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FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

Name: George Bassitt

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Tape: 17

Project Number 20012

Tape FLHP0034

10:01:03

Q:

OK. First of all we ask you a really hard question. If you could give us your name and spell it just so we have it right.

A:

George Bassitt. G-E-O-R-G-E B-A-S-S-I-T-T

Q:

Great.

A:

Senior

Q:

Senior?

A:

S-r, right.

10:01:16

Q:

And you can just talk to me just like we're having a conversation.

A:

That's fine.

Q:

Just ignore the camera like it's not even there. First of all, can you give us a little background personal information, where you were born?

A:

I was born in Whitesville, West Virginia and ah moved to St. Albans when I was a kid and I went to ah, Western University for 2 years. Then I went to work for B.F. Goodrich ah rubber plant. I worked on construction then I went to work at the rubber plant then I came to Fernald October 5, 1953.

10:01:49

Q:

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FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

And uh, how did you get your job at Fernald?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

A:

I got my job at Fernald through a fellow by the name of Max Tall, who worked on construction at Fernald and uh I found out about it. And then we, three of us came out, Joe Wright and myself and a fellow by the name of Walker came down and they sent ah Lee ----- who was a personnel man at that time and 2 guards to the rubber plant and they hired people up there to come down here to work. They was, National Lead was here paying \$2.00 an hour and up there from Portsmouth paying \$1.50 so we came down here for the \$2.00. That's what we was making.

10:02:27

Q:

So they interviewed you at the rubber plant?

A:

Yeah.

Q:

What was that interview like, what are, what are some of the questions they asked?

A:

Oh, they just, I don't know. They asked you if you had a police record and if you drank and that kind of stuff. But they really checked you because when I went back later on I knew the fellow that run the bank there in St. Albans and he told me they had been there and talked to both of them. The FBI had been. So they done a good job at checking your background.

10:02:50

Q:

Let's talk a little bit about that. Um, what kind of clearance did you have to have to work at Fernald?

A:

You had to have a Q clearance and it was on, they had a sign posted on all buildings - only Q clear personnel allowed in this building. And you couldn't wander all over the plant. You had to stay in your plant where you was working. So you didn't know what went on in the other plants. I never found out what went on in any of the plants, till I went and worked in them.

10:03:17

Q:

When you were hired, how much did you know about the process or what they were doing at Fernald?

A:

I didn't know a thing about it. It's like you said - build your future around atomic energy, is what they told us. They never told us about it, I didn't know nothing about nitric, I worked at the rubber plant making synthetic rubber but I'd never fooled with nitric acid or caustic or sulfuric or solvent or all that all the other things that go with the operation down there.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

10:03:44

Q:

And uh, how about your job itself? Could you discuss it with friends and family at all?

A:

No. My wife didn't know what, she use to ask me and I couldn't tell her. I also ah got hurt down there one time and I spent three days, the ah medical used to be where the laundry is. It was in the ah northwest corner of the laundry. And I was in, my mother and father came down here, my wife came down, and they wouldn't let them come in to see me.

10:04:12

Q:

How did you hurt yourself?

A:

Fell through the rollers with my leg and hurt, cause I spent three days in medical. Couldn't sleep at night. I was so used to working third shift and when it came night I couldn't sleep (laughing). Yeah. That's when Dr. Quigley was down there. He was the head of medical at that time. They used to come in every day and pack my leg in ice and I've still got a place on the side of my leg where I never did get it took care of.

10:04:38

Q:

Why wouldn't they let your family in to see you?

A:

I don't know that. I guess on the account they didn't have a clearance. It was, everything was supposed to be top secret. The thing they always told me was top secret was the rates that ran and all, and how much they produced. So I don't know, I presume that's what it was.

10:04:57

Q:

Wow. Um, well, let's go ahead and talk about all the jobs you had plant by plant what you did (Response: OK) and what you saw in all those plants.

A:

OK. Plant 2. I know when I first started out. I started out at, at ah, I told you between 9, the maintenance building, there used to be a place where we burnt chips. A chip burner and I still say I, it's down in the ground. I don't know but they didn't, they wasn't through constructing Plant 2, I think, probably 3 or 4 months later, we went to the refinery. And I went to ah, I was assigned to ah digestion ah, engineer by the name of Joe Carbane.

10:05:39

A:

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

Ordered two truckloads of sand because he said the sand was going to be like the ore we was going to be running into digestion. Well, we dumped the two trucked loads of sand and we plugged up everything in the building till they got the ore in. We finally ended up getting rid of the sand by taking a bucket up every time you filled a F1-1 or F1-2, feed tank throwing a bucket full into the ah feed tank it went through extraction and out with the raffinate.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

10:06:07

A:

Uh, the uh, well when I first started the drum, when we used to dump the, we didn't have the bucket elevators, they had the old skip horse they called it. You send one drum to the top of the building and there was usually one man down there sending the drum up and there was two on top of the building with sledge hammers and you had to go up there and open the doors and beat the ore out of the drums, then you sent the drum back down.

10:06:31

A:

Well if the drum, if ah you didn't have somebody up there doing that, and the drum was still full and it went back so far and jumped the track, well you didn't dump no more that night. That's all the, that's all the dumping that was done. Then after I fell through the rollers, I went to extraction which was part of ah Plant 2 and I worked the rest of my time over there.

10:06:51

A:

They had the hot side in extraction, they had the cold side in extraction. Then in about the '60's they got to mixer/settler that was in the middle of extraction, they got that from Horshaw. They said a bunch of black people used to run it that's the reason they used to make, Joe Beckelhum use to always want to up the rates if you didn't run it high enough and it would get emulsified and it would be going every which way.

10:07:15

A:

But they always made fun of you if you didn't run the higher rates. They wanted more production is what it amounted to. But I worked in there, till I got laid off in '71 so. But in extraction we used to have ah, use to have the hot side, the cold side and you had solvent treatment, deionizers and the mixer/settler which was a separate unit. And you made ah, what they done was take the solvent from 512 and you extracted uranium out of the feed which was in the extraction columns and went to B column which they called the scrub column, and you scrubbed the, through a little bit, scrub the impurities out.

10:07:51

A:

Then it went to C column. The C column used the ionized water, went in the top and the solvent came up out of the bottom where it come out of the ah, spinner box. They had two C columns. One that had spinner box, one of them was 60 percent and 40 percent, went into two C columns, and then what come out they called CP and then went into decan tank and it was yellow looking and it went to ah, denitration where they boiled it down.

10:08:20

A:

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

But for years the solvent, when the solvent went bad it used to pick up carbon and we'd drum the solvent up and burn it, take it and burn it and get rid of it. Then they got some centrifuges and solvent treatment. They got four centrifuges and solvent treatment and wound up with the mixer/settler so they could save the ah solvent. They hardly ever had to throw it out after that. Then after I got laid off I went to work for Golfer two years and I came back in '73 and I went back to the refinery and then I worked on all the plants. You can ask me the questions now.

10:08:56

Q:

OK. Um, when you were in, ah gosh I don't know, just start, start talking about different plants you worked in cause I know you were in just about everywhere.

A:

Well, Charlie told you about Plant 3 but they did have a small calciner in there. They ran the enriched ah, they used to put it in safe geometry drums and then they'd take it up Plant 1 and they milled it. Then we screened it and they sent a portion of it to the gas diffusion plant. Then I went to Plant 4. Plant 4 is where they took the orange out of Plant 3 and they took it over and they, when I went over there, they ran it through three banks. They ran it through bank 7, 8 and 9.

10:09:36

A:

They ran it through Plant 8 to fluodize it with ammonia and then they ran it down in and at Bank 8 they put air into the talcum reactor. You had talcum A, B and C on each bank. They put air in there and made black oxide. But when you got to bank 7 and you got to bank 9 they put HF in there and you made the green salt. Well they put the green salt in like, took it and canned it, in cans, and they sent the cans of green salt to Plant 5.

10:10:07

A:

Well, I went to Plant 5 and that area they used to make ah mans, they used to have these pots and they'd put a mandrel in there and they'd work 'em up on these rollers with the ah, mag fluoride and they ah, they made the ah, liner, liner material. Then they had to take it down there to the ah, where they blend it, and they'd like, two cans of green salt and so much magnesium, they'd pull that mandrel out of there and they'd put it in ah, put a cap on it. Then they'd put a lid on it, take it down and put it in the Rockwells till it fired and when it fired it made a derby and then they'd put it over in a cooling well.

10:10:44

A:

They'd put it in there then they moved it over to where the water was to cool it down. Then they took it up to the breakout and they broke the derby out and the derby came out and a slag went back down, slag went back out the building, they'd send that back to Plant 1 to have it milled. And they usually took the derbies, and they ah, I think some of the derbies they took them and ah over to Plant 6 and pickled them because it made better metal.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

10:11:11

A:

Anyhow, and B Area, up on the charge station, used to charge, you'd put like one or two derbies in and you'd put so many pounds of bricks in where they made in Plant 6 and you'd put so much scrap in. You'd put this in a crucible, then you run the crucible around you put it in a furnace, you put a lid on it, a graphite lid, that's a graphite crucible. Then you put the heat on it, you run it for maybe an hour and a half.

10:11:34

A:

Then you poured into ah, graphite mold, in a mold tank and they left it up for an hour and a half after you, then you took it back and put it in a cooling booth. After the cooling booth in the Plant 5 B area you took it back to the separation booth and you separate the ingot out of the graphite mold. Then you put it in the saw and you sawed like a crop off and you sawed a sample off and you took the ah crops to _____ drum.

10:12:02

A:

They usually took the crops back down to Plant 2 and run them back through the metal dissolver which we worked down there and then they took the ingots usually to ah, I was thinking they sent the ingots to Ashtabula, I guess and had them extruded. And the ah, no I take that back. They sent the ingots to Plant 6 and had them machined first and they used to put a hole in them. They had a rapid bore in Plant 9 that put a hole in them and they brought them over to ah, they brought them over to Plant 6 and they put them in the heat treat over in the rolling mill.

10:12:39

A:

I wasn't over there when they first started the rolling mill 'cause they used to roll them ingots out into rods when they made the ah, elements. But later on they just, they sent 'em to Ashtabula, the ingots and they extrude them and they send back inners and outers which looked like pipes and they run them through the B and O to cut them off certain length. And after they cut them off they took them to heat treat which was up in the ah south end of Plant 6. Then they heat treat the elements then they took them over and run them on the cross.

10:13:10

A:

Then after they, they looked real shiny they took them back in ah, inspection. They inspected them and they sent them out. The chips, there was a conveyor underneath the cross, the chips used to go up to ah up and go down into the drums. We'd use to either drum them or make briquettes. They never wasted anything. And we ran briquetting. They had a crusher and a merry-go-round where they used to clean the chips.

10:13:36

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

A:

Then they had a 300,000 ton briquette press that made the bricks and you'd put them in a can and they'd send them back to Plant 5 and they'd sure use them when they made their charges up. Now what else you want to hear about?

10:13:50

Q:

(laughing) Actually when, when ah they were making these products, did you know what they were for?

A:

Not till later on till I went over to work in the plants, I knew what they was for. They also had, I didn't tell you before, we had this, they had a real reactor down there one time. Did anybody tell you about it? They disassembled it down at the Pilot Plant. A fellow by the name of Cahill disassembled it and they had a blueprint where they had to take the boron rods out and then disassemble it and a photographer took a picture and they thought the thing had blew up at the time. (Laughing) Yeah. Fellow by the name of Cahill disassembled it, I think Frank Neblitz, I think he's deceased now, I don't know who else was on it.

10:14:33

A:

I also worked down to ah, well we worked down at the Pilot Plant. We ran ah, we ran thorium down there one time for Westinghouse a ----- operation. It was supposed to be, they called it French T and T. We dissolved it, made it up just like digestion and ran it through the extraction columns back in extraction and then they sprayed it and we ran it through ah, a press and it come out real snow white. We put them 5 gallon buckets and we sent it to General Electric. General Electric dried it and they sent it back to Fernald.

10:15:07

A:

Also another job that was done in the Pilot Plant was the trough was at the ah, north end of Fernald. We used to, they used to have elements that had aluminum on them and we used to put the ah, put the ah elements in these trays and we would put them in this trough and we'd pump nitric acid and caustic to declad them. Then after you dumped that out, and you put straight caustic in. Then they used the elements over again. Some of them had copper on them so they sent them over to Plant 6 and scrap pickling them to get the copper off of the elements. OK.

10:15:44

Q:

So that's how it came to the, that's how it came to us, was in this clad in aluminum?

A:

Yeah.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

Q:

How big were they?

A:

Oh, they were about this long. They looked like pieces of pipe if you hadn't known the difference. They was what they called an inner and an outer. The only one's I really saw was the depleted. Now see than ran normal, I told you they ran normal for years. They got the depleted back from Paducah, where the cascades, they never run depleted at Fernald. But they always threw all the garbage away that they couldn't run. They took down and threw it in the pits. Now what do you want to hear about? The airplane?

10:16:20

Q:

Tell us about the ah carbide uranium.

A:

The carbide uranium were ah long aluminum rods. They were about 6 or 8 feet long. And I don't really know if react or not, but they had a sodium plug in it and they had ah, a lathe there, that they'd cut that plug off and they used to throw that plug in a kerosene bucket. We used to take the plugs on second shift down to ah and throw it in the pit and they'd blow up when they hit the water. But they cut these in 6 or 8 inch pieces and we'd put 'em in, put 'em in a pan over water and shake the carbide uranium out.

10:16:55

A:

Then we'd take them over in the next room and put them ah in stainless steel pans and put water on them and it would dissolve and look like mud. Then I don't know what they did with it then. But that was the carbide uranium that we ran.

10:17:11

Q:

Tell us about the uh, paraffin encased....

A:

Oh paraffin green salt? That was paraffin extraction. It was done at the ah Pilot Plant out on the pad. At one time they got the bright idea at Oak Ridge that they was going to store the ah green salt in paraffin blocks it was every size in description so they mixed the paraffin blocks with green salt and they put aluminum foil on the outside. Well they sent 'em back into Fernald to get it out so they got a tube, they put a glass cylinder out here and they ah got a tank of kerosene and we heated the kerosene and we put the paraffin blocks into the cylinder and run the kerosene in and it got hot and melted.

10:17:55

A:

Then you run it into a centrifuge and the paraffin wax and the kerosene went out in a drum and the

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

green salt stayed in the, in the centrifuge. We also, a guy by the name of Bonnie, I always called him William Bonnie, Bonford, worked at the lab, we retorqued that stuff with HF there in the Pilot Plant and they sent it to ah Portsmouth, they sent it back in here and I think they redissolved it.

10:18:21

Q:

How many ah, were they drums or were they bricks, this paraffin encased green salt?

A:

They were in, they were in ah different size. Like a square block like a cube block or a long cylinder block but they was a green salt encased in paraffin wax.

10:18:37

Q:

Was there a lot of it?

A:

Oh yeah we had about... I don't know how much we had. But they took the kerosene up to ah up behind the Boiler House and burnt it up. That's the way they got rid of, that's the way they used to get rid of the solvent they couldn't use in Plant 2. We was all out on, I mean the nights we drummed that stuff up over there.

10:18:57

Q:

Now Plant 2/3, a lot of people think that that's one plant but it's actually two plants. Can you tell us about working in there when you were working in there?

A:

Plant 2 and 3, well, well later on that, that would be 2 plants cause they could work as many places as they wanted to but when I started Plant 2 consisted of digestion, extraction, the sump and hot raffinate and the metal dissolver building and K-65. The only thing Plant 3 had was denitration and acid recovery. That was Plant 3, that's all they had.

10:19:32

Q:

And you worked in those two different plants for many, many years?

A:

I never worked in Plant 3 that much. (Comment - you were mostly...) I went over there, I worked in, I went over there, told you, to run that calciner later on when they wasn't running it. I went over there and gulped the pots few times, I wasn't in there that much. I worked more in Plant 2 than I did Plant 3.

10:19:46

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

Q:

So, in Plant 2 how was, what kind of protective gear did you wear?

A:

(Laughter) We didn't have that much. They had a respirator but the funny part of it was, they had a respirator but they only had one canister that done everything. Now down there you probably got a dozen different canisters for paint, for fumes, for dust. We had one canister. And they usually took the respirator, I know they wouldn't let you do it now, you just took a respirator, stuck it in your locker with a piece of ah paper in it and the next night you went and got it and wore it again if you worked. It had pretty good vacuum though. But it's not as safe as it is down there now.

10:20:28

Q:

What kind of training did you have before you started working there?

A:

What kind of training? You had training on the job. On the job training. Another thing I was telling you about, ah we was discussing over in hot raffinate. That's where everybody is scared of all the radium and everything down K-65. They used to pump that raffinate over and you'd pump, you had a big, these two big filters up there, you'd put so many bags of dicolite on then you'd pump this stuff up, and it had an agitator that went like this and you cut that off. But every time that trough got full you'd have to go in there and rake it down.

10:21:04

A:

And you was laying in there right over top of this stuff, it used to be running out in the floor and everything else. We didn't have that much protective clothing. Like I've told you, I saw people go in that locker room, have green salt all over them like maintenance people, black oxide all over them with the white coveralls we wore and it'd be on the floor and every place else over there.

10:21:25

A:

We went over there one time later on when I worked in ah section that had a blowout on the sump cake was yellow and we had on our clothes. And they ah put tape around the locker room so you couldn't get in 'cause we had the stuff on the floor over there.

10:21:46

Q:

Geez. Tell us a little more about ah the K-65 Silos. You had some involvement with putting the material in there. How did they do that?

A:

The biggest part of the material I always thought that went into the K-65 Silos came out of the hot raffinate. But when we used to go down there at night, they'd haul stuff in from off site and we didn't

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

know where it came from or anything else. But you always had to fill a sheet out, the drum number and like where it was on the drum, I don't know where it had... but that stuff looked like lime is what it looked like.

10:22:13

A:

It was gray looking and we used to have to beat it out of the drums. We'd slurry it up and we would pump it out to the ah, pump it out to the K-65 tanks. Between tank one and two there was a, there was a pump house, we used to go down there at night, pump the water back to the sump so they could send us some more stuff down from the hot raffinate building.

10:22:33

Q:

So it was mainly oxides from the raffinate building and then stuff from off site?

A:

They might have, they ran some stuff down there now I don't know that ah, that mag fluoride later on, they might have put some of that down there I don't know. But if they had a spill or something and they wanted to get rid of it they'd bring it down there then dump it in those tanks. Like I told you, I went down there one night to dump six drums and it wasn't nothing but rocks. We had to take the bottom off the tank and scoop the rocks back up, put them back in the drum. We couldn't pump rocks out to the tank.

10:23:06

Q:

Wow. Now ah you had mentioned to me that some material came in on a, on a, on a what rail cars?

A:

Oh yeah. The, ah the airport ash come over on railroad cars, gondola cars in Plant 8. I don't know whether it was even covered up. But that looked like lyme. They used to ah, they use to unload it out of the gondola cars and put it right on the pad at this end of, the east end of Plant 8, there on the pad. You'd walk by there, walk by there going home and you'd see all this gray looking material that ran in Plant 8, I don't know how they ran in there. I guess they ran in their digesters. But I don't remember them even covering the stuff up.

20:23:45

Q:

Did you know what it was at that time or where it came from?

A:

No. The only thing I know is that they called it airport ash because they got it off an airport someplace and like I say it came out of the gondola. I don't even know how they unloaded the stuff out of gondola cars.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

10:24:00

Q:

Now are you aware that a lot of people believe that ah, some of the waste in the K-65 Silos is Manhattan Project waste?

A:

I've heard that but nobody didn't tell us. Like I told you we didn't know what we was dumping. They didn't tell us what we was dumping. That's what I don't understand, what happened to all the records they had, cause you didn't do anything down there unless you kept a record of it. Like you put down the weight and where it came from all the numbers and everything. No I didn't know any of the Manhattan Project but I've heard that story so.

10:24:33

Q:

Wow. Um, let's talk a little bit about the products that were made at Fernald. There were quite a number of different products in the early years and then also later in the '70's and '80's. Can you talk about all the products that went out?

10:24:49

A:

The only products that I know that went out was the ah, the elements that they made in Plant 8, uh 6. Later on when I went to Plant 6 they made a penetrator for the Army. This one boss told me he said we're going to have this whole building full of C and C machines. They ended up with one. But they give that to some outfit, nuclear new outfit down in Tennessee. This was a penetrator was about this long it had different configurations on it.

10:25:16

A:

It was supposed to go into a tank and set it on fire. Then later on when Westinghouse came in they made flats which is a, was a thick piece of metal about two inches thick which they sent out to Rocky Flats and they rolled it and they laminated it and put it inside the tanks so that when they shot the penetrator it wouldn't go through the tank and burn it up. That was two of the products they made.

10:25:39

A:

They also sent, ah, I know something they sent out of there one time. They sent some of this stuff. I think that was denitration one time they was going to send it to Canada in a tank truck and it was so highly, it solidified before it got there because it was so highly ah boiled down it had so much U in it so they brought it back to digestive and we had to put steam on it and cull it out to get it out of the tank truck.

10:26:03

A:

I just happened to remember that when you said products. Yeah, I think it was supposed to go to Canada I'm not for sure. But I remember that truck was solidified. Ray Wolfe will probably tell you

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

about that. Yeah, ask him.

10:26:16

Q:

Wow. And um, tell us about, I know there's a couple of different um, stories that we've discussed. One of them was about a small plane that landed over by the K-65 Silos.

A:

No. The plane landed down there by 30/45 where the watertower is. It was raining real hard one night and he ah, he tried to land between the two fences and ah, he just missed a tree. He got it down, I think, I don't remember if there was one or two people in there but they hauled the airplane out, took the airplane apart, hauled it out the next morning but he like to never got out of there. But it was raining cats and dogs and he thought that was an airport or something because there was always light between the two fences.

10:26:57

A:

When I first went to work down there they had guard towers every so, every so many feet around it and the last one they had was when you went to K-65 there was always a guard in there. You had to show them your badge when you went to K-65, you had to show him your badge when you came back out of K-65. So that's the reason, he thought it was a place like that.

10:27:16

Q:

So why was it hard for him to get out of the plant?

A:

They didn't know who he was. You want me to tell you about the hobo?

Q:

Oh yeah, tell me about the hobo.

A:

One night they was ah, one night they used to pull ah, I guess during the night, I don't remember who it was used to pull box cars in down there and one night there was a hobo come in down there. He got out of one of the box cars who got to running around the project he wanted to know where he was. So they took him up in the cafeteria, I think, I don't remember whether or not he took a shower but I know they took up a collection for him and fed him and I guess they finally let him go. That was the hobo that was inside the plant.

10:27:51

Q:

About what year was that?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

A:

That was probably in the '60's. When I was down there in, that had to be in the '60's when I was down there in the refinery.

10:28:03

Q:

Um, what did you do in ah, did you work in Plant 6 at any time?

A:

Yeah

Q:

What did you do in Plant 6?

A:

What I do in Plant 6? I started out in Plant 6, I was a stamper. I got to be a machine tool operator for a week. You had to work one way or the other. Then I got to be a degreaser and I also went in one time and put the ah, on those penetrators I was telling you about, they wouldn't let you stencil anything on there. You put a number on there or something with nitric acid. I used to run the briquette press. We used to have a lot of fires in the, the fines used to catch on fire underneath the ah crusher.

10:28:40

A:

There was a big screen, they used to run those chips through this crusher and the chips went out conveyor belt over into a merry-go-round room, what they called it. But this fine metal and the fine black oxide went into a drum with water and that drum used to catch on fire and we used to have to call the fire department to come and put that out.

10:29:00

Q:

Let's talk a little bit about safety. How safe did you feel while you were, oh, do we want to wait?

Tape FLHP0035

11:01:06

A:

Another thing they had me in digestion one time was somebody, maintenance came over one time, there was two acid tanks up by the office, or the control room. And they forgot to put a valve on there or something so they pumped nitric acid and it run down the walls eat the clock up, eat all the copper tubing up and we was shut down.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

11:01:26

A:

They came down there one night on the two acid tanks that's on the outside, it was either between 22 or 26 acid tank, they come down there one night, a pipefitter on day shift and they put a back iron flange on nitric acid tank. At 3:00 o'clock in the morning, nitric acid was running out in the gravel, going down the storm sewer and we was throwing lime bags without even opening them. That's how bad, and you wonder. What was you going to ask me about safety?

11:01:50

Q:

Well, that's what I was going to ask you. In your opinion, I mean, was it a safe place to work and if it wasn't where were the places that most bothered you?

A:

You know one thing I found out about working down there. You better take care of yourself 'cause nobody else ain't gonna take care of, that's what I used to tell people came down there. They're not gonna come around and beg you or whatever. I saw one guy down there one night, dumping, he's dead, name's Fred Riley. He got contaminated inside of his body, he was out there dumping one night and you couldn't even see him the dust was so bad, yet he didn't have a respirator on.

11:02:23

A:

He turned around and wanted to sue National Lead. Well, I figure it was his fault he didn't wear a respirator, he got contaminated. But he's deceased now, so I can talk about him. But safety wasn't a, oh, they was strict, they was strict on safety. Like I said, you better take care of yourself and that's what I done. If I needed a respirator, I went and got me a respirator. I always wore, when I went to Plant 6, them new people used to laugh at me.

11:02:50

A:

I always had a pair of goggles on my head. I always had a pair of channel locks, always had a flashlight, cause that's what you would, and them people, you had to have those, like when you went in Plant 2 you better have them and be ready to work. You couldn't go inside the plant and go to your locker and get your goggles out.

11:03:08

A:

You're supposed to have them on your head when you went inside there in case you need the dag gone things. But they used to make fun of me, I didn't care. I told them I was taking care of myself. But we always carried a flashlight and they had what they called a like a cock wrench that had two things on it like this that fit the valves where you took samples, that kind of stuff. You always had one of them plus a pair of channel locks.

11:03:28

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

A:

Um, when I worked in digestion, when I first worked over there we used to have trouble with the ah screw conveyors plugging up so they had, we used to have to call maintenance. So the way the eliminated that was they put wing nuts on there. When they put wing nuts on there the operators was allowed to take it off and clean the conveyors out, you didn't have to wait on maintenance. That's the way they eliminated that problem.

11:03:56

Q:

You know now that a lot of the places that you worked for 30 years with hardly any protective gear, you have to wear a full face respirator and anti-C's and everything like that. How does that make you feel now?

11:04:10

A:

Makes me feel, about like I, feel bad really cause there's a lot of people that died over there. A lot of people ended up with cancer. I thank the good Lord every day I didn't end up with cancer. That's the reason ah, that's the reason I told you these people that work at Fernald is crazy for not going getting a checkup at Drake every 6 months. Their blood is the most important thing to check to see if you got cancer, especially men. But I feel like, I don't know, we should have been told. But if I had it to do over again I probably go back down there and work.

11:04:50

Q:

Wow. Um, when, you were still working at the plant then, when they decided to shut it down. (Comment - shut it down). You were still working there? (Comment - Yeah) Can you tell us about those years, '84 to '89 of course first let's start it with the Plant 9 dust collector.

11:05:08

A:

Dust collector. Yeah, that's when they decided to shut it down, the dust collector. The bag had come down or something and they, they pushed a button and the horn went off and kept on running. I guess the dust went out in the atmosphere. That's when Westinghouse, so I guess Westinghouse decided to, by theirselves decided to shut it down so I guess that's what they did.

11:05:26

Q:

And how did you feel about that when it happened?

A:

Didn't bother me. I knew I wasn't going to get laid off so. But they was hiring people then so, to clean the place up. I still say they'll never clean everything up down there cause right now they're demonstrating out in Nevada, you know that, I'll tell Tim that and it's been in the paper every day. And May the 16th they're going to have a movie on television, the Atomic Train, what's that tell ya.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

11:05:59

A:

What are they going to do with the stuff when they, if they ain't going to let them send it out there. That's what I've asked, I've been to those meetings and asked the AC man, or DOE man and they won't tell me nothing. But what are they going to do if they won't let them send it to Nevada? I really, I hope they get rid of it, but I don't think they will. OK.

11:06:19

Q:

Good, good. Um, you are in the medical monitoring program right now. (Comment - right) Can you tell us a little bit about how you got involved in that and the types of things that they look for?

A:

Oh, I got involved with that by going down to Drake and I told you Charlie and myself, we go back to Fernald, we try to make an appointment every 6 months to have our blood and everything checked. Last time I was down there I didn't get ah, I didn't get, I didn't blow in that thing but I had my blood checked like I told you and my urine and they checked my heart.

11:06:49

A:

And I go to ah, well in fact I didn't have an X-ray done down there 'cause I had to have two made down to Drake last time. That's the best thing we ever got. And I'll tell you one thing, we took a beating on that lawsuit. I don't know if anybody's told you that or not. And they've still got money down there and they won't tell anybody what they're going to do with it, that's another thing that burns me up.

11:07:10

Q:

As a worker, were you involved in a class action civil suit?

A:

Right. Yeah.

Q:

Can you tell us a little bit about that?

A:

I got \$6,000 for 37 years, that tell you anything? Them darn lawyers got ahold of the money. Yeah, I'll tell ya that when we get off the camera, I better not tell ya. You don't want to put that in that camera thing. Did I tell you about the Beddus? I told you about the Beddus.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

11:07:35

Q:

Actually can you tell us about that because we weren't on camera?

A:

They ran high enriched down there one time. They had some real little columns down there. They brought the stuff in from out of a reactor some place and put in those NFS tanks. Then they used to bring the stuff back and ah put in those tanks that ran through the Pilot Plant. Well you ran on like timer, how much time, anyhow they got mixed up one time and I had to get down in one of those NFS tanks with rags and clean it out but I had an airline respirator on.

11:08:08

A:

Well, the operator got mixed up and he put the feed, the good stuff in, the feed vice versa and he messed the whole tank of stuff up and we had to clean it out with rags. I crawled down inside there. Yeah.

11:08:24

Q:

That can't be good.

A:

Huh?

Q:

Um, let's see what else do I want to ask you? Uh, while you were working there, um, of course it was during the Cold War, how, how did you feel at the time about the threat of the Cold War?

A:

I never thought anything about it. Used to go out at nights, if you remember when the Russians used to put the satellites up, well at nights we used to see that. I used to climb them, I told you, climb them silos down there. We always had something to do at night. We always worked. You had to get your work done. You know another thing, they had, when I worked in extraction, they had two men on the job.

11:09:07

A:

They had two men on the pumps, two men worked the fifth deck, two men worked the panel board, one man took samples, one man took care of solvent treatment and the ionizers. You can imagine later on, they had that, with that rotor dip, they had so good they had one man run the whole dag gone thing show. The integrated the mixer/settler with the columns later on when Jerry Green was ah operator down there. Did you ever interview him? You need to interview him. He was lead man over there and he was one of the best operators they had in extraction.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

11:09:42

Q:

How do you spell his last name?

A:

Jerry Green.

Q:

G-R-E-E-N?

A:

Right, he lives down to uh, lives down in Indiana.

11:09:57

Q:

Great. Now you retired in what year?

A:

'93.

Q:

So you were there also for part of the cleanup. How did they um, how did the process years differ from the cleanup years?

A:

Uh, the process versus the cleanup? You couldn't go in there unless you had anti-c clothes on, three pair of gloves, taped up around the ankles, have yourself checked when you come out and everything else. We used to go in there with well just a pair of coveralls. And you know the funny part of it they used to take them gloves, them gloves is hotter than a firecracker.

11:10:27

A:

They'd take those gloves over to laundry and clean them, we'd go get them and then wear them again, you know how hot the gloves were. Later on, they stopped doing that, they would let you wear gloves that were dry cleaned. Harry Phillips used to do that over in the laundry.

11:10:43

Q:

So when the cleanup started, um, was that when Westinghouse took over from NLO?

A:

Yeah. I was one of the few operators that was in the knocks. They paid 6 billion dollars I think, that was the best piece of equipment they ever had if they'd kept running 'cause that thing took care of the fumes but they had sodium sulfide back there. You couldn't get that or nitric acid cause it'd blow up.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

11:11:10

A:

I don't know what they ever done with it but there's a tank left back there when I left. But I used to watch it all the time and keep water on the darn stuff. But that had the best vacuum there ever was. If we'd had that when we was running we wouldn't have had all the problems we had. But they built it and then shut the darn thing down.

11:11:27

Q:

They did what they call a hot shutdown, while everything was still in the lines. Was that a wise choice in your opinion?

A:

They shouldn't have.

Q:

How should they have done it?

A:

I thought they should have cleaned everything out. We went over there, we went over there the first time they shut extraction down, when I left there. We took a fire hose and started up on the fifth deck and hosed that whole thing down and cleaned everything out but then they started up when, they took the work from Fernald, which I think they sent out to Mallencrodt and they found out they couldn't do it and so they brought it back to Fernald to redo it again. They had another operation down there and I never, you probably never, did you ever hear of the Winlow system?

11:12:08

A:

That was over in Plant 8. They was going to go right from the ore to the green salt it was in the ah, let me think, it was in the corner of Plant 8, there was a soil room in there, but it never did work out so they never did, the never did do it anymore. But it was supposed to go from ore to green salt so they could eliminate all them plants. I just happened to think about the Winlow system.

11:12:33

Q:

When they went into the cleanup years, what was your job?

A:

I worked back there with them, helped them clean up. We used to go in there and dump that ah, put that stuff in those white boxes that they shipped out. We dumped ah stuff that they sent, I think they sent it to North Carolina someplace and buried them boxes. But we used to dump water and everything else in them boxes back there, scrap pickling. And you had to put on them anti-c clothes and I happened to lose a thing out of my respirator one time and those rad techs saw me and I had to go urinate in a bottle see if I got contaminated. I remember that.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

11:13:11

Q:

So ah were you working with Safe Shutdown?

A:

No. Just trying to get rid of that stuff. I took care of those, that 4A Warehouse. I took care of that for six years. I used to check that everyday. I knew where all my drums were, I had it all inventoried and everything. I used to go up there and them darn lids would be up off of them drums and you know what was happening? Them drums was blowing up.

11:13:38

A:

They had got water in them and they'd for hydrogen and would blow up. One of the foremen tried to tell me they was freezing up. I said how was they freezing up, it was 100 degrees outside. But I used to go up there and mark them drums with a, with a can of white paint when they blew up. See when you get water with ah, that's what happened to them furnaces over in 5, when you got , if you got a leak, them furnace coils had water in them to keep them cool, well if you got a leak in one of them things well them things would blow them lids off and everything.

11:14:08

A:

They run out there in the floor one time. A friend of mine, he had to go to medics. He got up there, couldn't, they pulled that knockout back and didn't knock a graphite plug out. Well he got up there and done it when he done it the darn thing went out and went out on the floor and they took him to medics. There was two fellows, did I ever tell you about two fellows got killed out in Plant 9?

11:14:28

A:

There's two fellows that killed up there. I think they got water in a blender or something. One of them was Archie Stevens' boy who worked over at the sump and I don't remember who the other one was but I remember they got killed. There was another one. They ever tell you about the guy they found in the salt over in Plant 6? There was a pipefitter he worked third shift and he disappeared.

11:14:50

A:

So they went over there and looked, they could smell him, when you walked in Plant 6 and they went up there and took a lid off the salt furnace and there was a black impression up there. So they got all the salt out of the furnace and they screened it and they found bones and eyelets out of his shoes and keys and I think part of his radio.

11:15:11

A:

They never did find them. But they claim he committed suicide and crawled in that furnace. But there

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

was only a hole up there that was so big; there's no way he crawled in there. Don't ask me how he got in there, I don't know. I thought maybe you'd heard about that.

11:15:24

Q:

Uh, what year was that?

A:

Oh, must have been in the '80's. He was a real good friend of mine too. I used to kid him, kid him he was a pipefitter. But they never did, I don't know what happened to him.

11:15:40

Q:

Was that the program that Unsolved Mysteries did?

A:

Yeah. That was it.

Q:

I had heard about that.

A:

His name was Box I think or something like that. The reason I used to kid him he used to, see you're required to take a shower and you had to wear shower shoes, he never wore any. I told him I said your going to cut your feet off one of these days and ah he used to go through there barefooted. The, you was talking about safety a while ago, in the men's shower room, they had a thing that you, a spray thing that went across, an electric eye, so that you couldn't get through unless unless you took a shower or that eye would come on.

11:16:15

A:

There used to be people that'd take umbrellas, they'd take raincoats and put over theirselves with no clothes on, they climbed the wall. They caught one outside one night, the guard caught one outside one night naked and asked if he was moon bathing. So you didn't have to take a shower. See, you didn't think you was going to hear all this stuff.

11:16:37

Q:

No, that's good.

A:

He was. You believe that, that guy was out there, he told that guard. He says what are doing out here with no clothes on. He said I'm out here moon bathing. Didn't have a stitch of clothes on so he wouldn't have to take a shower. But they used to climb the walls. And they had a guy down there,

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

you asked me about the phantom.

11:16:55

A:

This guy used to go around and he would get in foreman's drawers and he'd put human waste in the drawers and they'd open up the drawers and find that stuff in there. They never did find out who he was. I think he left there and they called him the phantom.

11:17:10

Q:

Oh, my gosh. Um, now, you know one of the things that they've been talking about a lot in recent years has been that folks who worked at Fernald for a very long and during certain years, they're referring to them as the Cold War Warriors. How do you feel about being called a Cold War Warrior?

11:17:32

A:

I don't want to be called that. I started to tell that, they was talking about giving us a certificate or something by the government. I don't want nothing by the government. I think they stuck it to us on that lawsuit as far as I was concerned. And my heart problem, I don't know, I don't know whether it's got anything to do with working down there or not but Charlie's got a heart problem, Holstein's got a heart problem and I had 4 by-passes.

11:17:56

A:

But my arteries was plugged. I don't know, mine was probably from eating. But I probably inherited it from my family so I won't blame that on them. No I don't want no certificate from them people. That's basically from Clinton. I wouldn't take one from him if he gave me one.

11:18:13

Q:

Um, as far as the Cold War went, at the time, uh, in the area how did most people feel about Fernald? I mean, if you know, how did most people feel about Fernald being in the area and was it um, was it a target?

11:18:38

A:

Not as I know of. Lisa Crawford said she thought they was making dog food because the water tower one time was orange and white like checkerboard square. I don't know how they can be so naive to think they'd make a dog food down there in that place. I'll tell you another incident that happened. They used to send, they used to send those ingots at Ashtabula, Ohio to have them extruded.

11:19:00

A:

National Lead thought they was going to be smart, so they went down and bought a bunch of Kroger

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

trucks and they didn't have a good piece of steel under them. They got a load up to Columbus and the truck caved in when they was coming back from Ashtabula. They had to send a welder and somebody else to jack the truck up and weld some steel beams in there before they could get the truck back up there to Fernald.

11:19:21

Q:

What kind of controls are in place like nationally um, to transport that kind of material?

A:

I didn't have nothing to do with that. I don't know. They were probably pretty strict, I don't know. But I'll tell ya another little secret they done down there. We had a tank car one time, I don't remember but they were unloading out of it, but we couldn't get it cleaned off so you know what we done? We took those cans and painted over it.

11:19:49

A:

I don't remember what it was, whether those tank cars was white or black and that's the way it passed to get it out of the plant. They disguised it. I remember that. Cause I remember the boss that told me to do it. So you use your own judgement about that one.

11:20:07

Q:

I've heard too, from other people who are retirees that there are like entire vehicles in the waste pits. Have you ever heard anything?

A:

I don't know about that. I really don't know much about those waste pits, like I told you, K-65 one and two, I did help put that stuff in there. But I still think the waste pits, the only thing I know about the waste pits, when I worked in Plant 5. You had ingots that had boron in it. Boron was an absorber and they don't want it in the uranium. I saw them take 4 ingots out of Plant 5, I said where you taking them? We're taking them down putting them in the pit.

11:20:42

A:

All the skull metal that came out of the burnout, they took it and threw it in the pit. But I don't know what else they threw in there. But them pits, sets on fire once in a while too. When I worked at Plant 1 you could look down there see the dust flying where they, Plant 1 they used to send all that stuff to Plant 1, then they'd load it on a tractor trailer and they'd stack them 2 high. Then they'd take them down there and just take them drums and just shove them off into the pits.

11:21:09

A:

They probably told you about that. They didn't? Well the pits used to catch on fire every once in a

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

while. One pit did. And the funny thing I've never understood about the pits, they claim how contaminated they are. We went down there on a tour a couple of years ago and the darn seagulls was in there, or the birds was in there.

11:21:26

A:

You think the birds aren't going to go someplace else and contaminate someplace else with the stuff out of those pits? I do remember going down one night in the pits. I told you about the sodium plug where we cut off and one of the bosses went down and he fell in up to his knees so he took his clothes over to laundry and he washed them.

11:21:50

Q:

Holy cow.

A:

I hope you're going to edit this thing.

Q:

Oh well no actually, you whole, the whole thing goes into the Public Information Center.

A:

That's fine. That's fine.

11:22:03

Q:

Uh, you mentioned a little bit about the settlements and things, um, how, so you were involved in the class action suit. (Comment - right) How did you get involved in that? Did they just send out a notice or how did that work?

A:

No. I went down there with uh, I went down to Chesley's, I don't know how they, I guess they got it from a notice. But there's still money in there and they don't, them lawyers down there that's taking care of it I guess they're going to keep it till it runs out and then they'll say they haven't got any money. I've asked them 3 or 4 times and I can't find out anything. But I went down Chesley's office, which I wish I hadn't done, told them a lot of stuff.

11:22:38

A:

We went down there and had the lawsuit and ---- was in there telling everything was OK, that's the reason you said you was going to interview him. But he was in there for the company and all at once they settled the dag gone thing so I don't know. I thought, I felt like anybody that worked there took a rook on the lawsuit. I'll tell you something after we get off of the camera.

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

11:23:02

Q:
OK.

A:
All right. Remind me.

Q:
Um, let me look at my stuff here. Um, generally, um, how do you feel about having worked at Fernald all those years?

A:
I told you if I had it to do over again, I'd probably work down there again. I'd probably be more careful. Like I told you my motto was, take care of yourself ain't nobody else going to take care of ya. I saw a foreman by the name of Dave -----, I was working with him down at the Pilot Plant and we was cleaning the columns out one night and there was a heat exchange around there where your hot water came in, somehow that hot water came in, that hose busted and it blistered him all the way down the leg.

11:23:43

A:
He was the one I told you that was over Plant 4 the night Plant 4 blew up and blew the doors off. Got in the truck, I saw his wife and his wife says I hope Dave gets away from you before you get him killed. But he just got in the truck when the doors blew off, or blew up Plant 4.

11:24:02

Q:
Tell us about that incident and why did that happen?

A:
That incident happened because they filled that pot full of ammonia and the heater wouldn't come on so it would vaporize and they shut it off and filled it full and then the heater came on. They still don't know to this day how it happened but that's the way it happened. They say it was a valve in there backwards. There wasn't no valve in there backwards. Me and another fellow know the people that done it but I won't say it on camera.

11:24:34

Q:
Um, let's see. Um how do you feel about the work that's going on at Fernald now?

A:
Well, I hope they get it cleaned up, I really do. I wish them the best. I know them guys are going to be, that's another thing, I read in the paper where they're going to help them people find a job. Didn't nobody help me find a job when I got out of work. I had to go find one myself. I went down and

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

worked for Gulf for 2 years and that was worse than working at Fernald.

11:25:05

Q:

Also, there's been a lot of discussion about future land use and what should happen to that land that Fernald's sitting on, what do you think?

A:

Wouldn't make any difference. They was saying something about they were going to make a cemetery down for the Indians I think. If that's where they found their bones and if that's what they believe in, let them bury them there. Doesn't bother me. They ought to make it like a wild preserve down there. Let the birds and the deers have it. That's another thing they done.

11:25:30

A:

You know all them trees that back exit? They spent I don't know how many thousands of dollars on them, they used to go out there and fertilize them things and everything else to plant those trees out there and look at them now. They'll probably end up cutting them all down. You ought to have seen when they used to take care of them. That was a special job for a guy down there.

11:25:48

Q:

When did they plant that forest? The pine forest?

A:

I don't remember. It was probably in the, probably in the '70's or '80's. But they used to go out there with little things and they'd fertilize them. They used to have a building out there, we used to have fire training in too, but it's gone. The old smoke house they called it. You'd go out there and put on all that equipment and go in there see if you could find your way out of the building. They put, build a fire inside of it.

11:26:21

Q:

Um, I noticed that you came to our Open House event a couple of years ago. When you came to the Open House, site had changed a little bit, how did you feel about the Open House event?

A:

The Open House event was a good thing but they didn't have all their facts straight. I told, well just like some of the pictures you had down there, they didn't have those, they should have the people back down there where they live and get names put on them. You got pictures that was made from, well I don't know if you ever saw them, I saw them on the board down there. Over the sump, we was all, I always wore a hat with a bill on it.

11:26:59

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

A:

I don't know whether you noticed, and I used to take them down to the laundry and I'd get a guy to wash them for me and I'd leave and go in there at night and sew that dag gone things. Well they had, everybody had, those bills on one time and then they got to tearing them off. Then they wanted the hats back with bills on them because when stuff leaked down it would run down your face and it was always a good thing.

11:27:20

A:

But I always wore hats with bills on them. I even had them when I left down there. If you notice in them pictures, they all got bills on them. You notice when we was ---- the flash in the pictures, we didn't have no protective equipment and you wouldn't do that now if your life depended on it.

11:27:39

Q:

Uh, let's see.

A:

Did you talk about the 2 stills they had?

Q:

Uh, no, let's talk about the stills that they had.

A:

They had a still up in Plant 8, or I'm sorry Plant 1 but it's tore down now that they used to take the liquid that they'd clean the gloves and they'd take it up there and get the water out. I ran it one time. They also had a still up in Plant 6 they used to have to take the cores where used to get the oil off of them and they would run the fluid through there and get the oil out of it.

11:28:18

A:

That was the 2 stills they had. I never did see them use the one in 6 but I did see them use the one in Plant 1 'cause we ran it one time. We used to screen up there too, we used to screen that safe, safe geometry in them little cans they sent to Portsmouth. That's it.

11:28:39

Q:

Is there anything you want to add?

A:

No. They had a, did I tell you about the deheading the drums, I told you about deheading the drums. The can opener they had. They used to get those Portugese drums and they had a deheader they called it and they'd cut the top out of the drums. They usually send them down there and we'd dump the stuff. Is that it?

FERNALD LIVING HISTORY PROJECT

Transcript

11:29:00

Q:

I think we're out of tape for this one.

Tape FLHP0036

11:29:01

Q:

Tell me when your rolling. (Rolling) This is nat sound.