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Transcript

Name: Paul Criswell

Date Interviewed: 4/29/99

Date Transcribed: 5/26/99

Tape 12

Project Number 20012

Tape FLHP0012

23:01:03:17

Q:

OK. The first questions is real easy. Um, just give us your name and spell it, that's just so we know we've got it spelled right.

Now, I've got a problem.

OK.

I don't hear ya.

Oh, OK, I'll speak up. Um, can you give us your name and spell it?

Paul Criswell. C-R-I-S-W-E-L-L.

23:31:29:13

Q:

OK good. We got that down. All right first of all tell us a little bit about when you first started working at Fernald.

A:

Well I went out there in the spring of '51 and when I arrived out there they were in the process of stripping the ground and getting ready to move the dirt for the buildings. And it was just a matter of making things, the ground was fairly level to start with so the only problem was a getting down, getting basis for the buildings and that primarily was what I was in was in the dirt moving part of the situation at that time.

23:02:15:09

Q:

Great. And now where did you live when you first got your job there?

A:

I lived in Lawrenceburg Indiana. And wasn't too far of a drive. You didn't think anything about it really. It wasn't that far away to go.

23:02:30:04

Q:

And you were raised in Lawrenceburg?

A:

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Just out of Lawrenceburg. Out a little town called Rice Corner Indiana. And went to school out there and then later on when I was in high school we moved to Lawrenceburg.

23:02:45:21

Q:

And how did you get your job at Fernald?

A:

That was something else. I bothered the business agent for Local #18 which was the union. Every Tuesday and Thursday at 4:30 and I was persistent for about six weeks and finally he got to know me by name when the phone would ring. And he said well come on up and I'll talk to ya. So that's how it started. I went out there as a grease monkey, as an oiler when I first went out.

23:03:20:06

Q:

Wow. And uh, so who hired you to work at the beginning. Who was it that actually hired you?

A:

I went to work for George A. Fuller. And they were the general contractor on the site at that time. And at that time there was probably 25 of us out there. They was in the process of moving the dirt and getting things arranged.

23:03:49:10

Q:

Wow, 25 operators. And how old were you when you started your job?

A:

Probably 24. Right close to it.

23:03:59:08

Q:

Um, tell us about the machinery at that time. What was it like?

A:

We moved most of the dirt out there with drag pans that were pulled with dozers or tractors. We did have on the side I think were four DW10's which were six wheel unit and maybe 10-12 yards at the most. We had a couple of super C's which were ????? made and they were probably the same on the yardage. The drag pans went up to 33 yards.

23:04:42:01

Q:

So tell us a little bit about how that worked. Was that just to level the land or how did that work?

A:

Well that was primarily to level the land and to get it into a drainage situation and to get the foundation and basis for the building, build the roads and that sort of thing. That's what that was for. And we

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stripped all the topsoil, got that out of the way then they compacted fill went back on that. Mainly just to level the ground down and get basis for the buildings.

23:05:12:29

Q:

Wow. Good. Um, did you have to clear the land much when you first got there? Was there much to get rid of?

A:

When I went out there, there wasn't much clearing and those other people was there before I was and really know more about that. I think most of the buildings were how they needed to be. And the one's they wanted to use, they retained those for their use while we were working on the project.

23:05:48:23

Q:

What about your offices? Where were the offices for George A. Fuller located?

A:

I honestly don't know because we really worked out of the shop and area where they had the equipment parked. Where they had the office buildings were I don't know. But we had our own shop where the mechanics worked, where we parked the equipment, the master mechanic and a guy by the name of Ray Morgan worked out of an awful lot and he was equipment superintendent.

23:06:19:14

Q:

Great. And uh, what did they tell you about the site? What did they tell you about what was going to be there? What you were leveling the ground for?

A:

I don't think there was really too much said about it. There was, we had a job to do, it was an interesting job and we knew we was working on an atomic plant but other than that we didn't really know what we were doing. I mean you just go out and do your job and do what you're supposed to do and there wasn't too much said about the whole thing, the completed thing would be.

23:06:59:08

Q:

Did you see some of the publicity that came out of the papers and stuff like that? 'Cause I know they did a couple of stories in 1951 about the atomic plant.

A:

Yes, but we didn't pay much attention to them. Or I didn't I mean I don't think very many people at that time. Maybe the people lived in the direct area did. But we didn't pay attention other than it was a job, something to be done and that's what we were doing.

23:07:23:22

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Q:

Good. What was a typical day like on site? Like what time did you get there? What time did you break for lunch? What did you do all day?

A:

Usually starting time was 7:30 and you know I'm stretching things from memory but 11:30 we probably broke a half hour for lunch, that's normal. Uh, quitting time would depend on situations. We worked as high as 10 hours a day it was 8 hour days, there was 10 hour days. There was quite a bit of overtime involved on the job. And we had, seemed like most of the time we had good weather to work on during the summer months. In the winter time, why things changed as far as moving dirt, you don't move a lot of it.

23:08:18:14

But there was still a lot of activity, things didn't quit. We was in a position where they could start their buildings, so they went ahead with those things. They hauled slag in from Middletown by the truckload I mean just piled it in there everyday. Keeping mudholes halfway cleaned up so they could go ahead and do the work on their buildings and everything. And most of the roadways at that time, when they were working on them, constructing with slag that they had to haul in so they could make a base to run cement trucks and ----- like that out in the project.

23:08:54:19

Q:

Wow. So, you operated machinery most of the time?

A:

That's primarily all I done.

Q:

Uh, huh. Wow. So what was that like being on a machine all day long? Especially the summer.

A:

Hot work. It was definitely hot work and it's something you get accustomed to. You, it's just that you got a job to do, you go ahead and do it and I don't know that I could say it was tiresome maybe at that time I was intrigued by my work and I enjoyed it. I did enjoy what I done. And throughout all my years, I enjoyed my work.

23:09:33:15

Q:

Tell us about safety then. What kind of safety things were in tact?

A:

Yeah, once safety. I can remember very little we actually had on safety. I will there was very few accidents and I don't know it's really changed in the safety over the years but at that time. There was not, just good common sense was safety. You done what you thought would keep you from getting hurt and that's the way you went.

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23:10:09:18

Q:

How about uh personal protective gear. Did you have to wear hard hats, steel toed shoes?

A:

No, no hard hats, no steel toed shoes. In the summer time the shirts come off. Had a great tan. But no, when you get down to that, no there was none of these devices that, some of the crafts wore them maybe ironworkers but I can't remember a lot of safety hard hats and most of situations. Some of them did, quite a few did and some of them didn't.

23:10:46:22

Q:

Tell me about your fellow workers. Um, what type of people did you work around and who was building, I mean so while you guys were leveling the ground they were still, they were starting to build buildings already, is that right?

A:

No. Until you get the base really down for the buildings, you can't start the buildings. So I'm thinking maybe in midsummer they may have started some of their foundations at that time. I have a hard time going back that far. The sewers were started they were part of that ground, getting ready for the building, so the sewers were run in and you didn't actually get into the buildings until the primary dirt work was done. So they did push to get the buildings there ready first and then we went ahead and done other things while the buildings was being built.

23:11:42:18

Q:

So who were your fellow workers? The folks you were working with. Were they mostly with the union or who were they?

A:

Well, it was an entire union job and my fellow workers were all operators, uh, there were a few laborers in. Your dirt superintendent. The mechanics who kept equipment -----.

23:12:03:20

Q:

And how about the people who were putting down the foundations? Who was doing that?

A:

Primarily that would have been cement, rodbusters, laborers, carpenters work up the forms and everything to pour the concrete in. So they were the primary people that done that kind of work.

23:12:30:09

Q:

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And was that union too.

A:

Oh yeah, every craft out there at that time, that was a full union project.

Q:

What's a rodbuster?

A:

Reinforcement steel. They put in the reinforcement steel for concrete.

23:12:48:16

Q:

Did you see any of the blueprints for the plan, I mean any of the plans for the buildings and all?

A:

No. We only worked off of stakes. The engineers drive the stakes and we work from the stakes.

Q:

And what do the stakes tell you?

A:

They give you cut and fill information. How much and at what point really, all it is really there's usually 25-50 foot apart, depending on the situation how close they want the grade and then the grade is marked on the stakes as to the cutting and fill to get the right elevation for whatever they're working towards.

23:13:23:01

Q:

How did the surrounding community react to having all these big machines and everything around? Did you ever talk to anybody in the community?

A:

I have no idea. I talked to nobody in the community at all. You know, you go on a job and you leave and go home so you know, no, I didn't talk to anybody around to find out how they felt about it.

23:13:46:12

Q:

Were you aware at the time, um, how the government secured that land at all? Did they tell you anything about that?

A:

No, there was nothing said that I remember of how they come up with that particular hunk of property.

(Laughter)

Cut - tape change

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23:14:08:14

And all right, rolling again

Q:

OK. And uh, let's talk a little bit about your salary.

A:

Huh. The best I can remember, I went out there originally as a grease monkey or an oiler, and I'm pretty sure it was roughly around \$1.75 an hour where the operator's were \$2.00 an hour, the ones that actually run the equipment. I didn't get into that part of it for about 3 months, but I did work myself into it and get into it so, at that time about \$2.00 an hour and it has changed greatly in the last 40 years it really has.

23:14:51:21

Q:

Um, why, do you know why they put the plant, why did they put the plant where they did, why did they chose that hunk of ground?

A:

I really don't know, to be honest about that. I always wondered why, but to know why, I don't know why the choose that hunk of ground.

23:15:15:14

Q:

You can say something about the aquifer. (Laughter)

A:

Yeah, I always wondered about why they built that kind of an aquifer. I don't know. It just didn't make sense to me. It don't now and probably don't to them and that's the reason it's coming down but somebody really goofed in where they built the plant. And I feel that way.

23:15:39:17

Q:

Why is that?

A:

Because of the underlying material in that area is all gravel which allows water seepage down into the gravel which as I look at it allows uranium to go down with it which would eventually cause a problem. And maybe I'm wrong on my scientific thoughts but that's the way I feel about it.

23:16:06:24

Q:

Good. OK. And um, generally uh, how long did it take to build the plant?

A:

I keep thinking that I was there approximately a year and a half and at that time the major part of the construction was done. I know that at a later time Maxim moved in and they were there for quite some

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time but they were putting in additional things. It seemed like maybe at the time, maybe I should be in the term of 2 years it was in operation completely, I don't know. I know it was starting to operate in a year and a half. They had some of the plants running that length of time.

23:16:55:25

Q:

Which plants were up and running by the time you left the site?

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A:

The one I really remember in particular was the roller mill. That's the only one I can really say was in operation when, before I left there.

23:17:09:17

Q:

Tell us about the first time you saw the rolling mill.

A:

Well, really about all I can say I walked in the building for some reason. I don't know whether I had a machine in there that I was running or what reason I was there but I had a reason to be there and it looked to me like they was rolling pig iron out into long small bars. That's the way it appeared to me and that's all I know about the plant.

23:17:39:06

Q:

OK. And uh, what kind of security clearance did you and your co-workers have to have to work there? Did you have FBI checks or anything like that?

A:

The best thing that I can remember when I went out there originally I was sent out there by the hall, I don't know if there was any clearance checks on anything. I do know at later dates as things proceeded, there were a few men that were taken off the job and it was our understanding with the rumors going around that they left because the FBI didn't want them on the predictor side. And as far as being checked, if we were we didn't know it they were doing it on a QT.

23:18:29:29

Q:

Wow. And um, let's see, um, now what years were you out at the plant?

A:

I started in the spring of '51 and I left there sometime I think in the middle of the summer in '52.

23:18:58:16

Q:

So you weren't there too long before you got an awful lot of work done?

A:

Yeah, probably about a year and a half and maybe not quite that long. There was a lot accomplished during the time I was out there. It went good, it was a good project.

23:19:14:00

Q:

Did you ever have any contact with anybody from the Atomic Energy Commission?

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A:

Not to my knowledge. Not to my knowledge at all.

Q:

Like who was your boss, was that a union person.

A:

Yes, our boss was, was a union person. We worked under the master mechanic. As I mentioned before Ray Morgan was equipment superintendent. He probably kept track of equipment and what it was, how much he had and what it was for and what he needed and then grade foremans out on the job told us where to work and what to do. They were the ones in charge of that.

23:19:55:21

Q:

Great. And generally how do you feel about having worked at Fernald?

A:

Well I felt like we accomplished something. We went out there to do something, we got the job done and I have no regrets about it. I enjoyed the work and it was just something you had to do and you got paid for it so you go ahead and do it. That's the way I looked at it all the time. I think I felt that way about all the project's I worked on throughout the time that I worked.

23:20:29:27

Q:

Great. Now um, of course Fernald was part of the uh, United States Defense and um did you know that? It was going to be that, when you building it, when you helped build it?

A:

I think we understood that. I think we knew what it was being used for. I don't know that we knew the particular thing it was but we knew it was part of the defense system and uh, we looked at uranium as a part of that because of atomic bomb and I don't think it went any farther than that. I don't think we really understood what we were doing other than it was part of the defense system.

23:21:15:15

Q:

Was there a sense of patriotism, that you were doing something for the country?

A:

Why sure I think I felt that way about almost all of the jobs I done. It seems like when you're in construction like that and you look back at your road jobs and the interstates and the bridges and the power plants all this is something for the country. I have friends that say we're building America all the time so maybe that's the way we look at it.

23:21:46:02

Q:

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That's great. I like that quote. Um, let's see now you came back in the 1980's to do some work on the silos. Can you tell us a little bit about that job that you did?

A:

Yeah we went in there and rebermed them. I can't remember, I guess they had some berming around them, I can't remember but I know we increased that berming about 12 foot from the bottom clear to the top. Whatever it was, it was increased about 12 foot in width at the top so it was probably wider than that at the bottom and there was only four of us in there at the time and I think 2 of those were operators and two scrapers but primarily all we went in there is to try to stop, I understand some of the radiation off of these tanks and we added dirt fill around them to hold that down. And as I understand it they changed the name of them. We called them Imhoff tanks in '51 and '52 now they're K-65 Silos.

23:22:56:02

Q:

What about the material that went in them? Did they tell you much about the material that went in them?

A:

No, no. You might hear rumors but you never know really what's in them. I know they were active I know when I had to wear a monitor all the time. I had to wear a monitor all the time to see how much radiation was moving and it was well checked. I mean, it seemed like to me every hour every two hours they'd come out and check the monitors see how much radiation I had picked up. I had no problem with it.

23:23:27:01

Q:

And were the silos capped when you went out there to do that work?

A:

They had concrete tops on them. I think the concrete was probably supposed to be as I understood 3 foot thick. I think after they capped them with styrofoam, I'm not sure. I don't know what they used to cap them with after that but I know they were recapped after we got done with the dirt.

23:23:49:04

Q:

And why did they want to put more of a berm around them?

A:

To help eliminate the radiation leakage from the tanks. That's what I understood.

23:24:03:01

Q:

And uh, what kind of shape were the silos in when you started the job?

A:

Well the silos themselves are concrete, I mean not concrete, but I think they're steel and then the tops are poured concrete. Until we actually got up to the top, I'm not sure that they knew the concrete was

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cracked. But as soon as we got up there they figured they'd have to do more to it than what we'd done.

23:24:34:18

Q:

Uh let's see, um, how did you get called back? How did they notify you? Was it through a union job again?

A:

No, no. I was working for a local contractor which was Richtor Transfers at the time and he got the contract to go out and do the job and I was sent out there along with the three other men to do the job. And that's how we, it was actually just through the contractor who we was working for.

23:25:03:24

Q:

Great. And you've lived in the area for most of this time now, um, you've probably heard a lot of the media attention as to Fernald and the kinds of things that happened around 1989, there was a dust collector leak in Plant 9. Um, how did you react to that?

A:

I really didn't pay attention to it. I heard it and understood it. I don't think I paid a lot of attention to the media and what they had to say about the plant. You kind of hate to think of something you've constructed coming down but you know outside, huh, uh, I paid no real attention to it.

23:25:49:05

Q:

OK. And um, you mentioned to me that it took just a little over a year to build and how many years to tear down. (Laughter) What is your reaction to that?

A:

Yeah, we, those comments on that, we was in a meeting one night at the union hall and they were talking about the number years, the number of people it would take to tear it down and I said my golly what's wrong with that, a year and a half to build it and it's taking you this long to tear it down. Seems to me like they was talking in terms of 10 years or better to take the plant down. I understand now. I didn't at the time really but through the safety and the situation I can understand the time and it's appreciated.

23:26:36:06

Q:

Good. Good. And uh, how do you feel about the work that's going on at Fernald? The clean up process?

A:

Really I don't know that much about it. I got friends that work out there and they talk about it. I can't, I don't want to place any feeling on something that I'm not close to. That I'm not really working with. I feel that it's a necessity but I, outside of that I don't want to say too much about that, that's, let the people that's doing it talk about it.

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23:27:11:16

Q:

OK. And uh, how, in your opinion, I mean have you been out to the site lately?

A:

No.

Q:

Have you been to any of the open houses or anything?

A:

No. I haven't been out at all. I haven't been out there for 12 years roughly and last time I worked on the K-65 silos that was the last time I was out there and I really don't pay much attention except what I see on television of an implosion or when they're tearing something down and that's the only time I've got any time, any time that I even notice it. I don't go look at it. In fact you can't get close enough to see anything anyway so you stay home.

23:28:13:28

Q:

Did you see some of the media attention when they brought Plant 7 down?

A:

I can't remember what Plant 7 was. I don't remember it.

Q:

That was the very first implosion they did.

A:

Yeah, I seen that one.

23:28:28:25

Q:

And what was your reaction to that, just watching that?

A:

Well, I always think these guys do a real good job and they had problems with that. I don't think they went heavy enough on that one. If that's the one I thinking of because they did have trouble with one of them and generally they don't have that problem.

23:28:46:23

Q:

How did you feel about seeing something that, you know, you knew you helped start, coming down like that? (Laughter)

A:

You know, Bill Bold always talks about we build a lot of things and we built monuments in this country

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so I turn around now the stadium's done we're starting a new one, I worked on it. It don't

bother you too much that you see these things happen. You done the best you can. If they decide they don't need them, they don't need them anymore. That's all. So go build a new one that's all right.

23:29:23:07

Q:

Wow you worked on the stadium. I've been driving by there watching that stadium go up. (Laughter)

Tape change.

00:01:06:16

Q:

OK. Um, I'll just throw this question out cause she made a note here to ask you if you have any stories. Anything funny that happened, any anecdotes that happened on the job?

A:

Not really. Not really, I can't really off hand remember anything that was funny. There's bound to be some things 'cause your not serious all the time. But as far as anything happening on the project, why not really I can't come up with anything. I've thought about it 'cause it was mentioned and no.

00:01:51:14

Q:

OK. Can you describe some of the people you worked with? Tell us a little bit about Bill Bold.

A:

Bill Bold was a very serious individual I always thought. Me and Bill rode to work a lot together up there on that job. He'd been in the Marines. He'd run equipment in Okinawa for the Marines and he got out of the service and he was probably one of the first men to go to work on the site and he was a history student. He still stayed in history when he was 60 years old or better he said when I started studying about myself I quit. So, uh he was a very intelligent individual and a good worker and a good man to work with. And, outside that, you know, Bill was just an awful nice, pleasant guy to be around.

00:02:55:21

Q:

What did he do on site while you were there?

A:

He run, when he first started out there he run a dozer most of the time and he end up later on running a grader on the finish work getting the finish work done. We was talking about comical things. I can remember one thing that he said to Ray Morgan one time. Bill had run the grader on the subgrade for a big concrete pad that was a staging area where they staged lumber and rebar and the stuff for the buildings and when he had finished, right after he had finished it had rained and Ray said Bill you know your tracks are holding water.

00:03:39:27

Which is normal after a grader. And after they poured this big area of concrete Bill went back and said

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you know the concrete finishers ain't too good, it looks to me like there's four inches of water standing out there in the middle of that slab. And it always comes out that way, I mean it's hard, I mean you can't make anything so level that it won't hold water. It's got to stand somewhere. So that was kind of an interesting remark but Bill was very quick witted and managed to keep up with everybody.

00:04:13:06

Q:

And how about Earl?

A:

Earl, Earl, his father was master mechanic, his name was Earl also. But Earl come in there I think maybe the late part of '51 and he stayed out there until it worked out. He later went back in there with Maxim. I think Earl had probably a couple of years that he worked there all together. Uh, later on he become business agent for Local #18. After that he became general business manager and vice president of International. So Earl moved on and is really an interesting individual to talk to. And by the way Bill ended up business agent for local #18 also.

00:05:12:20

Q:

So are you guys still in contact, you and Bill and Earl?

A:

Oh yeah. I talk to Bill maybe once a week and Earl a lot less than that because he is in Cleveland and, but I still, if he comes down I like to know about it, I go down and see him. But he made his home in Cleveland and he's staying up there now.

00:05:36:29

Q:

So what do you guys talk about when you get together?

A:

Work. Yeah, well we talk about a lot of different things but a lot of time it is work and equipment and what we've run over the years and how much things have changed. It makes for a very interesting conversation.

00:05:53:17

Q:

What other projects have you worked on here in the area?

A:

I've worked on a lot of interstate. Um, oh, 275 from 75 going west and uh the stadium downtown. The 275 bridge at Lawrenceburg. Uh, I worked on the McDonald bridge in Cincinnati. I worked on power plants both up and down the river. As far up as Kyger Creek Power Plant ----- uh, if it had to do with construction I was there some time or another. I think I worked on most of the hospitals in Cincinnati where they have enlarged them or had additions put on them. Uh, the last project I worked with a school and I'm trying to remember the name of it now and I can't, but I think it was one of the Talawanda Schools, high school. So anyway, it's been one thing right after the other. There's always something to

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do out there they kept us busy.

00:07:13:27

Q:

Tell us about working on the McDonald bridge. That sounds interesting.

A:

I wasn't there on the bridge too long. I went in there and brought it for one of the operators. I wasn't there too awful long. I spent more time on 275 bridge at Lawrenceburg. And I worked for Dravo down there and we was down there oh about 6 months. I was called in for a two week job and it turned into six months. But they had a individual down there that got hurt then after I went to work and covered for him and he came back there was another boy that left and I stayed there in his place. And, these are all interesting jobs. What I worked on primarily was the foundations and the footers for the bridge.

00:08:01:16

Q:

And those under water right?

A:

It's under water but not really. Your below, I wasn't below water level but the people who works are below water level so they build a culvert damn, pump the water out, and they're actually working in a dry area.

00:08:19:28

Q:

Wow. I didn't know that. That is cool. You know every time I drive over the bridge I'm going to think of you now.

A:

You know bridges are interesting but you know you think about the barges going up and down the river, every once in a while one of them makes a mistake. They plow into a pier. Those pier's are really down into solid bed rock. They're not just something that's set down there. They're drilled and cored into them and those pier's go down quite a ways in solid limestone rock.

00:08:52:06

Q:

Wow. I feel safe now going over bridges. Oh, that leads me to a questions. What kind of training did they give you at Fernald anything?

A:

No. No, I don't remember any training at all.

00:09:11:17

Q:

I was wondering about that cause I didn't know whether they would offer that or anything, cause I mean

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there's a ton of training we have to take now. (Laughter) Um, are you in the medical monitoring program?

A:

No. I wasn't out there any of that hot stuff as we might call it except the K-65 silos. I was only there a couple of weeks. Now Earl is on the monitoring program.

00:09:39:25

Q:

Yeah, I know that there are quite a few folks that are. Um, do you see any changes in the community due to Fernald?

A:

Not really. Not really. I probably not into as deep as a lot of people but I, it's not something that I actually worry about.

00:09:59:19

Q:

How about workers. Um, during the process years, were you friends with anyone who worked at Fernald?

A:

I'm trying to think of his name and I can't. I knew a guy who worked up there from the time we built it till he retired. And then his sons, when I was up there on the tanks, he was still working there in the laundry rproblem.

00:10:29:18

Q:

Did you ever talk to them about their work at all?

A:

No, not really. No.

00:10:36:12

Q:

Did uh, cause I know that there was a great deal of secrecy up there during you know the process years. Did you ever talk to anybody who couldn't discuss their job.

A:

If I did I didn't know it because maybe I didn't talk to them about what they done. I work at Fernald, oh, OK. So you know, do you like your job, yeah and that's about the end of it. No I don't ever remember asking anybody any reason to discuss it. Uh, I didn't know that many people actually that worked up there. There's a boy across the street that works there, but I've never talked to him about his work.

00:11:20:13

Q:

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OK. Um, let's see, do you want to, did you have anything to add.

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A:

No, not really. Not really. I can't say much more than I've already said.

Q:

Good. OK.