National Educational Technology Solutions LLC

K-25 Oral History Interview

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Interviewee: Tommy Jones

Interviewer: Jennifer Thonhoff

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[1:00:38]

Thonhoff, J.: Will you state your name and spell it for me, please?

Jones, T.: My name is Tommy Jones, T-O-M-M-Y J-O-N-E-S.

Thonhoff, J.: And where you born?

Jones, T.: Born in Hawkins County, Rogersville, Tennessee, in April 10, 1928.

Thonhoff, J.: Where were you living prior to coming to K-25?

Jones, T.: In Rogersville.

Thonhoff, J.: In Rogersville?

Jones, T.: Yes.

Thonhoff, J.: And what kind of work did you do prior? You were in high school, you said?

Jones, T.: I was in high school until the end of '46, and I worked two years of construction on some new apartment buildings in Oak Ridge and on the new high school that they built and St. Steven Episcopal Church. And they were hiring at K-25, my dad found out, and I put in my application. And 90 days later, I got the call after my clearance went through to go to work.

[1:01:45]

Thonhoff, J.: So, that was -- your schooling was in high school and you didn't go to college. You went straight there?

Jones, T.: No, I took some NAT classes during the time that I worked on so to try to better myself.

Thonhoff, J.: What were your first recollections when you arrived at K-25?

Jones, T.: Well, we -- my dad was here for a year-and-a-half or so before we could come down because there was no houses available, and they lived in what they called a hutment. It was a plywood shack, if you will. And there was four men in it and a big old pot bellied stove in the center of it for heat. Then there still wasn't any housing development -- housing available, and he got a room in the

barracks. And then we could get a trailer. And I was in the middle of that year of school when he and mom came down here. And I stayed with my grandmother and finished that year of school and then I came down.

[1:02:55]

And we lived in Wheat Colony Trailer Camp; that's on Blair Road, right next to K-25. All of the equipment, you could hear running at night. The big flood lights, and they had PA systems, and the big loud speakers we would [hear] all night, paging different Army personnel or whatever that they needed. And sometimes they would play music all night.

So the trailer we lived in was like a camping trailer. It was about a 26-footer. The cook stove was a Coleman cook stove like you use in camping, and the oven was a little box -- metal box that you set on top of that to do the baking. We had a little kerosene heater for heat, and we had bath houses. There was a bath house for every so many trailers. You didn't have a bath in the trailer itself.

And there was some people that were fortunate enough to have their own campers, and that was called the private trailer camp. And they had that set up. And they were able to live a little better than we did.

But it was right out in the middle of a field. No trees, no shade. And when my dad would be working midnight shift and he'd get up in the afternoon, the bed would be wet where he was, you know, sweating so much and everything. It was pretty rough during that time.

[1:04:31]

But we lived in Wheat Colony Trailer Camp. They closed that out, and we went to Happy Valley Trailer Camp, which is just kind of across the turnpike from K-25. And from there, we went to Middletown Trailer Camp, where the civic center is built today and the field that joins it there.

But at K-25 we had a skating rink, bowling alley, a movie theater, a department store, and a grocery story, and we had a recreation center with a basketball court. And outside we could pitch

horseshoes. And that was a laugh, you know, in that time. We could go to the about three or four different cafeterias. Carbide had one; Ford, Bacon and Davis had one; John A. Johnson had one; and Fercleve had one. So we had four different cafeterias that we could go to and eat. The busses ran -- government busses ran about every five minutes. You just got on. There was no fee to ride the bus. You could catch a bus and go anywhere in Oak Ridge. The city was fenced off, and it was -- the guards were MPs with the Army. And if you wanted a friend or anybody in the family to come and visit, you had to go get a pass and tell them what gate they would be coming in. And they would have to get off and be cleared through to come in and visit. They couldn't just come in.

[1:06:30]

So that brings us up to the time that I went to work at K-25. And we were, at that time, had got a house on West Outer Drive, and I started in May of 1950 and into what they call re-tubing. It was like an assembly line. You had three different operations that we did. One was called the feed, one was called the living, and the other was the bucking. And when we'd feed the tubes in and then move -- we'd get a ten minute break every hour and then we'd switch to the next position, and we'd do this all day long. And it was real strict. I mean, you didn't get longer than ten minutes, and you didn't come back to work until the time they said to. And if you needed relief, they had a relief man, and you couldn't just walk off from your position because you'd leave five other men without anything to do.

So to go [to] the restroom, you had to get a relief man. He'd come and relieve you and then you'd go back to your position when you were through.

So that brings me up through that part of it. I worked in that for about a year-and-a-half, and I got an opportunity to transfer into what they call barrier testing lab. And I worked in that until 1960 and they started the centrifuge program, and I went into that.

[1:08:11]

But in the time of the barrier testing, we ran different tests to see how good the material was and so on and went from there. They had pilot plants that they ran actual checks on them to see how good they would do using the real thing. So, that done, brought

me, like I say, up to the centrifuge part. And then I stayed in that until I retired in '86, September of '86.

Thonhoff, J.: So you retired in September of '86?

Jones, T.: Yes.

Thonhoff, J.: And how did people communicate at the plant?

Jones, T.: You mean in what way?

Thonhoff, J.: To your fellow workers?

Jones, T.: Oh you mean --

Thonhoff, J.: How did you guys communicate with each other?

Jones, T.: Relate and so on?

[1:09:07]

Thonhoff, J.: Yeah.

Jones, T.: All right. It was good. I mean, we had a good working relationship with most everyone. Everybody was there and you had to do your job then. They were real strict and we had to take a lie detector test every six months to make sure you weren't removing any classified material or anything from the plant. And the FBI conducted that, and they were real strict on it.

Thonhoff, J.: Whoa. And then how did you communicate with your friends and family?

Jones, T.: You mean outside the work?

Thonhoff, J.: Outside of --

Jones, T.: Well, eventually we got phones, but we didn't have them for quite a while, but you just have to go and visit was primarily what you'd have to do.

Thonhoff, J.: How was it not being able to say what you were doing?

Jones, T.: Well --

Thonhoff, J.: How did your friends and family respond to that?

[1:10:03]

Jones, T.: Well, they just realized that when you told them, you know, you couldn't talk about what you were doing. I know one time there was a rumor that nobody knew what was going on except the ones that needed to know. And the rumor got out, oh we know what they're doing now. They're making tires. Said there's warehouses full of tires down here and we know what they're doing now. [laughs] So, you know, that type of thing.

Thonhoff, J.: What were the physical working conditions like?

Jones, T.: They were good. They were good. They stressed on safety and trying to, you know, be sure that you did the job in the safest way and provided your equipment that you needed to do it.

Thonhoff, J.: And what were your co-workers like?

Jones, T.: They were all real good for the most part, you know. Every once in a while you'd have a fella that may be having a problem or something, but for most part, they were great.

Thonhoff, J.: And then what kind of health facilities were available to you?

[1:11:21]

Jones, T.: We had a dispensary, they called it, that was staffed with medical personnel, doctors, nurses, and we got a yearly exam. And if you were injured or anything, they had the ambulance to pick you up and take you to the dispensary and if it -- if they deemed it was more than they needed to take care of, they would send you on to the hospital. In the very beginning, most all the doctors and dentists and everything were Army. Everything was pretty much run by the Army.

Thonhoff, J.: And you said they put a lot of emphasis on safety?

Jones, T.: Oh, yeah, yeah. They sure did.

Thonhoff, J.: What type of radiological, chemical monitoring was performed?

Jones, T.: Well, they used Geiger counters, you know, if they thought there might be some radiation around where you were working and

would you let you know what you were working with and so on to, you know, to keep you from getting over-exposed. But they couldn't be everything all the time, you know. There was releases and stuff that they'd come in after the fact and check everything and then send you through and you'd have to report to a dispensary and you'd have to leave 24-hour urine samples. Take them home and bring them back to analyze and so on.

[1:12:53]

So they tried their best under the circumstances to do everything they could.

Thonhoff, J.: And so were you informed about the results of the testing?

Jones, T.: Yeah. Yeah. We sure were.

Thonhoff, J.: During the war, did you have any idea what the uranium was going to be used for?

Jones, T.: No.

Thonhoff, J.: No?

Jones, T.: No. We didn't know until President Truman announced that it had been dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Of course, we knew that they had run tests out in the desert and -- but we didn't know where it was going to be used or when. But --

Thonhoff, J.: What was your reaction when you found out?

Jones, T.: Well, we were all elated, really, because we thought of all the number of lives that it would save, you know, from having to go in and do hand-to-hand fighting, what you might say. So this brought them to their knees and they surrendered. And everyone was really elated about it.

[1:14:04]

Thonhoff, J.: How do you think history will view the Manhattan Project and its outcome?

Jones, T.: Well, it's hard to say because we have so many people now that are protesting nuclear power and any nuclear type material and -- but I think for the most part, I think people will still realize that it

saved a lot of lives, American lives. And they will appreciate the fact that that was the way it went.

Thonhoff, J.: And could you explain the expansion program?

Jones, T.: Like building more plants and so on?

Thonhoff, J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jones, T.: Originally it started with K-25 and then went to K-27, K-29, K-31, and K-33. And that was a big job and there was a lot of people working toward the completion of those projects. And it went real well, really. I mean, they kept getting more and more enriched uranium and finally at -- in '86, of course, Portsmouth and Paducah were doing the same work, and in '86, why we had to close out and stand by K-25. They shut it all down, including the centrifuge program.

Thonhoff, J.: And what was -- what kind of work was being done at the facility after the Manhattan Project, during the cold war era?

Jones, T.: Well, it was still -- you know, the centrifuge program, I guess, at that point was the biggest program going due to the fact they were trying to find a more economical way to separate the uranium and also to make reactor power, you know, uranium for reactors for peace time use. But it could also be used either way, but that was the primary goal at that point, from what I understood on it.

Thonhoff, J.: And how did your work change at that point?

Jones, T.: You mean --

Thonhoff, J.: Your actual work that you did -- how did that change?

Jones, T.: It was no change in -- as far as the centrifuge at that point. I mean, we were going gung-ho and trying to develop a better and more economical machine.

[1:16:55]

Thonhoff, J.: So there was more work then?

Jones, T.: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah. And the plant was to be built at Portsmouth and that was killed too, but that was their goal, was to build a good machine to do the work and have it used in the plant

at Portsmouth. We did all the research and development in Oak Ridge.

Thonhoff, J.: What did you do when the plant went on standby?

Jones, T.: Well, at that time we inventoried equipment to dispose of it and whatever method it would be on surplus or whatever. And then I retired during that time. That was going on when I retired.

Thonhoff, J.: What are your thoughts now about how the activities accomplished at K-25 revolutionized the world?

Jones, T.: Well, I think that it was a great thing, like I say. Somebody was going to get it. I mean, it had gone further enough in development that some of the other countries -- in fact, they know Russia [was] working on it. And we were just able to beat them to the draw, so to speak, and come out ahead and be the dominating power in the nuclear industry.

Thonhoff, J.: What types of jobs -- what exactly was it that you did?

Jones, T.: Well, like I say, I started off in the re-tubing, an hourly job. Then I went to barrier testing lab, where we tested the barrier material. And then into the centrifuge and I performed various operations in the two labs, the two different labs.

Thonhoff, J.: What were some of the things you did in the labs?

Jones, T.: One thing was we'd run tests. We'd have test ends, we called them. We'd have the conditions that we would run this sample at and we would run these samples and record the data. Other operations had recorders that automatically recorded the data. If you want to call it automatic, it printed it out on a chart paper. And then that was pretty much it in the barrier section.

[1:19:33]

But in centrifuge, which started with the little Zippe model, they called it, that was Dr. Zippe in Germany had developed the centrifuge to that point. And it was a small but wanted to find out what it did, how much problem it was, and there was a lot of development went into just that little machine.

And then as we got more familiar with what we could do and how we could do it, we got bigger and made larger machines, of course,

trying to get more efficient. You can imagine all of the effort that went in, the support from the maintenance people and everyone in performing this and trying to accomplish this. It was quite an undertaking but here again we had a good crew and good people, and we did it.

Thonhoff, J.: What was your most challenging assignment?

Jones, T.: I'd say in the centrifuge.

Thonhoff, J.: Was there anything in particular?

Jones, T.: Yeah, trying to get them to operate. They ran at high speeds, which we can't talk about, but it took real good equipment and the assembly had to be mistake-free. You had to do the job right or you were in trouble. So that was the most challenging part that I ran into. But it was a joy to be in that because it did challenge you and felt like you had accomplished something when you did the job and it turned out right.

[1:21:23]

Thonhoff, J.: What would you say is your most significant accomplishment for yourself or for you as a group, collectively?

Jones, T.: Here again, I'd have to say in the centrifuge. I got three patents when I was with the centrifuge group and was, like I say, enjoyed what I was doing. And it was challenging. And I think all of us -- all the way through, the whole group, it was a big challenge to us and I felt like we accomplished a lot together as a team.

Thonhoff, J.: Yeah. Do you have any things that you remember specifically during that time that you could discuss like any stories about working there?

Jones, T.: Well, they might be a lot and some of them I probably couldn't relate.

There was one thing, if I might, I was thinking about the old K-25 building, if I can go back.

Thonhoff, J.: Sure.

Jones, T.: When they were building it, it's in a U shape, and they said one crew started at one end of the U and one on the other side, at that

end of the U. The one on the east side was working faster or had more or whatever. But they went down and went across the U and started up the other side and when they met they were two feet off in elevation. And if you've looked at the building today, the roof will be going along and then it'll step down and the windows will be going along and they'll step down, and they had to build a ramp on the operating floor so that they could overcome that.

[1:23:20]

The instrumentation, I mean running the instrument lines and everything in there, it was just immaculate. They all ran parallel and when they made a bend, they all made the bend the same, and then when they went off to the instrument that they were going to, everything -- it was just perfect. I mean, and to think they did in the short time that they did it, it was remarkable, really. It was a remarkable feat.

I'm sorry I went back on you like that.

Thonhoff, J.: No, you can go to wherever you want to go. It's up to you. How was the management?

Jones, T.: The management was fine, great. I mean, we had some of the best top management, and I mean this from my heart, they were. They were good planners and managed to get us funding to do the jobs that we had to do. And we appreciated them for the most part.

[1:24:30]

Thonhoff, J.: And were there any conflicts that occurred?

Jones, T.: Oh, no, nothing serious. I mean, little nit-picking things every once in a while like you'd run into any job. But they were handled well.

Thonhoff, J.: And what sort of roles did women play?

Jones, T.: In the later years -- in the earlier years, when they were building the K-25 building, they had to do a lot of leak checking and the women primarily did the leak checking. But you didn't have women then as pipe fitters and welders and so on in the plant itself that I know of. But they did play a big part in performing operations like leak checking and things like that. Of course,

secretaries and this sort of thing. But they had their job and they did it well.

Thonhoff, J.: And did you have any contact with Afro-Americans or any minorities?

Jones, T.: Not too much then. When Oak Ridge was built, they built a colored section. And they were over in Gamble Valley, we call it here. And they were pretty well separated. I mean, they still had black and white, you know, restrooms and that sort of thing. But they were treated well. I mean, there wasn't anybody that really -- oh, you had a few, I'm sure, but it wasn't evident that any of this was going on. That was the way it was then, and things got better, of course, as time went on.

[1:26:20]

Thonhoff, J.: Things kind of changed a little.

Jones, T.: Yeah.

Thonhoff, J.: And I want to kind of go back about what it was like -- did you get married and have kids?

Jones, T.: Oh yeah. Yeah.

Thonhoff, J.: How was it like with your spouse and your family?

Jones, T.: Well, it was fine. Of course, I didn't get married till 1950. I met the wife in high school, and we married in January 1950 and raised three kids during our lifetime. But things were, you know, better then. It wasn't so much -- the town wasn't fenced in, you know, and things were getting to normal, like in any other town. So it was a lot better then as far as, you know, having just a normal town.

Thonhoff, J.: And did it affect your home life at all, working there and not being able to talk about it?

[1:27:39]

Jones, T.: No. No. I'm sure there's a lot of automobile mechanics that don't try to tell their wife that they worked on a carburetor or a transmission, so -- [laughs]

Thonhoff, J.: What do you think future generations should remember about the K-25 facility?

Jones, T.: Well, I think one thing how quick it was built, how soon they got the job done, and the actual operations of it, and what an effort it took, and I don't believe in this day and time that you could do it in four or five times the length of time that it was done then. It was just -- I mean, it's hard to believe.

But they said that when General Leslie Grove, who was in charge of the Manhattan Project was approached on taking this project over and managing it, he said, "There's one thing. I want all the material that I need when I need it or I will not try it," because materials were froze then, building materials. A lot of people had dug basements, I know, in my home town before I came down here, anticipating building a new home, but they froze building materials and that basement was just sitting there, a hole in the ground.

[1:29:10]

Meat was rationed. Gas was rationed. And they would have nylons every once in a while in some of the stores. And there would be a line of women a block long standing in line to get the nylon hose. And when they had meat, and that canned Spam was considered a meat. And you had stamps to buy meat. And you'd have to use a stamp to buy a can of Spam. But it was pretty good with eggs, really [laughs] and with vegetables because, you know, you just couldn't get it. It wasn't available.

The story was one time in a cafeteria, we'd go and get roast beef. And oh, you know, this is great. We can get a roast beef dinner. Then come to find out later on, well it was horse meat, which, you know, it's okay. But it was grainy like, but it was good and we didn't pay too much attention when we found out later, you know, except well if I'd have known, I wouldn't have ate it. [laughter]

[crew talk]

[End Tape 2, Begin Tape 1]

[2:00:20]

[crew talk]

Thonhoff, J.: Could you describe the great accomplishments here and what should be acknowledged?

Jones, T.: Well, I still feel that the length of time that it took and the amount of work that went into it, is just outstanding. Like I say, it couldn't be done again, even close to that length of time with modern technology, I don't think at all. It was just sheer work, hard work, and it was covered up with people that had the knowledge and everything to do it. And it was remarkable.

Thonhoff, J.: Why do you think everybody came together so closely and worked so hard?

Jones, T.: Well, they had a job to do and they didn't have time for frivolous things back then. And everybody -- like I say, the management was strict in what you had to do, and they wanted it done. They didn't put up with any nonsense. And everybody just fell in and I think they -- when they realized what they had done that they were really proud of what they'd done but it was stress to them that it needed to be done and as quick as possible. And everybody just put their shoulder to the wheel and went to work. It was around-the-clock operation. You couldn't tell the difference in the amount of traffic or anything at 12 o'clock at night that you could in 12 noon.

[2:02:10]

In talking about that, all the roads were gravel roads. And in the summertime, when it was real dry, it would get dusty. They'd run graters and trucks spraying water and try to keep the dust down because it would just absolutely cover you up if they didn't. It was just a big operation like I never dreamed that I'd ever see, and I'm sure I won't ever see it again. But it was really something.

Thonhoff, J.: What was the general feeling around the plant?

Jones, T.: Well, everybody just went on and did their thing, I mean, you know, everybody -- they'd tell jokes, you know, and everybody would dig each other once in a while. If somebody [would] make a mistake, you know they'd laugh at them or whatever. But not -- it was good. Everybody worked hard. It was just a hard-working bunch of people. And it was people from all walks of life, farmers, you name it, that was in here doing these jobs. And they were actually -- just picked up on it and trained. And of course, they had skilled mechanics and pipe fitters and instrument people and this

type of thing. But a lot of the work force would just plain old common hillbillies from the state of Tennessee.

Thonhoff, J.: What did you like the most?

Jones, T.: Well, I guess, making new friends. One of the things that -- talking about the schools and all, so many people, well all of them were like me. You were taken out of your school where you had all your friends, you knew everybody, and brought into a place where there was a few that might migrate from your own hometown or whatever in here. But the further away you got the less there was. Some of the students -- the boys maybe were a star football player back at their school or whatever it might be. Basketball, baseball, and they come into a different place, start it all over again, and it was -- some of them were really irritated and irate about the fact that they had to move here. And we'd have occasional little fisty cuff or something, you know, where somebody would be aggravated and we'd be at the rec center playing maybe playing basketball and it would come out. But it wasn't too bad. I mean, everybody fell in line and it was really a pleasant thing overall.

[2:04:53]

Rode the busses together. It was good. When Coach Ben Martin -- he was the first coach in Oak Ridge High School, and he was from Kentucky. And that's how the Oak Ridge got its name of the Wildcats, was from the Kentucky Wildcats. And the colors, the maroon and gray from the Oak Ridge School was taken from Dobbin Bennet's high school in Kingsport, and they were one of the outstanding teams in the state of Tennessee at that time. In fact, they pretty well dominated. They had money backing them up there and everything. They had a nice school, nice facilities and everything. So, they chose their colors for the school colors here in Oak Ridge.

But it was an experience, and it was good times and bad times but more good times.

Thonhoff, J.: What did you like the least?

Jones, T.: Oh, the -- I guess, all of the milling, and you know, rushing around and -- cars were a premium. Hardly anyone had a car because they didn't build them, you know, from '42 to '46, and just not being able to get out and travel and go places. But like I say, we had the buses and you could ride them all over Oak Ridge city, and they

had the plant buses that just operating inside the plant. And they had theaters, bowling allies, and everything up in town. You could get on the bus here and go to uptown we'd call it. And roads were all gravel. Sidewalks were all made out of wood. And one of the things that I remember was like on Sundays maybe or whatever the occasion might be that the women would dress up and put on high heels. They were forever catching their high heels in the cracks on the sidewalk and breaking them off and get highly irritated.

But you'd see women walking like Chester on "Gunsmoke", where she'd broke her heel off her shoe or something, you know. And that was kind of amusing. But it was muddy and the streets were muddy. We had a lot of mud and had those old board sidewalks. They were all over town. And that's what we had to walk on. And there was a lot of walking, I mean, you know, people get out and walk around and -- but it was real muddy like in the early spring or in the late fall, why it was something else.

Thonhoff, J.: That's wonderful. Tell me some more about walking around in Oak Ridge. Tell me some of the things you guys did.

Jones, T.: Well, we'd go to central cafeteria, a lot of us in the evenings and have a hamburger or whatever, hot dog, and that was sort of a hangout place, and we had school Wildcat den, which was a student facility. They had pool tables and this type of thing. And we'd go there and shoot pool and have a good time.

[2:08:38]

A fella, named Shep Lotter, managed that Wildcat Den, and he was from down in Louisiana, and he was quite a character and he was good to us, but he was strict. He didn't put up with any nonsense. And we'd go in there and just have a big time. That was the school handout most of the time. But that was primarily what we did. I mean -- and we'd walk from - instead of taking the bus when the whether was pretty, if you wanted to walk to someplace that wasn't too far away and you'd walk and just have a good time.

Thonhoff, J.: Are there any stories or anything in particular that you remember that you want to talk about?

Jones, T.: Not right off hand right now. There's plenty of them, if you could recall them. But I can't think of anything right off -- like I say, it'll come to me later, I'm sure, but it's been a while.

Thonhoff, J.: Anything at work that was particular intriguing or interesting or funny that happened?

Jones, T.: Well, yeah, there was a lot of things. I know I had a habit of saying "Mercy" to a lot of things that would take place. And this one young lady, when she'd walk through our workplace, I'd look over and I'd say, "mercy," you know. Well the fella that I was working with, the next time she came through after that, it had been -- you know, I had said that a number of times. He stopped her and said, "Is your name Mercy?" And she said, "No. Why?" And he said, "Well, every time you walk through here, Tom says Mercy," and she [laughs] of course, she laughed about it and everything but they kidded me about that quite a bit.

[2:10:45]

Things like that. I mean, we had a good time and we worked hard too. Told a lot of jokes, like I say, but we were serious also.

Thonhoff, J.: When you needed to be.

Jones, T.: Right.

Thonhoff, J.: Are there any friendships that you nurtured and kept on with?

Jones, T.: Well, yeah, but a lot of them have passed on. And you know, still have some friends and we don't get to see each other like I would like to. But we have -- well, I have my mother with me, 97 years old and we're pretty well tied down, taking care of her. And I don't get out as much as I'd like to because the wife has to help with her brother and sister, and you know, so we're pretty well tied down. But we've had a good time. We have a lakefront lot down on Watts Barr Lake, and we used to get together, a bunch of us, and we'd ski and swim and boat and just have a big time. And that was really enjoyable.

Thonhoff, J.: If you were writing a story about Oak Ridge and the K-25 plant, what key topics would you cover?

Jones, T.: Here again, my thoughts have always been on how fast that everything went together and the number of people that was involved in doing it, the workmanship that was put into it, and just the relationship. I mean, we lived in those trailer camps, and you know we were like in campgrounds. We were side by side. And everybody knew everybody and everybody would get out

sometimes and have sort of a cookout like, even in those days. And if not, everybody would fix a dish of whatever and we'd get outside and eat outside, when the weather was pretty and laugh and talk and, you know, just have a good time because there really wasn't that much to do or that easy to do it by having to catch buses and go here and there but it was all right. I mean people will improvise. [laughs]

[2:13:31]

It's just human nature that people find themselves in situation and making a good living, making better money than they ever made in their life, good working conditions, and it was just a pleasant time for a lot of people. When the city was fenced off, everybody in the city had to work here to live there. You would go off and leave your door wide open, night day, leave it open for a week if you wanted to. You wouldn't' have to worry about anybody bothering anything. The weather would be the only problem. But it was just, you know, unreal really.

Thonhoff, J.: Is there anything else you want to add? Anything you can think of?

Jones, T.: No, not at this point. I think I've pretty well covered everything that I can remember. I'm sure I'll remember more later, like I say, but --

Thonhoff, J.: And if you do, you can call us up and come back.

Jones, T.: There were so many things working that many years with so many people and seeing the changes over the years. You know, it's just unreal and you try to bring it all together in your mind but, like I say, it's been a long time. Not only has it been a lot of water gone under the bridge, but they built a lot of new bridges since then, you know.

All in all it was a great experience. It's a once in a lifetime experience, and I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to have participated in this. All the way through and to have made new friends and just a great experience is all I can say.

Thonhoff, J.: Do you want to talk about some of the changes that happened? Some of the shifts?

Jones, T.: On the what now?

Thonhoff, J.: On the shifts. You said they were a lot of changes and a lot of things that happened throughout your working there.

[2:15:36]

Jones, T.: As the construction, you know, was completed, and the work force would start dropping off and you'd have less and less people. You know, and then it became just a - when Carbide took it over, I think Tennessee Eastman was in Y-12 and then Carbide took it over for the operations end of it. And then things began to settle down to just a normal, like any factory or whatever routine work. You know? Repetitive type jobs and whatever. But it -- that was the biggest change was at the end of the construction.

Of course, there was smaller construction jobs going on, support buildings, and this type of thing, even after the main building was completed, but you didn't have the force -- the workforce involved in the time that they were building the plant itself.

So that was the biggest change that you -- and then of course, when they took the gates down and opened the city up, that was a big change.

Thonhoff, J.: And how did that affect your life?

Jones, T.: Then?

Thonhoff, J.: Uh-huh (affirmative).

Jones, T.: Well, it -- some of us boys used to -- like we'd want to go to Knoxville or something and we'd forget our badge to get back in. And what we'd do going out is stop and maybe be a couple of us and we'd get in the trunk of the car. And go through the gate and then they'd stop on the other side and let us in. But they had routine checks where they would just random check an automobile. And we always hoped and prayed oh, don't let them stop us and open that trunk, you know. But we'd go out and we'd go to Knoxville and maybe, you know, take in the town over there and come back and we'd get back in the trunk and hide. Then they'd stop and let us back in on the other side.

We had things like that. And alcohol was prohibited in the area. And I know the MPs that manned the gates around the plant primarily, of course, they had residential areas, like the trailer

camps and everything around the plant. And they'd go out - some people -- we'd go out and go to the Owl Whiskey Store up in Oakdale, and they'd buy half pints and pints and so on. And they'd take it and put in their spare tire in the trunk. It wouldn't have any air in it, of course. It would be filled with whiskey bottles. And they'd slip it in that way. And they caught some of them. And if they caught you, you lost your job. I mean, there wasn't any question.

And that was another thing. If someone messed up, you'd see them today. They were escorted out and you'd never see them again. They were gone.

[2:18:50]

They were just fired completely. I mean, they didn't put up, like I say, no nonsense. They wouldn't tolerate it at all. I know there was one murder. A fella killed his wife in a private trailer camp and all the police and MPs and everything was in there, and the county sheriff came in; took him off. The trailer was gone the next day and nobody knew what happened or where he went or anything. You just didn't get any information or any feedback on that type of thing.

So it was something else. I know when my dad was on the guard force, and they had a complaint at that time, they were letting vendors come in and bring in vending machines. And they had a cigarette machine that all of the cigarettes would be missing out of it and no money. And it took a quarter back then. So they put my dad in plain clothes and work coveralls and put him over in one of the shops that was just across from where this vending machine was to watch that one machine and see if he could catch or see what anybody was doing to get them out of there.

A fella came up and he stood there and he looked around. He took out some scotch tape, made about a four foot piece of it, wrapped it around the quarter and then twisted it like a string, pushed it down in there and kept pulling the lever and when it finally tripped, he stopped right there and just proceeded to empty all of the cigarettes out of the machine or start emptying them out. That's when my dad went over there and flashed a badge and said, "Let's go buddy," and he was fired, of course.

And another fella, they had an ice cream bar machine in the same building. And this fella he was a rigger, and he was rough and

tough and a big fella, you know. And went down and put a dime in it. That's what the ice cream bar cost then. And it went click, click. And he put another dime in it. It went click, click. He grabbed it and he jammed it against the wall a couple of times and had to go over and get some change from a fella. And he went back. Put a dime in it. Click, click. He backed off and he kicked that thing. And the glass that had the name of the ice cream bar and everything in it flew out and the machine had a big dent in it. And it started just clickity click, clickity click, throwing out an ice cream bar every time it would do that. And the fella was a harelip and he turned around and hollered at these fellas working across the aisle way over there. Said, "Mule train. Come on boys and get your ice cream." That was back when that Mule Train was real popular. And that was one of the things. I mean, it was amusing, but you know. [laughs] Things like that would happen and everybody would talk about it. But he set everybody up with ice cream that night and nobody knew who done it, you know. They don't know what happened. [laughs]

I remember things. I keep thinking, and I'll get back to these little things like this that happened. But I think you p pretty well drained my little old pea brain though. [laughs]

Thonhoff, J.: Well that's all the questions I have for you. If there is anything else you want to add.

Jones, T.: I can't think of anything right now, really. I hope this has been okay and --

Thonhoff, J.: This is wonderful.

Jones, T.: I hope I gave you the information that you're looking for.

Thonhoff, J.: Absolutely. We're looking for everything. And you honestly have really made me smile, more than anybody has, all your stories.

[2:23:24]

Jones, T.: Well they used to get after me -- not the supervision so much, but fellas I worked around, we all joked, and they said I knew more jokes than anybody they'd ever seen. But I enjoyed working and having fun and doing it and then trying to keep a good attitude rather than going around with my lip hanging down and scowling at everybody. I'd rather tell them a joke than I would, you know,

cuss them out, so to speak. That was always my attitude, and that's the way I feel. And still do.

Thonhoff, J.: Well I like that attitude. It's good for society, everyone.

Jones, T.: If you've got any more questions, I'll try to answer them the best I can.

Thonhoff, J.: That's my questions. Do you feel complete?

Jones, T.: Yeah. Yeah. Like I say, I'm sure I'll sit down and get to thinking about this and say, "Well, why didn't I tell this or why didn't I think of that." But like I say, it's been a few years and some things you know you go though and you kind of put them in the back of your mind because that's a part of your life that you've already gone through. But as you get on, you'll recall it and remember and the good and the bad. So -- but like I say, it's been an experience, a once in a lifetime experience that you go through and probably will never be anything like it again.

Thonhoff, J.: Overall, how would you, in just a couple of words, how would you describe it.

Jones, T.: Just phenomenal. I mean, just unreal. It was, just being from a little old country town (Hawkins County), like I was where the big thing was if somebody's tire blew out on the streets, you know. It was a big thing, or if [we] had a house fire or something, you know. It was a big deal. And to come into something like this, my goodness gracious. [laughs] Come into a school that I guess maybe my class in Rogersville probably had 15, 20 people in it. And come down here where you had 15 and 1,600 students in the school and mercy, it was just unreal. [laughs]

And we played team sport a lot in Rogersville, and why they walked all over us, just like grammar school playing a pro, almost that bad. But then came the Oak Ridge, and they got the teams all lined up and then when we played Kingsport why we showed them what was like to get beat. And that was one of the big satisfying factors for me, being from up in that part of the country and having them run over us all those years. And then come down here and see a team go up and just whip 'em good.

[2:27:11]

Jones, T.: Well, I guess that pretty much winds me up, if that's all right with you.

Thonhoff, J.: That's all right with me.

Jones, T.: Okay.

[End of Interview]