National Educational Technology Solutions LLC
1524 Eubank NE, Suite 3
Albuquerque, NM 87112
Phone: 505/271-1333 Fax: 505/271-1334
Alt: 505/350-1433
Email: CCallan@netsamerica com
http://www NETSAmerica.com

Oak Ridge Form 5: Oral History, Deed of Gift Release for Interviewee

DEED OF GIFT RELEASE FOR INTERVIEWEE
K-25 ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
U.S DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY'S ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

I, Nelson VanVie *(Name of interviewee)* residing at 1935 Cherokee Bluff Dr. *(Address of interviewee)* do hereby permanently give, convey and assign to the United States Department of Energy (DOE) my interviews *(or oral memoirs),* and the recordings, tapes *(audio and or video),* and any transcripts of my interviews conducted on April 14, 05 *(date)* at 104 Ion Lane #113 *(location).*

In doing so, I understand that my interviews *(or oral memoirs)* will be made available to researchers and the public and may be quoted from, published, and broadcast in any medium that DOE shall deem appropriate.

I further acknowledge in making this gift that I am conveying all legal title and literary property rights which I have as well as all rights, title and interest in any copyright which my be secured now or under the laws later in force and effect in the United States of America.

My conveyance of copyright encompasses the exclusive rights of reproduction, distribution, preparation of derivative works, public performance, public display, as well as all renewals and extensions.

I, Bart Callan, *(Name of interviewer or agent for or duly appointed representative of DOE)*, accept the interview *(or oral memoir)* with Nelson VanVie *(Name of interviewee)* for inclusion into the DOE Oral History Program.

Signature of DOE or its Representative: _____
Date: 4/14/05

Signature of Interviewee: _____
Date: Apr 14, 2005

Signature of Interviewer: _____
Date: 4-14-05

National Educational Technology Solutions LLC

K-25 Oral History Interview

Date: 4/14/05

Interviewee: Nelson VanWie

Interviewer: Bart Callan

[1:00:56]

Callan, B.: Okay, let's start out with the hard-hitting questions here. Let's go ahead and state your name and spell your name out for us so we have it on the tape.

VanWie, N.: My name is Nelson VanWie, N-E-L-S-O-N V-A-N-W-I-E.

Callan, B.: How old are you?

VanWie, N.: How old am I? I'm 81.

Callan, B.: Where were you born, if you want to expand.

VanWie, N.: I was born in New York City and in the Brooklyn Borough, and I don't know exactly where. But it was in one of the hospitals in the Brooklyn area.

Callan, B.: Where were you living prior to coming to work at K-25, at Oak Ridge?

VanWie, N.: Before coming to work at Oak Ridge, I was living in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and I was working for General Electric Corporation.

Callan, B.: What kind of work did you do at GE before coming over to K-25?

VanWie, N.: Well, I was on the test program at General Electric. I had just started out six months prior in Lynn, Massachusetts; and worked there for three months and then worked in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania for the next four months. And they were -- this test program was an attempt to give the people in GE an idea of where an engineer would best fit into the program and give the engineer an idea of where he could best fit into the program.

[1:02:42]

Callan, B.: What about your educational background? Where did you attend high school and college?

VanWie, N.: I attend high school in Bladensburg, Maryland. And I attended college at the University of Maryland.

Callan, B.: What degrees did you obtain?

VanWie, N.: I obtained a degree of mechanical -- BS in mechanical of engineering -- Bachelor of Science.

Callan, B.: So why was it that you came out here to K-25? What was it that attracted to the town and how did you hear about it?

VanWie, N.: Well, I was working for General Electric in Philadelphia at the time on their test program as I mentioned, and I came here because they called all the engineers that were on the test program in and said, "Now look, we can't get deferments, occupational deferments for you people any more. So what we're going to do is to give you people an opportunity to a) either let us help you get a commission in the armed services, or b) to find a job for you in an area that can still give you occupational deferment.

[1:04:20]

So I -- let's see. I tried to get the occupational deferment by -- or no, that's wrong. What I did was to attempt to get a Navy commission, but I couldn't pass the physical exam. So the people in the Navy department told me that if I had the operation that was required to correct this situation, which was a pilonidal cyst, it was called, or sinus, that they would give me a waiver on my eyesight and allow me to enter the Navy.

So I had the operation in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and it -- they excised a hunk out of the back end -- at my tailbone, about that big in size around about that deep and while that was healing, I was still working at General Electric and got disgusted with that job as far as not fulfilling any real desires that I had to help in the war effort.

And so I came to Oak Ridge.

[1:05:59]

Callan, B.: When you first came out here to K-25, what were your first recollections? What did you first see and think about what you saw when you got here?

VanWie, N.: Well, when I first came here, I came by train, of course, from Washington, D. C. to Knoxville, and when I came out here, all I saw was a sea of mud and a field of dry dust when it wasn't raining. And I just thought it was a typical place that an engineer might work.

Saw construction work going on all around me. It was a very busy place to be.

Callan, B.: What years did you work at the K-25 site?

VanWie, N.: I worked out here from 1944 until 1982 with an intervening time that I spent at the Y-12 plant of six months and a time at ORNL of three years.

Callan, B.: How did you commute to and from work? What was that like?

VanWie, N.: Well, when I first came here, I commuted by the same means that the rest of the people in vacuum testing department commuted, which was one of these stretch limousines. And eventually, we got away from that and went into commuting by car.

[1:07:48]

Callan, B.: Where did the limousines travel to and from? Where were you living?

VanWie, N.: I was living in West Village 42, which was one of the dormitories out on the western side of town.

Callan, B.: And actually you're the first one I heard talking about limousines. How long did they have that going on?

VanWie, N.: About three months.

Callan, B.: Okay. Did you meet any notable scientists or famous people while you were working out here?

VanWie, N.: No, I didn't.

Callan, B.: Okay. What about perceptions from people that didn't work here? Did people that didn't work here ever ask what was going on? What was their perceptions about all --

VanWie, N.: I never talked to any of these people. I don't know.

Callan, B.: If people were to inquire now and ask you what work was done out here, how would you describe it?

VanWie, N.: I would describe it as the enrichment of the uranium isotopes or of the uranium isotope that was fissionable.

[1:08:59]

Callan, B.: Okay. What are some of your most vivid recollections of the time that you spent at Oak Ridge and K-25?

VanWie, N.: Well my most vivid recollections have to do with the pressure that was on us as far as getting the job done in a certain amount of time. And for that reason, I guess we couldn't talk too much about the job or the area because of the needs -- the pressure on us for getting the job done in a timely manner.

Callan, B.: What did you like most about working out at K-25?

VanWie, N.: I liked the people I worked with the most. They were a fine bunch of engineers and dedicated to getting the job done, I believe.

Callan, B.: Was there anything that you didn't like about working out here at K-25?

VanWie, N.: No, it was all in all a pleasant experience.

[1:10:25]

Callan, B.: Let's talk about some of the working conditions and the work environment out there. What was it like communicating to fellow coworkers in a secret facility? Everybody had certain clearances. Was communication hard? Describe to me what it was like.

VanWie, N.: I don't -- I was less than a year out of college at the time, so I can't really say that it was one way versus another way.

Callan, B.: But I mean, what were the -- what was it like communicating at a secret facility for those of us that have no idea and have never been to one?

VanWie, N.: I don't think that it was any different from any other type of opportunity that I might have been in.

Callan, B.: What were the physical working conditions like there at the facility?

VanWie, N.: The working conditions were such that we were up and down from one level of the plant, of the four levels to another frequently during the day and I don't think -- and, of course, to get to an elevator was virtually impossible. So you went up and down the steps to get between these various levels.

[1:12:10]

Callan, B.: If I was someone that had never seen K-25 before or didn't even know what K-25 was, kind of give me a description of this building and what it was like.

VanWie, N.: The building was a huge U-shaped building and the building was divided into number of plant segments and each of these segments was further subdivided into cells. And I don't know how much I can say in this particular area, but -- and I guess I don't really have anything to supplement the subdivisions that I gave you.

Callan, B.: Okay. Were there certain rules, procedures, or guidelines in the facility that were important to follow, for example, the issue of secrecy?

VanWie, N.: Well, just the rules of what -- yeah, they had posters around frequently in places, "What you see here, what you do here, let it remain here," and this type of thing.

Callan, B.: Okay. What was your supervisor like?

VanWie, N.: Well, I worked for a number of different supervisors. And they were all young fellows, perhaps maybe a year or two older than myself, at the most until they brought in -- I think they brought in four supervisors from the Union Carbide organization from other areas of the -- there was Dixie Walker, Greg Tuttle, people of that general level.

[1:14:23]

And they were all nice people, but they were all very dedicated to the -- and they were dedicated to the job, so I don't think that they had much in the way of inputs as far as what to do to on the job, just get it done.

Callan, B.: What about your coworkers? What were they like? Did everyone pull their weight?

VanWie, N.: Everyone seemed to pull their weight, yes. They were young people like myself. Perhaps I was one of the youngest because I graduated from college when I was 19 years old. So, they might have been a year or two older than myself in some cases.

Callan, B.: You are the second person that I've interviewed this week that graduated from college at like 19 year old. So did you go into college when you were like 15 years old?

VanWie, N.: 16.

Callan, B.: 16?

VanWie, N.: Uh-huh (affirmative). And, of course, it was the wartime, so you had to perform in those days.

[1:16:42]

Callan, B.: What kind of health facilities were available to you out at Oak Ridge and at K-25?

VanWie, N.: Well, there was a dispensary at the plant, and if I ever felt sick, I think my needs got taken care of very adequately in the dispensary.

Callan, B.: Was health care also provided for you and your family when you were living out here?

VanWie, N.: I believe it was.

Callan, B.: Did you get married out here in Oak Ridge?

VanWie, N.: I got married after I'd been here about seven months.

Callan, B.: Tell me about that story. Tell me how that came to be.

VanWie, N.: Oh, well, my wife, at the time, was living in Washington, D. C. , and working for the federal government and the Department of Agriculture there. And we had had a courtship before I left for Oak Ridge. And I knew her, of course, then, and so there's really not too much to tell in that regard.

Callan, B.: Tell me then about --

VanWie, N.: When she sees this tape, she's going to be mad, but that's all right.

[1:17:19]

Callan, B.: she is in an interview right now herself. [laughter] Tell me about what the living conditions were like when you first came out here.

VanWie, N.: Well, when I first came out here I guess we lived in the Alexander Hotel for a period of about three weeks until they found housing for us. And we were in an "E" apartment for a while. After a while, we had to move out of the "E" apartment, and we moved -- let's see.

I was drafted, that's what happened. I was drafted in the Army and after about eight weeks of basic training, I was returned to Oak Ridge to the same job that I had had previously. Meanwhile, my wife continued working down here, and she found a place to live in Harriman. And when I returned, we both lived in Harriman for, oh, three or four months, I guess, and it was a nice life over there.

We rode one of the plant busses in from Harriman every day to our job. We were both on a rotating shift when we started living out there. And by that, I mean a shift that did day work, night work, and midnight shift work.

[1:19:13]

Callan, B.: I've heard about shift work. Whenever I asked that question, "Is there anything you didn't like about working at K-25," and people always say shift work. Did you find the shift work to be difficult?

VanWie, N.: No, we managed to survive on it alright.

Callan, B.: Okay. Let's see, did you have any children out here as well?

VanWie, N.: Well, all our children were born in Tennessee. But our oldest daughter was born in the hospital here in Oak Ridge, our son was born in hospital in Oak Ridge, and our youngest daughter was born in Knoxville, after we moved over there.

Callan, B.: I wanted to go back a little to bit. The story is that you were working out here and then you said you drafted into the Army while you were working out here.

VanWie, N.: That's the correct.

Callan, B.: And then the Army sent you back out to work your same job?

VanWie, N.: That's correct.

[1:20:19]

Callan, B.: What the reason for doing that?

VanWie, N.: Well, it was because I was a young person. The Army and the draft board had an arrangement that if someone were under 22 years of age, they could be drafted. If someone were over 22, they would be given a deferment. Well, I was 21 at the time, and so I worked -- let me see.

I was 21 at the time and, therefore, I was eligible for the draft and so I was sent to Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri, for my basic training after a brief stop in the pre-induction physical place in Georgia. And I don't know what to add to that.

Callan, B.: I'm just thinking what was that like? Why would you be working in a certain position and then you take you into the Army and put you back out into the same position.

VanWie, N.: Yes. There weren't many people in uniform doing work out here at the plant in those days. And so I was just one of the masses.

Callan, B.: Did your pay change?

VanWie, N.: Oh, it certainly did. I went from civilian type pay down to Army scale. And I was making 18 dollars a month when I first went in.

[1:22:26]

Callan, B.: And what were you making in your position prior to that?

VanWie, N.: Oh, probably about 45 or 50 dollars a week prior to that.

Callan, B.: Down to 18 a month?

VanWie, N.: Yeah.

Callan, B.: So that was kind of difficult to deal with?

VanWie, N.: Yes, it was difficult but my wife got a job and supplemented our income.

Callan, B.: Okay. While you were working at the facility, how much emphasis did the company and your supervisors place on safety? Did they regularly monitor your health and what kind of tests and monitoring did they do?

VanWie, N.: Well, and health and safety are two different topics, I believe, and they looked out for our health and safety in an adequate way, I think.

[1:23:31]

Callan, B.: You worked here during the Manhattan Project. You said you started in 1944, correct?

VanWie, N.: Yes.

Callan, B.: At the time, what was your understanding of the function of the K-25 facility during World War II?

VanWie, N.: What was my understanding? My understanding came from talking to my coworkers about it, that we were separating the isotopes of uranium.

Callan, B.: Did you have any idea what the enriched uranium you were separating would be used for?

VanWie, N.: I just made a flying guess that it would be used for bomb material.

Callan, B.: And on that date, on August 6, 1945, when they dropped the first bomb, what was it like here? What was the reaction to the news here in Oak Ridge?

VanWie, N.: Well, it was a summer day, of course, and when they dropped the bomb and news broke about it, I was working in the coordinating office at the time, I believe, and so I heard the news through my supervisors at that time and went from there racing down to where I knew my wife was working on the cell floor and told her about it. And she was quite excited to hear about it. So, she immediately went back in to tell her people that she was working with about the fact that the atom bomb had been dropped. They all wanted to know well what's an atom. So she tried to explain it to the best of

her knowledge of what an atom was and that's about the way it happened.

[1:25:46]

Callan, B.: What was your personal reaction to the news? How did you feel on August 6, 1945?

VanWie, N.: Well, of course, I hated the Japanese for what they had done to us. And so, I was very happy that they had dropped the bomb.

Callan, B.: How do you think that history will view the Manhattan Project and its outcome?

VanWie, N.: I do I -- well, I think that history will treat it reasonably well. I know we went to Japan later -- in later life, about five years ago, I guess it was. We went over there, and I felt that by that time I could tolerate and put up with the Japanese people and their attitudes and so forth. And after we got back, I saw this movie Toro, Toro, Toro, or something like that, and I redeveloped immediately my hatred for the Japanese. So, I don't know how they felt about it, but I sure felt like we did the right thing.

[crew talk]

[End of Tape 1, Begin Tape 2]

[2:00:15]

[crew talk]

Callan, B.: Let's talk about after 1945 and I guess the role of K-25 changes a little bit after the Manhattan Project and after World War II. Can you explain what the expansion program is and when did that begin?

VanWie, N.: Well, I don't know that the role changed very much, but it became more intensive than it had been. So there was a demand for more enriched material. And so --

Callan, B.: Why was there a demand for more material?

VanWie, N.: Well, I don't know really. I just don't know. But they built the K-29, the K-31, the K-35, or rather K-33 plants that all fit into the cascade and produced more material.

Callan, B.: And the material that was being produced was it being produced just for additional bombs or what was the uranium being used for?

VanWie, N.: I don't know. I supposed additional bombs, stockpile.

Callan, B.: Okay. That would be the nuclear stockpile?

VanWie, N.: Yes.

Callan, B.: How did your work change personally?

VanWie, N.: Well, I progressed a bit in those days and so my work as an engineer changed to more responsible positions. I don't know how to describe what I was doing particularly but it just seemed to me to get more responsible and I had roles in the plant design such as heat transfer and fluid flow that I had not had before.

Callan, B.: Okay. When the facility was put on standby in 1963 or '64, what was that, and what did you do at that point with your career?

VanWie, N.: At that point I changed functions and became some -- became involved in the computing aspects of work. And in 1964 in particular is when I changed completely out of my previous field of purely engineering and supervision of engineers into more managerial position.

Callan, B.: What are your thoughts on how the activities that were accomplished at K-25 changed or revolutionized the world?

VanWie, N.: Well, I think they changed the world's attitudes toward the United States in a large way because I think we came to our senses that the world was just shrinking in size and we had to play a lot tougher and closer role in world affairs than we had before.

Callan, B.: What about the world of scientific advancement? What sort of applications came out of what was accomplished here?

[2:04:52]

VanWie, N.: Well the work that was done here to begin with was very pioneering. The -- for example, the mass spectrometer was as device that probably had not been heard of before the K-25 plant came along. And as a measuring tool, it was used in a very significant way.

Callan, B.: Let's talk about your job specifically or your jobs roles you had out there. What types of jobs did you have associated with K-25? You know most people's careers kind of evolve. Tell me the different jobs and roles you served over the course of your career.

VanWie, N.: Just to sum it up briefly to begin with, I was working in mechanical engineering to being within what I feel was sort of the grunt work of mechanical engineering. And I got involved in some of the fields -- digressed into chemical engineering to a degree and other fields of engineering and finally ended up in a supervisory position.

Callan, B.: What would you say was one of your most challenging or difficult assignments as an individual or group that you had to accomplish?

VanWie, N.: Working on the axial flow compressors for the higher flow ends of the stages.

[2:07:03]

Callan, B.: Why was that difficult or challenging?

VanWie, N.: Because the -- well it was rather innovative in that the blades when they were put into the compressor were not fixed in place, like the blades in a gas turbine or air craft engine might be. But they had to allow for motion or for adjustments I should say. So, we had to compensate perhaps for different flow conditions or flow conditions that might change throughout the plant stages.

Callan, B.: Was it because -- I've heard of deblading.

VanWie, N.: Deblading occurred, oh, from several causes. First of all clearances between blades and other stationary parts that might have adjoined them were tight, as tight as we could possibly make them, and well just reasons like that.

Callan, B.: What would you say throughout the course of your career was your most significant accomplishment and biggest achievement of your career as an individual or as a group?

[2:08:58]

VanWie, N.: Yeah. Well, I guess -- you know, that's a tough question.

Callan, B.: You want me to come back to it? Kind of (indiscernible) and come back to it.

VanWie, N.: Let's come back to it.

Callan, B.: When working in engineering, do you have any thoughts on how -- how was the technology different back then than it was today, the technology that you needed to do your work, you know, take measurements, conduct experiments, machining technology. Was it different?

VanWie, N.: It just flowed from one era into to another, it seemed. And I didn't have any particular feeling why or how it might have changed from one era to another. It just seemed to be a natural progression of things.

[2:10:06]

Callan, B.: Did you notice things come out to where all of a sudden you had computers to run all these things, whereas before, you know, had to run calculations by hand?

VanWie, N.: Oh yes, but I noticed that mostly after I had gotten into the computing organization. And really developed an appreciation for what computers could do.

Callan, B.: What kind of equipment did you use when you were working in mechanical engineering and chemical engineering?

VanWie, N.: Well, mostly slide rule.

Callan, B.: Okay. When you were a supervisor, how many people did you manage?

VanWie, N.: Perhaps about ten.

Callan, B.: Did you ever run into any management difficulties at all?

VanWie, N.: No.

Callan, B.: They're all good people, huh?

VanWie, N.: All good people.

Callan, B.: Good.

VanWie, N.: I was very fortunate.

Callan, B.: Were there unions out there and were there any conflicts that occurred between management and the unions?

VanWie, N.: The were unions, yes, and the only conflict I can recall was one time when the plant went out on a strike for about two weeks and I don't even remember what year it was in that it happened.

Callan, B.: Okay. Do you remember any of the details of that strike or what that was like?

VanWie, N.: Yes, we had to work -- do work in the routine areas of -- that the union people had been doing. And it seemed to me the observation; general observation at the time was that the work got done faster and cheaper by having supervisory people do it than union people.

Callan, B.: I've heard the same story before from someone else who was talking about that strike to where all the workers, I guess, walked out and the management had to come in and do it. It was like the first realization point that cascade more or less seemed to run itself.

VanWie, N.: Yes. Yes. Quite so.

Callan, B.: Your wife also worked at K-25, right?

VanWie, N.: Yes.

[2:12:49]

Callan, B.: And what did she do when she was working out there?

VanWie, N.: She was in the test laboratory calibrating the plant gasses and things like that.

Callan, B.: And what sort of roles did women have while working at K-25? How were they treated?

VanWie, N.: I'd say they were treated very well and there were a number of jobs for women. We had people in the computing organization who were women and did a job for us on computing that was done in a very proficient manner.

Callan, B.: Okay. Did women typically have different job roles than men did out there?

VanWie, N.: Yes. I did not see too many women working in the plant area.

[crew talk]

Callan, B.: Would you say there were women than men or more men than women because of wartime or was the ratio about the same?

VanWie, N.: The ratio was about the same.

Callan, B.: What about African-Americans and minorities? Did you see African-American or other minorities out there?

VanWie, N.: Yes, I saw them out there, and I thought they had quite a few. But my interactions with them were nothing that I can recall any significant interactions.

Callan, B.: What sort of job roles did they have out there?

VanWie, N.: They had mostly custodial type jobs.

Callan, B.: Did they also live in Oak Ridge or in different areas?

VanWie, N.: They also lived in Oak Ridge and in surrounding areas.

[2:15:26]

Callan, B.: As far as your home life goes, I guess you and your spouse were both working. And did you guys also have children at this time?

VanWie, N.: No, that was before my wife resigned her job.

Callan, B.: Were you guys satisfied with the living conditions out in Oak Ridge?

VanWie, N.: Well let me put it this way, I don't think I was dissatisfied.

[2:15:59]

Callan, B.: Tell me a little bit about Oak Ridge and what it was like.

VanWie, N.: Well, it was a -- what I envisioned a typical wartime community would be like. There were a minimum of stores, minimum of stocking of these stores. It was one of these situations where when you saw a line forming somewhere, you aromatically got in the line because it meant that some kind of shortage was being alleviated to a modest degree.

Callan, B.: I guess the town was completely fenced and secured, as well as K-25?

VanWie, N.: Yes.

Callan, B.: What was that like? Could you come and go out of town?

VanWie, N.: Oh, yes, you could come and go out of town. All you had to do was carry your badge with you and show it at the guard gate. When you went through the gate, the portals, they had guards that stopped the buses, got on the bus, or if you had a car, they examined the people in the car. And to a degree did a spot check -- random spot check on the packages you were carrying. I think they were more interested in finding liquor than finding any other commodity that one might be carrying.

Callan, B.: What about liquor? Was it difficult to get liquor when you were out? I don't know if you drank or not, but was there --

VanWie, N.: Well, we drank to a degree, and it was a little bit difficult to get, yes.

Callan, B.: Do you have any interesting stories or funny stories about --

VanWie, N.: Well, one time we were coming back in the gate from a trip out of town and we had a bottle of hair tonic or something in one of the suitcases in the overhead rack in the bus. And it was gurgling a little bit. And the guard had a difficult time finding what was making that gurgling sound. We surmised it was because he was looking for liquor primarily.

[2:18:34]

Callan, B.: Were there positive aspects to living in Oak Ridge that offset the wartime conditions? Was there -- things that you look back and think, "Yeah, it was really nice about that community. "

VanWie, N.: Well I liked the fact that it was a closed community. And your in-laws could not come in unless you had a pass for them and provided ample notification that they were coming or your own parents for that matter.

Callan, B.: So no surprise visits from your mother-in-law?

VanWie, N.: No surprises. [laughter]

Callan, B.: I've head that too -- people that was just great. As far -- I guess there was rationing that occurred out here.

VanWie, N.: Oh yes.

Callan, B.: Did you guys have access to some stuff that wasn't accessible to the rest of the country?

VanWie, N.: I doubt that we did. I really doubt that we did because we had the gasoline coupons. We had the coupons for food, sugar, butter, and things like that, that everybody had.

[2:19:46]

Callan, B.: What about recreation out in Oak Ridge? I guess almost everybody was pretty young during that time.

VanWie, N.: That's right. This was the period when one was learning to play bridge, for example. And so we'd get together with friends and play bridge.

Callan, B.: What other social activities were going on?

VanWie, N.: There were dances going on, and there were adequate movie shows and things like that.

Callan, B.: Anything else special or unusual you'd like to talk about regarding Oak Ridge and the secret city?

VanWie, N.: Bart, I can't think of anything else at the moment. No.

Callan, B.: What do you think future generations should remember about K-25?

VanWie, N.: K-25 was a plant that did very well in its time and if in the normal progression of things that they just did their job and did it in a very capable, competent manner.

Callan, B.: Describe what the accomplishments were here and what should be acknowledged. What history should acknowledge about this place.

VanWie, N.: What history should acknowledge is the dedication of the people who worked here and it should be remembered that people who worked here were patriotic and did their jobs and did them without -- well I can't -- I just can't put my feelings into words here.

[2:22:18]

Callan, B.: Well, go ahead. If you want to collect your thoughts a little bit because it's an important thing to know what should be acknowledged. If you were writing a story about Oak Ridge and K-25, what would the topics be that you'd cover?

VanWie, N.: What would what?

Callan, B.: What would your topics be?

VanWie, N.: Well you'll have to remember I did not work in essence in any other capacity other than in Oak Ridge because there was wartime going on when I graduated from college. And I might have -- with my career with General Electric, I might have worked in -- well, compare with Lynn, Massachusetts for example, where I worked on the test floor up there for small turbo generator sets. I think that it was fairly comparable.

Callan, B.: Do you think there was a spirit of -- I guess a large group of people collaborating or cooperation and accomplishing something?

VanWie, N.: Oh yes, cooperation is a good word. I think that was what we were primarily interested in doing, getting the job done and despite the fact that so many people out there did not know what they were working on or why they were doing what they were doing. I think that it was carried off in a very good manner.

Callan, B.: What about the time period that it took to put this thing together and pull everything off? Is that something that is pretty significant, thinking back?

VanWie, N.: Oh, yes, I think it was significant that it was pulled off in the time that it was. We were continuously bombarded with messages like this must be done or this must be it and providing schedules of when various buildings had to come on line. And --

[crew talk]

VanWie, N.: So I don't know anything more to say than that yes, it was a very cooperative spirit that the people had here.

Callan, B.: Those are really all the questions that I have for you. Is there anything else that I left out or anything else that you'd like to discuss or expand upon before our interview ends? I think we had one other question you wanted me to come back to.

VanWie, N.: Yeah.

Callan, B.: What do you think was your most significant accomplishment as an individual or group?

VanWie, N.: Well, I think depending on the time you're talking about when I was in vacuum test for example. It was getting the job done. When I worked in the plant design, it was helping and cooperating on design aspects of the plant. And when I was in the computing organization, it was getting the computing done in an expeditious manner.

[2:26:55]

Callan, B.: Can you describe vacuum testing?

VanWie, N.: Vacuum testing was a system where you evacuated segments of the plant and then probed around the outside of welds with helium as a test gas and used a mass spectrometer to analyze the gasses that were being introduced into the piping system. And when they -- things showed a significant increase in the helium concentration, then you knew there was a leak somewhere in the vicinity. So you would probe in a very strategic manner the piping and try to isolate where the leak might be occurring so that the welders could come in and repair it. And then you'd go back and test and that's about all there was to vacuum testing really.

Callan, B.: Were leaks in the cascade or leaks in the system pretty problematic?

VanWie, N.: Yes. The welders developed a proficiency at their job that meant less and less leaks as the plant progressed in its construction.

Callan, B.: Great. That's all the questions I have. Anything else?

VanWie, N.: Okay. Well, I don't believe I have anything more to offer you.

Callan, B.: Well it was an excellent interview. Thank you very much, Mr. VanWie.

VanWie, N.: Happy to do it, Bart.

[End of Interview]