with for many, many years. But it was uh, enjoyable experience too.

08:29:10
A:
I think one of the last, when I walked out you know leaving the place after 42 years it was a funny feeling, it really was.

08:29:21
Q:
Good. We're going to take a little break.

TAPE FLHP0102

09:01:04
Q:
Great. And uh, just tell us about the different um, we were just discussing this, talk a little bit about the different uh, organizations that were in charge of the site as far as the government goes.

A:
Okay. When it first started everything was under the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) and I think their main office at that time was out of Oak Ridge and we had a few, several people from AEC on site. They were kind of like the overseers of the whole project. Then down through the years the AEC was dissolved or changed and we went under another one.

09:01:40
A:
It was called ERDA (Energy Research Development Authority) and we worked under those, that outfit for several years. Then the government changed things again and the last of, continuing now it went under DOE (Department of Energy). So as time went along down through the years as the production went up and down their manpower kind of changed too.

09:02:07
A:
At one time there was several AEC people there then it went down when we weren't hardly doing anything and I'm not sure but I think at one time we only had one DOE or ERDA person on site, best I can remember. I remember, but I think we only had one which was very amazing according to the way it is now, we have several now.

09:02:33
A:
But it was interesting 'cause I remember he had his little car. He drove around on site and everybody knew so and so come around that was the man and it was kind of interesting 'cause he kind of watched things and kept an eye on things. But that changed too as things went along they needed more oversight and they brought in more people and which was needed to see what's going on.

09:02:54
A:
One thing I thought might be kind of interesting to people, we had one man kind of disappear several years ago. Uh, probably might have been in the '80's I think. Anyway we had a small maintenance crew on the midnight shift and the person in question was, he was one of our, belonged to our maintenance group. And for some reason when it was time to go home that morning, I don't know just exactly how it happened, but anyway he wasn't there for his ride when they left.

09:03:36
A:
And they started checking around and he didn't come home. So they got concerned and they started checking around the site and some people seem to think that this person might have went in one of our molten vat furnaces over in the rolling mill in (Plant) 6. So they was checking there, of course they checked the whole site you know to check for him.

09:04:03
A:
So they started a big inquiry of checking in this one furnace in Plant 6. And it was a very in-depth check, investigation in that. But the person never was found and what the final results was I don't know but at that time it was very newsy thing around the plant. I mean everybody had their own ideas, he jumped the fence in the middle of the night or escaped or went in one of the furnaces.

09:04:37
A:
But everybody had different ideas. The place in question where they thought he might of went in, it was a molten furnace and this material in here was like a real hot molten salt and it would be, had to keep it a certain degrees to do what they wanted to do with their production when we was in production. And this furnace had a continuous printout time and temperature on it.

09:05:04
A:
And uh the rumor was, I didn't see it so I can't verify it, but they said one time during that night in question when he disappeared the chart took a small deviation in temperature, just a little bit. And

some people theorized that might have been when he went in there. But we didn't know for sure, but anyway what they did, they turned the power off of the furnace and they took all this material out of there.

09:05:38
A:
They took it all out and went through it piece by piece, little pieces I mean they went over that. And they had this area all cordoned off when they went through it and they jackhammered it out of there. You know it was just like molten rock you know. And they did find some things they thought that might have been attributed to him like shoelaces or your steel toe shoes.

09:06:00
A:
But you know it probably could not been conclusive because you know somebody might have throwed some things in there uh just as a prank or something down through the times. So I don't know what the results was because that was a big deal at the time but I don't know what ever worked out. Down through the years it wasn't all work, there was a little horseplay going.

09:06:21
A:
Of course I know the company always was against horseplay you know. But when we worked in Plant 6 they had these big furnaces, it's all gone now so it won't hurt to tell, I'm sure they'll get a kick out of it. We had these rubber gloves we'd wear and you'd fill them up with water.

09:06:37
A:
You take a little rubber glove and throw it in the furnace, man it'd pop like a canon going off. Once in a while people'd get in a playful mood when no supervisor around and they'd throw one of these in the furnace, man it'd pop, it would go off like a shotgun. Them bosses, they'd come flying out of the office, the office was right there next door they'd be where it was cool, everybody would say what happened, I didn't hear anything, what happened.

09:06:58
A:
Well they'd go back in there, they'd shake their heads you know. I mean, we did do things kind of keep the humor in things but it was very, very funny you know. 'Cause we were all young you know but they kept us working hard. We broke the monotony once in a while but it did make a nice little noise.

09:07:13
A:
But getting back to the guy that went into the furnace. After that, myself included, that building, nobody worked in there at nights. And we'd usually make a tour through there a couple times a night just for checking for leaks and things. It had a few lights in it but be hard to imagine to walk into a great big building with no lights, I mean just a few lights on you.

09:07:38
A:
You'd be walking down through there, you'd be looking back behind your shoulder see if anybody was behind you and about that time a pigeon would squaw or something, something would pop. You know you'd say it was a little bit eerie for several nights, I didn't admit to too many people but I did have a little bit of a eerie feeling walking down through there.

09:07:54
A:
I think even it got so, lucky the guards, they got to carry guns but I think they even went through there two people after that for awhile. But you know I guess they figured we were dispensable so we did it on our own. But they went in doubles I think this was, it was it was very interesting. I mean, it made you look over your shoulders once in a while.

09:08:18
A:
One thing I didn't mention about security maybe I did, but when we first started there security was so tight you know and about what went on. They had security officers all over the place and around production area they had these guard towers that would remind you like you see around prison. They'd be these towers, they four or five of them around the perimeter.

09:08:42
A:
And they'd have security personnel, they would man these day and night 24 hours a day 7 days a week. You'd see them climb up in there for their little tour duty. They'd take their little guns and their little uniforms and go up there and sit and watch you know that's what they did.

09:08:55
A:
That was their job. But as time went along they found out it wasn't needed, security wasn't as tight as it was. That was one of the little quirks that as time went along (cough – excuse me) you know that was, that was one of the things that happened at that time. It was kind of a memorable thing. Uh, when we first started there you know it was more of a class thing you know.

09:09:19
A:
Salary here, hourly here, you know I think it was that way every place. You know if you were salaried you'd eat here and hourly eat there when you go to lunch. But down through the years I think we decided we was all one. We was all kind of alike you know we'd kind of get where we'd get along and mingle. You know it was more of a together talk things over and make which was a good, better rapport.

09:09:40
A:
You know people got along and they talked things over which was really worked out good. Uh, Westinghouse was great with that in they made everybody feel like they was part of the team you

know. They all did but you know that's one thing, you always remember something about everybody and they were great people, they treated us good.

09:09:59
A:
And but it was always said when one left and another one came in. You know 'cause you was always anticipating what was going to be the next deal. It was just like working for another company even though we worked for the same outfit. You know it wasn't a boring time I'll tell ya. You know they all had their little ideas and little different rules. But it was very interesting.

09:10:25
A:
When they decided they wasn't going to use the buildings anymore, to start tearing them down, uh that was very interesting. I think one of the first buildings they decided they wanted to do away with was Plant 7. That was the infamous building that was used for just a few years and it was one of the tallest ones. So they decided to get an outfit in to implode the building.

09:10:45
A:
So we was all kind of interested in how that was going to go. So being part of Emergency Response Team, when they did get everything ready to go uh everything was set. You know they had the ERT in there as an emergency in case something happens. So the guys they were very good at this, they were known worldwide. But they said they never had any fires there won't be any problems.

09:11:10
A:
So it was set on a Saturday I think. They had the stage set, we had the big dignitaries in, the time was going to go. And we had the big countdown the big boom-boom rumbled and building creeped and rumbled a little bit. A little dust flew and lo and behold the building didn't go down.

09:11:26
A:
So the guy, I mean I was right beside of him there 'cause you know we were there, I was management so in the field. So they come running up there and said what do we do. I mean they had these dignitaries out there, they wanted to see this building go down. They said we want answers, what happened. This guy said I don't care. He said I'm not talking to nobody he said I'm interested in this building.

09:11:45
A:
Why the building didn't go down. Of course the dignitary's newscasters, they were wanting answers. So that was very traumatic time, the building didn't go down. But finally it did go down but that was very interesting to say the least the building didn't go down the first change. But it went down finally so and everybody ended up being happy with it, it just took a little while.

09:12:08
A:
So it was, then I think after I was gone, the place where I worked the infamous boiler house. I think they decided they didn't need the boiler house anymore. They went after all those years using the coal, uh after being concerned about contamination and what we was doing with the atmosphere with the dust and everything, they went to the gas boilers.

09:12:33
A:
So after they went to the gas boilers they proved to be maybe not as economical but they worked a lot better. You didn't have to worry about the emitting anything so after that they didn't need the boiler house anymore. Which we thought they could never get along without. So it proves that you can be not needed. So they brought in the gas boilers and that was the end of an area of the boilers.

09:13:00
A:
And uh, through the years the water plant was very essential part of the operation of the plant. 'Cause the process when they were operating took a lot of water. Plus you know having water for 2-3000 people and we had just a small city. But as time went along we didn't need as much water. So since the neighboring area did not have any water supply, through the goodness of the government there was a grant issued and I think they got water around the area which is nice for them.

09:13:34
A:
And they decided it would be more economical to put the plant on the city water supply. So when they did that, that was the end of another area, the water treatment plant was no longer needed 'cause they bought the water from Hamilton County or Cincinnati but then they didn't have to pump water any more. So that was another thing that was you know it was something that we always had that ended.

09:13:59
A:
And it worked out very successful. And when construction people come in you know there was always, no matter what you did it seemed like you had to dig. So you know down through the years we had some experienced people there. And you know when I took this job you know utilities engineer they were supposed to know everything.

09:14:20
A:
I mean you know if nobody else knows they'd call a utilities engineer and say well Doc what's underneath the ground here. And you were supposed to know. I mean it was just an unwritten law you know if nobody else knew, if you couldn't find it on the prints, we were supposed to know. So you know I always felt pretty secure.

09:14:34
A:
We had one fellow who had worked there for years and years and I always said he had a memory like an elephant. Elmer Thinnes, I'm sure that might ring a bell with someone but he could remember

anything. And he had did what I did before but he went on to another job so I didn't feel too bad having this job knowing that he was always there.

09:14:52
A:
Every once in a while I'd call him at home, I'd call him he'd say what the hell do you want now Doc, he'd say what do you want to know. I'd tell him what I want, he said don't you remember that I told you once. He say go over there, go there and he was usually right. But finally after he retired, then I got to saying well you don't have anybody else to go to, the buck stops on your shoulder because there's nobody else who knows where these lights are at.

09:15:19
A:
So I thought well I better start remembering a little bit make sure we know what's going on. But as time went along you know you get by you know you learn to find things. But it was like I said, our group was five of us and hopefully I always thought it was a very responsible group. Because nobody would dig you know, we had to okay it to make sure we didn't hit, because all our lines we had water, gas lines, and sewer lines and everything underneath the ground.

09:15:47
A:
So you know they'd say is it okay to dig here? So if you said yes or you know you was kind of putting your life on the line you know electric and everything. So you know that's one thing I was concerned about. I mean I wasn't concerned about hitting the water line because all we could do, we'd fix that. But you know digging hidden electric you know there's a chance, you know of something happening.

09:16:09
A:
So that part was very, very responsible and I did take that very serious because you know, when they always said you know when I says okay dig this they'd go it's okay to dig this, Doc said so. I said boy I've got to save myself I hope I'm not wrong. But luckily it worked out all right. And you know we had the good faith of the construction people too when they come in you know they take a little while to find out what was wrong but if they want to dig they would never dig.

09:16:38
A:
They'd say, let's get these guys over here find out and if we'd tell them yes, they felt comfortable. They'd say it's okay, they said it was all right. And you know that was just I guess it was just having a lot of street sense and experience what paid off for that you know. And I felt that was one of the things I was very helpful to the plant.

09:16:57
A:
And I was very happy that I could do that. And working with the people and they was real nice and I think that was one thing I was very helpful in helping the people. That come in very handy for a lot of people.

09:17:12
Q:
They ever call you now, Doc?

A:
They did a little bit at first and I think they kind of fizzled out but you know I, you know I didn't mind it because you know a few things you just can't remember everything and everything's not on the print. So you know I did help them out a few times and that felt good, real happy that I could do that. But it was, it was very interesting so, but there were so many things underneath the ground up there.

09:17:39
A:
You know and they were doing there there'd be a salesman come in they'd say well we got stuff they can locate underneath the ground, piping underneath the ground. He'd start showing off his fancy equipment you know, it didn't always find everything what we needed so you know, it come in handy to really know. But our prints, our older prints were really good.

09:17:58
A:
I mean, they were right on it you know. Find the right prints you know they were you know when they built that place they were right on it. I mean, you'd say so deep it was right there but as time went along you know we were probably a little bit lax when we added things and didn't get them right in as they should be.

09:18:15
A:
So that's where we had a little bit of a problem. But it worked out, luckily nobody got hurt too bad. So it was few water breaks you know we had to get everything shut off. But nobody got hurt electrical wise. Electric was always my biggest concern you know and we'd have a power outage you know and that was always a big thing.

09:18:36
A:
Because you know being a utility engineer, you had, I always said we were jack-of-all-trades and master of none you know. We had to know a bit about maintenance, we had to know a bit about operation management. And you know so we knew enough hopefully to keep management, to keep them happy on the off-shift and do what they needed.

09:18:56
A:
Uh, we had, years ago we always had, when we were busy we had like night shift superintendents. And they would be you know if something happened or something, they'd be the one's who we'd go to. But as time went along, through the budget crunch and things they thought they could get along without them so they went for a time they really didn't have anybody on site that they could really go to you know if they had a problem.

09:19:20
A:
So then they said utility engineers is here all the time let's just kind of give it to them. So I think that was under Westinghouse, so they come up with this fancy little title, they called it the AEDO (Assistant Emergency Duty Officer). So they kind of indoctrinated us a little bit and told us what they wanted. So we was the AEDO then they had management people, they called it EDO.

09:19:47
A:
And these people were on staff, they would take this job for a week at a time. So if anything happened during the off-shifts we would know who to call, we would make a decision on site to rectify it till we could get with them. But if something happened, you know we would call them right away so they would know it.

09:20:06
A:
So you know we were their eyes and ears in the field you know for any, if something happened or anything so you know that's it worked out real good. I don't know we'd call them once in a while let them know. Lou Bogar, I know he was always the one at Westinghouse I'd call him he'd say what now Doc, what'd you do now. He was a nice guy, he was very nice.

09:20:26
A:
One of the most memorable experiences we had was when they was shipping some stuff out west one time and it had a leak. And we had to get everybody on staff and get them on site and we had Emergency Operations Center, which was the kind of a neat thing we didn't have in the beginning.

09:20:47
A:
And uh, Sharon Cornwell was very instrumental in getting that going. And uh it was a very nice little place. So when we had any kind of incident or anything we would call and the staff, they would all come in they would hopefully take care of the problem which was really nice, the EOC was one of the most updated command center I think you know any of the DOE site had.

09:21:13
A:
And it was really up to date and I'm sure they've still got it, it was really nice. And we had a system where we could get all management in there with a certain code we'd call them so they would be in there real quick. So you know it worked out real good but you know the people, but when they give us the added responsibility AEDO it's like putting another burden on your shoulder.

09:21:34
A:
Because you know that's, and you know if something happened management always wanted to know before they got to work. They didn't want to find out. They wanted to know at home so they'd come to work and know what happened so you always wanted to call them at home. 'Cause you didn't want to surprise them when they got to work in the morning, it's nice to call somebody at home.

09:21:52
A:
So you know we kind of felt them out we knew what they wanted. So it took a little to figure out what they wanted but it worked out. So uh, and I think they still have that title out there. But uh, it was something that worked out you know, years gone by they found out you know do different things. It was, it was all right.

09:22:13
Q:
Now we were talking a little bit before about tearing down buildings and everything and eventually all those buildings are going to be gone and uh, what would you personally like to see that land used for?

A:
That is a good question you know. Time has to go on. You know I'm not one person to dwell in the past. I think you have to look to the future. Maybe a small museum to show what did happen and for the people in the future to know what did happen on that ground. And what actually, how it did fit into the concept of things for the defense of the country.

09:22:53
A:
That we just wasn't out there polluting, just to be polluting. That it was a very essential part of things that had to be done. Uh, and if they can make it useful ground, I see no reason why it shouldn't be put to something useful rather than just laying there. If some of it can be maybe make it in like a wildlife thing but just leave it there for nothing, I think everything has a purpose in its day and I think it should go on you know.

09:23:20
A:
The future, if it can be used, not just leave it there. Because it, it did what it was supposed to and I think the future should have use for it rather than just leave it lay there. Because you know the past is done, so you know it's, maybe just a small museum. But just to dwell on it forever, I see no use in it. It served its purpose. And I think that's what the people that worked there should remember it too you know.

09:23:46
A:
They all had a part in a very important thing and it did what it was supposed to and we're moving on to hopefully bigger and better things. Uh, one thing I hope everybody does take care of, or take advantage of, they probably don't realize till it's too late, is the education system they have out there of people getting a higher education and going on.

09:24:11
A:
The government through Fluor or whatever who's in charge of it are being very generous to the employees. And that would be one thing if I had anything to say that was one thing I would really stress. Take advantage of the education because you know it's very important because that place won't be there forever. In the end, if it's a stepping stone for them to move on.

09:24:35
A:
I mean, they have been very generous to a lot of people. Uh, people have asked you know it's kind of crazy, uh I only have one son and he worked for one of the companies out there through a construction company, ASI. They did some test pouring and well drilling on site. And after they left, I don't know if it being fortunate or unfortunate but for some way or another he became an employee of, well Fluor now and he's still working there.

09:25:05
A:
And uh, they treated him very good. He got his education when, he had a couple years of college when he went there and through the generosity of Fluor and DOE than he got his bachelors degree and he went on and he's, he got his masters degree right there on site. And uh, I'm very proud of that. People should take advantage of that because they don't realize it you know it's there.

09:25:38
A:
And the cost, they practically pay for it all. And I guess one of the other benefits that was really helpful and instrument to a lot of people uh, you know when your young people don't think about the future too much something like you might not work forever you know. And uh, back in National Lead time they come out with this 401, they call it savings plan, they had some fancy words for it but basically that's what it was.

09:26:04
A:
You put in so much money and they would match it. And down through the years that has been good for a lot of people. One thing, when they first started they didn't have priority people and I wish they would have from the start but later on everybody was made, it was made available for everybody. So I think all employees that work there can take a part in it.

09:26:27
A:
And that is a very good benefit that they're giving. And it's worked out real good for a lot of people including myself. So I mean, so that's one thing I would say if people can take part in it and the benefits there have been good. Maybe as time, down through the years I know people have questioned the health. And maybe what we did years ago, probably maybe wasn't the way we do it today.

09:27:02
A:
But if you look in the chemical industry and the metals industry, steel industry I'm sure they're not operating the way they did 40 years ago too. So looking at it in that light, I feel we've did the best we could with the knowledge we had and when we got more information about this what we were handling, we did the best we could. And you know probably maybe there has some people health problems up there just like there was in other industries.

09:27:30
A:
I don't think nobody knows for sure but it's one thing they're concerned about. And I guess, I would be as concerned as much as anybody 'cause I think I worked in every building there. Probably one of the few that had down through the years the jobs I've had, if not working in the buildings being connected with them, being in the buildings several times and spending a lot of times.

09:27:56
A:
And taking part in several leaks and spills and helping cleaning them up the way we did years ago wasn't the way we do it now but we did it the best we knew how. And we did not do anything wrong, we did the best we could with the manpower and the technology we had at that time.

09:28:16
Q:
Great, well, we're at the end of another tape, is there anything else you wanted to add, I don't have any more questions.

A:
Just a couple of things and that'll be it.

Q:
Okay. Do we have time. (We've got a minute and a half).

A:
That'll do it.

09:28:27
A:
Uh, people are concerned about health problems uh, myself I've been very fortunate. They do have a thing up there through taking your physicals. A few years ago, probably 4 or 5 years ago, through the PSA test which they were giving on site, uh, one of my tests did show elevated readings. And through further tests and things I had a prostrate problem and by finding out early, I had the problem taken care of.

09:29:00
A:
And hopefully to this day I'm all right, I had to have radical surgery but if it hadn't been through the physicals I had there you know it, you know it was detected soon. So you know it was, I feel like you know, I don't know if it came from there, nobody knows but you know through the medical problems, I mean through the medical services and physicals it was found there.

09:29:25
A:
So you know the physicals are very important and I was very lucky there I guess, very fortunate. And the medical department, I will say something for them, they were a great bunch of people. Very, very nice, very and the physicals are very important.

09:29:41
Q:
Great, okay.

A:
That might take about my 42 years.

Q:
Nat sound, we're going to do nat sound now which is just a natural sound. If we could just be quite on the set for a second and get room tone. This is nat sound.