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Interview no. 786

David C. McKee

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UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY

INTERVIEWEE: C. David McKee

INTERVIEWER: Becky Craver

PROJECT: El Paso Family Owned Businesses

DATE OF INTERVIEW: September 9 and November 17, 1992

TERMS OF USE: Unrestricted

TAPE NO: 786

TRANSCRIPT NO: 786

TRANSCRIBER: Kevin Rowan

BIOGRAPHICAL SYNOPSIS OF INTERVIEWEE:

Born 1915 in El Paso; 2nd son of Robert E. and Evelyn McKee; Engineering Degree NMSU 1939; started working in his father's business, Robert E. McKee Construction Company in the 1930s; directed activities of the Zia Company which built military and civilian installations at Los Alamos, N.M. during World War II when the A Bomb was being developed; He and brothers continued the Robert E. McKee General Contractor, Inc. until its merger with Santa Fe Industries, Inc. in 1973.

SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW:

Tapes 1 and 2: Family genealogy and background; father Robert E. McKee grew up in St. Louis and New Mexico, started his construction company in El Paso in 1911, the same year he married Evelyn Woods McKee. Recounts childhood memories; names the 8 children of Robert E. and Evelyn McKee; tells of his father's early career; how Robert E. McKee Company acquired the contract for Los Alamos in 1943; his personal experiences at Los Alamos (security regulations, acquiring of construction materials, his responsibilities); service in Marine Corps in Panama Canal zone when Pearl Harbor was attacked; tells of his meeting and marrying Martha Louise Carter.

Tape 3: Discusses Los Alamos after WWII (1946-1950) and the role of Zia Company; major projects of McKee Construction during 1950s and 1960s; changes in the company after the death of company founder, Robert E. McKee; the influence of family members on company management; labor relations; use of unions; company's emphasis on doing good work; size of company (40,000 on payroll); tells of 1973 merger with Santa Fe Industries; recounts Bob Hazelton's background, his connection to the family and his importance to the company; discusses child-rearing/discipline practices of his parents; varied personalities of his siblings.

Length of Interview: 2 hours, 25 min Length of Transcript 60 pages

INSTITUTE OF ORAL HISTORY
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

Name of person interviewed C. David McKee
Name of interviewer Becky Craver
Date(s) of interview September 9 and November 17, 1992
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Biographical Sketch for The Handbook of Texas
on
Robert E. McKee

McKee, Robert Eugene (Gene). Robert Eugene McKee was born in Lake View (Chicago), Illinois, on June 15, 1889. He was the youngest son of Alice Elizabeth (Cleve) and James David McKee.

His family moved to St. Louis, Missouri, when he was very young where he received his education at the Manual Training School of Washington University. He left St. Louis as a young man to live on his Uncle "Bud" Cleve's ranch at Elk, New Mexico. After a short stay at the ranch, he moved to El Paso, Texas, in 1910 at the age of 21 years and began his illustrious career in the engineering and construction field.

Robert Eugene McKee and Gladys Evelyn (Evie) Woods were married on September 20, 1911. They had eight children, six sons and two daughters.

After working as a draftsman and engineer for the El Paso Milling Co. and the Engineering Department of the City of El Paso, he began his own construction company in 1913 and soon became one of America's most important contractors. McKee's unique personal talents and keen knowledge of the construction industry enabled him to expand his company quickly into one of the nation's largest and most successful operations. By 1935 he had built the Naval Docks and the Marine Hospital at the naval base in San Diego. In Hawaii, he had just completed various military facilities to include the power plant at Pearl Harbor, the Air Corps Double Hangars and 3,200 man barracks at Hickam Field. He was also constructing officers' quarters, warehouses, Air Corps machine shops and an engine test facility at Hickam Field; all of which were substantially complete when the Japanese bombed Pearl Harbor.

His organization was well known for its ability to do the unique, the difficult, the different. During World War II, McKee built the largest military center in Texas - Camp Bowie near Brownwood - in a record time of only ten months. He constructed large military installations in the Panama Canal Zone and in the Territory of Hawaii. During one year he had hired 42,000 workers on his payroll. In the 1950's he constructed the Cadet Quarters Complex, the Air Force Chapel and several other large facilities at the United States Air Force Academy. In 1959 he was the major contractor for the new Los Angeles International Airport. Building a variety of major projects in 35 of the 50 states, his headquarters and home, however, were always in El Paso, Texas, with branch offices in Dallas, Santa Fe, Los Angeles, Hawaii and the Panama Canal Zone.

Known for his unsurpassed organizational and management skills, he was chosen to be solely responsible for the timely construction of the facilities for the Los Alamos Atomic Energy Project in New Mexico during World War II. He was among a select group of people responsible for the successful development of the atomic bomb, building most of the laboratories, testing sites, dormitories and houses at Los Alamos, in utmost

secrecy under the mysterious Manhattan Project. He drove himself and his men to build structures that were unique in design and construction, while not knowing the purpose of these installations, he had them ready in record time. He was honored for this accomplishment by Major General Leslie R. Groves, Officer in Charge of the Atomic Bomb Project, who awarded McKee the Army-Navy "E" for high achievement in October 1945.

El Paso's skyline could almost be labeled "made by McKee." His company built a large percentage of El Paso's major structures, to include offices, hospitals, banks, schools, churches, military installations and facilities at UTEP. Two of his pet projects were the Austin High School stadium named for him, and the Southwestern Children's Home. He was a liberal donor to many projects.

McKee became one of the largest individually owned contracting firms in the United States, when in 1950 he incorporated his construction operations. His growth and success were directly related to his philosophy of giving his personal attention to detail, his high regard for employees as individuals, and a demand for work of the highest quality that produced the finest quality of buildings.

Because the Southwest had always been of great interest and fascination to McKee, he chose El Paso, Texas, to be his home and headquarters for his business. His interest in the art and crafts of southwestern Indian tribes brought him to Taos, Santa Fe and other art colonies where he became acquainted with many of the native artists and their art works. He and his wife visited many of these artists in their homes and corresponded with them regularly over the years. As a result of these visits, they acquired an outstanding collection of Southwestern and Indian art. This collection was later established as the McKee Collection of Paintings.

Mr. and Mrs. McKee's keen interest in the El Paso community and in the El Paso Museum of Art had a great deal to do with the development of the Museum. McKee had established a firm acquaintance and friendship with Mr. Rush Kress and became instrumental in the acquisition of part of the Samuel H. Kress Collection of paintings for permanent display in El Paso.

He never ran for an elected office, but was appointed City alderman to the City Council of El Paso in 1928. He was a vestry man at St. Clement's Episcopal Church. McKee was a thirty-second degree Scottish Rite Mason and Active in El Maida Shrine. He was a board member of the El Paso Museum of Art and Southwestern Children's Home.

He was appointed Colonel, aide-de-camp to the Governor of the State of New Mexico in 1947. The City of El Paso honored him as "Conquistador" in 1960 and he was inducted into the El Paso County Historical Society's Hall of Honor in 1967. He was a champion of the underprivileged and used his influence and generosity in achieving many charitable, civic, religious, medical and educational goals that are today a monument of a

part of his life's ambition. In 1952 he established the Robert E. and Evelyn McKee Foundation, a non-profit, charitable corporation for the continuation of his charitable goals within the United States.

Robert E. McKee died on October 21, 1964, in El Paso, Texas, at the age of 75, active as Chairman of the Board of Robert E. McKee, General Contractor, Inc.

BIBLIOGRAPHY: Mr. McKee's children were the source for all factual, personal data; Robert E. and Evelyn McKee Foundation-The McKee Collection of Paintings, published by the El Paso Museum of Art, 1968; Phoenix Art Museum-Paintings from the McKee Foundation, published by the Western Art Associates, 1976; El Paso Times-various news articles published between March 8, 1935 and October 22, 1964; Program of Presentation-Army-Navy "E" Award to employees of Robert E. McKee General Contractor, Los Alamos, N.M., October 16, 1945; Certificate of Appointment-Governor of New Mexico-to Robert E. McKee as Colonel, aide-de-camp, February 19, 1947; Certificate of Honor-City of El Paso-Robert E. McKee awarded title of Conquistador, December 10, 1960; El Paso Herald Post-"Side-Bar Remarks" by E.M. Pooley, Editor, January 29, 1962; Irene and Duffy Stanley-Personal recollections of experiences as a practicing Architect with Mr. McKee's unique capabilities in achieving outstanding buildings.

Irene and Duffy Stanley

Notes about Robert E. and Evelyn McKee

Robert (known to family and friends as Gene or Eugene) born June 15, 1889 in Chicago. Raised in St. Louis. Father died in an accident when he was 10 years old. Education at Manual Training School of Washington University. Moved to Elk, New Mexico to his Uncle "Bud" Cleve's ranch. Then to El Paso.

1913 - General Contractor. Construction Business built installations in the Panama Canal Zone, Hawaii, Los Alamos A Bomb Project.

Died 1964

Evelyn (known as Evie) born May 16, 1893 in Quezaltenango, Guatemala. Her father was employed as an electrical power plant operator until the plant was destroyed by a devastating earthquake. Then he became manager of a coffee plantation. Finally family evacuated and fled to San Francisco.

Then San Francisco earthquake and fire hit, and the Woods family left San Francisco for Chihuahua, Mexico. Lived there for a short time, then came to El Paso.

Evie and Gene met at Mother Woods' boarding house. Married Sept. 20 1911.

8 children, six sons and two daughter.

27 grandchildren.

"Mother of the Year" 1942; member of St. Clement's Episcopal Church; board of trustees for YWCA.

Died 1960

The Robert E. and Evelyn McKee Foundation was chartered in 1952.

Children:

C. David
John S. McKee
Mrs. Margaret McKee Lund
Mrs. Frances McKee Hays
Philip S. McKee
Louis B. McKee
Robert E. McKee III

Interview with C. David McKee
September 9, 1992
by Rebecca Craver

M: Up there at the [McKee] Foundation, Louis McKee has all the information that is possible on the McKees. My granddad was a civil engineer. He did a lot of his work for the railroad, bridges across the rivers and stuff like that. He designed the first railroad bridge across the Mississippi in St. Louis. He also did a lot of structural steel building, the first structural steel building in St. Louis.

C: What was your Granddad's name?

M: James David.

C: James David McKee.

M: Of course, then he [Louis] recently found out that in Memphis, Tennessee, the McKee brothers were another bunch of the McKees, see? They were all engineers; did a lot of engineering, structural steel and stuff like that. Of course, they were primarily design people and my Dad's father died when he was just about 5 or 6 years old and his father was, uh, I guess celebrating a little bit, some of his feats of engineering and going home with a couple of buckets of beer in his hand on an old mule-drawn streetcar and it lurched and when it did, he went over the back end and hit on his head and it killed him. (Chuckles) And so my Dad was farmed out to his mother's family, the Cleves.

The Cleves were a group of Germans who came over from Braunschweig, Germany. The first one came over as a mercenary for the Union Army and they didn't have any opportunity to pay these people so [they'd] give them land. So they gave them land in Missouri. Then my Dad's uncle, one of his uncles, Burt Cleve, was working with some other uncles and Jim Hinkle, who later became governor of New Mexico. Cleve was one of the best-known cattlemen in the country. They had a background that wouldn't quit, you know? So they were working for this big TA BAR ranch, which ranged from the Gila River in Arizona to Kansas City, Missouri, and when they broke up the oil trusts, they broke up this cattle trust at the same time. So Hinkle and Cleve and these people, uh, bought up some of this land, and there was the Hendricks and Cleves and Hinkles and some of these others, a bunch of Germans and they were all related. So they managed to get their pieces of land and so forth, then some of them are still under control of those families. So, there are various ranches up there in the Sacramento Mountains.

C: Did your dad stay in Saint Louis until he was how old?

M: He was about 5 or 6 years old [when] they farmed him out to the relatives in New Mexico.

C: So, he grew up in New Mexico?

M: Partly. And, then he went back to Saint Louis to go to school, in the manual training school there, which is part of the Washington University.

C: Right. Did he have any brothers and sisters?

M: He had 2 brothers and 1 sister.

C: And where, who was...?

M: He was the youngest.

C: He was the baby.

M: Yep.

C: And, were they farmed out with him, or were the kids separated?

M: No, no. They were old enough to get their education with their mother there in Saint Louis.

C: O.K.

M: But, my dad being the youngest, they thought it would be better for him to be with the uncle.

C: Right. So, do you think your uncle Cleve, that uncle Cleve had a great deal of influence on your dad's life?

M: Well, it's hard to say, because probably he was just born anyways to be an engineer. So he went back to manual training school and got his degree. We found out the other day that he did get his degree, certified by the Washington University, see?

C: Well, he got his degree before your mother married him.

M: Oh, yeah.

C: So, he was a young, like, a teenager, maybe?

M: Yeah, yeah. Well, when he came to El Paso, he had sights on working on the Gadsden purchase, layout of the Gadsden purchase, which I think he did work on that, and then, ah,

from there he went to work, I think, with the Madero Lumber Company and built their box plant here in El Paso, and he was only 19 years old. And, when they told him that if he had any problems, they were handed him this pistol and told him "That's your authority", see? (Laughter) Different ways, you know? So, he never had to use it, but he managed to get along with people when he built the plant and he was 19 years old. Then, he went to work for the International Water and Boundary Commission, which for years had a big steel casing right in the middle of the Rio Grande down here below the old Fort Bliss, Hacienda Cafe. Just below there there was an old, big pipe sticking out of the river and they used to pump water out of that, the international water. And, then the city started their water system and he then went to work for Mr. Todd, who was the engineer, water engineer, who later became one of the most renowned water people in the world. And, when we went to Panama, why, uh, people asked my dad if they knew of any good person to give them some help in the water system in the Canal Zone. So, he referred Mr. Todd to them, and Mr. Todd's son, and he went down there and the son stayed there and worked on the water system at the Panama Canal. That was just before World War II.

They could see that they had to expand everything and have to have good, reliable water sources, see?

C: Right.

M: So, those things all added up (Laughter) together, you know?

C: Well, tell me about what was he doing during World War I? Was he working here in El Paso as an engineer? That'd be 1914 or so.

M: Yeah, well, he was a contractor by then.

C: Ah ha, I see.

M: By then he was a contractor.

C: He had already started his company?

M: Yes.

C: Do you know what year he actually [did start his company?] Did he call it McKee Construction?

M: [Yes, Robert E. McKee] And, it was started in 1911.

C: 1911.

M: And, he met my mother, whose family had a little house on

Upton Avenue, and they had a thing in the papers, it said, "Boarder Wanted." My dad had came in off of some project, and so he saw that and rented it, you know. So he started boarding there and met my mother. And, of course, they [my mother's family] had a very strange, strange way of getting to El Paso, too.

C: O.K. Tell me about it.

M: So, they met. My mother's family were plantation people. To go back to her grandparents: they were from Saint Croix in the Virgin Islands, and at that time they were under a Danish flag. So her parents married in Saint Croix, went to Guatemala because too many people trying to make a living off the sugar cane in Saint Croix, a small island. So, they went and started a plantation in Guatemala; had sugar cane, coffee and bananas.

C: Tell me their names.

M: Woods.

C: And, what were their first names?

M: Well, now, let's see. Charles, uh, Charles Woods, I think Alfred, Charles Alfred or something. And, my grandmother, Ulalee, or something like that. And, they were Woods and Beech. But, they were still under the Danish flag. What nationality they were, God only knows. They [were] light complected, and my mother's hair was kind of like yours, [blonde] a little more red, I guess. And, they had a beautiful plantation. I'll show you a picture of that.

C: O.K.

M: And, they had the volcano eruption like Mount Saint Helen. It blew up and they had to get out of there in a hurry, and they did. They had to get out of there and went to Chichicastananga and Casaltanango, two little towns there where he had built a power plant, supplying electricity, at the time when electricity was very infant, you know, small. But, it kept enough so that my grandmother and my mother and sister and two brothers all migrated to San Francisco. Got up there and they were getting ready to go to school, maybe had [been] in school a little bit, when the earthquake and fire hit.

C: And that was in ...?

M: 1906.

M: Yeah, and so they had some correspondence back and forth with

some people, German people, from down in Guatemala, who had moved to Chihuahua City, because they left because of the same problem, see? So, they got there to San Francisco, [left] San Francisco, then went to Chihuahua City. Thought maybe they'd like that, too. They got down there and got mixed up in the Mexican Revolution. So, the first thing that [they did] was to head this way, see, to El Paso, shortest distance [out of Mexico].

C: Right.

M: So, that's how they got to El Paso. And then, they started looking for a boarder, see? And that's when they met my father, you know (Laughter). Heck of a way, you know?

C: Yeah.

M: Yeah.

C: Did your parents ever tell you any tales about their courtship days?

M: No, but they used to tell me that when they wanted to go to a movie, they saved up a nickel or dime to go to the movie. That was something else, see? Then, they finally got to where they built a house for my grandmother and my dad. They built up one over Richmond Street. Both of them are little bungalows up on Richmond Street. And, so then they had to spend another dime to get on the streetcar to ride to town, see?

C: I see.

M: Those were tough years.

C: Yeah.

M: Yeah.

C: Well, I saw in one of those books, they married in 1911.

M: Yes. Right.

C: 1911.

M: Yep, that's when he started in his contracting business.

C: Uh hum. Well, he was only 22 years old?

M: Something like that.

C: And your mother was 18?

- M: Something, yeah, uh hum. (Laughter) Four years difference, yeah. So, anyway, that's the way it was in those days. And, there was no air conditioning no nothing, you know. I [can't] help but admire the way they had to live, you know? So, I don't know what else, but getting back to all those various families with the Cleves and the Beeches and all of the Woods and the McKees and all that. Quite a few people all congregated and came out. My dad was probably the biggest driving force of the whole bunch, see?
- C: What do you think made him such a successful businessman? What in his background gave him that drive?
- M: Ah, he had good vision, you know? His vision was unbelievable. And he knew that a man had to work. And even though they may not be good craftspeople, they had to work with their brain or something else, see? Well, he was a fair craftsman, but not good enough to make a living continually out of it, see? But he did have some interesting things in his files and my brother Louis has got a bunch of that. Here's one of them I thought was really choice. And, you might be interested in that. [Shows papers to interviewer.]
- C: Ah, ha! O.K. So, was your dad a Democrat?
- M: I don't know what he was. Uh, in those days all they had in Texas was Democrats.
- C: Right.
- M: So, you had to register as a Democrat. But, he voted as he saw fit; I know that.
- C: Uh hum.
- M: Yeah, that's for sure. And that's the way all of us have always been. If we thought the person was good, we voted for him. If he wasn't any good, why, forget [it].
- C: Right. So, he taught you all to work hard?
- M: Right. And he told me, he says, "You, I want you to study your civil engineering". I said, "Dad, I don't like that." I said, "I want to be mechanical, electrical." "Well, maybe so, but, I'll send you to school", [he said]. So, I went to school up here at New Mexico A&M, and the reason why I went up there [was] because Doctor Goddard, who made K.O.P. radio station, which was at that time the biggest radio station west of the Mississippi. So, that's what I just was intrigued at it. He [my father] was doing some building at New Mexico State. He built several buildings up there for them then, and he'd take me with him. And, I'd go up there and wander around

the labs, see all the things they did in those labs, and it just intrigued me, see? So that's how come I got into mechanical and electrical engineering. And, he didn't really feel that that was the coming thing. Well, I said, "Dad, you know good and well that you're going to have everything in under the sun and mechanics and electrical stuff that there's no way in the world that a civil engineer can keep up with a electrical/mechanical/electrical." And it proved out that way, see?

C: Yeah.

M: Now, I wasn't any (Chuckles) expert at guessing, you know? But, it just was the way I felt, you know?

C: Now, you were one of eight children.

M: One of eight. I'm number 2.

C: You're the second. Tell me the names of all of them.

M: Robert E., Jr. was number 1 and Charles David number 2. John S. was number 3. Margaret Elizabeth was number 4, and Frances Evelyn was number 5. And, Bill, James William, was number 6. Philip Sidney was number 7, and Louis Bernard was number 8. 3 [boys], 2 [girls] and 3 [boys].

C: 3, 2 and 3.

M: Yeah.

C: And what is your birthday?

M: My birthday? July 18, 1915.

C: And, you were born in El Paso.

M: That's right.

C: Were you born at home or in a hospital?

M: I think at home, in those days, yeah. My brother Bob, the older one, he was born in a little hospital, which was Providence, I think. That was down there, the Schusters had that, I think at that time.

C: Yes.

M: And, then I was born at home, and John was born at home, too, I think. And my sister Margaret, I think, was born at home. Because we as boys were out in the alley playing with the neighbors, and my dad came up and said, he said, "You have a

new sister." "Oh? Yeah?" We turned around kept on playing.
(Laughter)

C: Right. When you were a boy, did you live on Richmond?

M: Right.

C: What was the address?

M: 2620. (Chuckles)

C: 2620 [Richmond]. O.K. So, what elementary school did you go to?

M: Fannin.

C: Fannin.

M: We had to walk to school, too. No ride. There wasn't anybody to give you a ride. We used to ride a bicycle once in a while, you know? We walked and walked and walked, and, hot or cold, we still walked, see?

C: When you were a child, did your dad take you down to his company? Down to the business?

M: Oh, yes, many times.

C: Where was the [business]?

M: Well, originally it was down on San...uh, it's on the street that the city/county building is on. What the heck is that? San Antonio. San Antonio divided and went this way, and...

C: Right.

M: O.K. He had a little tin barn on San Antonio Street there. We have pictures of it. And, let's see, uh, in I guess it was about [19]20, he built his little office there on Texas Street, 1918 Texas. And, it grew from there. And, that was the only two places he ever had. Well, he had many, many friends, the Ponsfords and a lot of other contractors here in El Paso. My dad had worked for a small, uh, for a little period, with the Mr. J.D. Morgan, who started out as a bricklayer, see?

C: Uh hum.

M: For a very short period of time he worked for him. Why or what, we never did find out, but he did. Otherwise, he always worked for himself, eh?

C: Um.

M: He had a partner one time who was a carpenter, and he was maybe a fair carpenter, but my dad and him split up, because he figured he could do without him. (Chuckles)

C: Uh ha. So until you boys were old enough to take you all into the business, he just worked by himself?

M: Yeah, well, he used to take us down there to pull nails out of boards.

C: Really.

M: That's where we got some education, yeah? How to go to school and get a degree, see? (Laughter) Yeah, get out there and pull nails out of boards. Those days, they used to save all that lumber. And sometimes they'd even save the nails, see? You know, times were real tough, you know. And so, you didn't throw stuff away like they do today. Even today they throw most of that stuff away.

C: Right.

M: And you can't afford to pay high wages for a guy pulling nails, see?

C: Right. How did the Depression affect your dad's business?

M: Well, it, uh, I guess we were very fortunate. He was a hard worker, and he managed to keep a little work and so forth, Enough like he said, to keep the wolf away from the door. And we had, uh, one job there, which kind of helped him get the wolf away. The Government decided they were going to straighten the Rio Grande river for better drainage. And so, that job started at that time I was interested in mechanical things and I went down there and operated a tractor. In those days a tractor was something, you know, then. (Chuckles) And, we started at San Elizario. We started working down river. And, in those days there was a lot of snakes, there was a lot of turtles, there was all kinds of things. We'd see deer, we'd see wild pigs, uh, everything under the sun along that river, you know? Pheasants, everything. Wild. There was javelina, you know?

C: Yes.

M: Yeah. So, we kept on going farther down the river, and before it ended up we had a hundred miles of the river to clear. And it's amazing: the first contract I think was only about \$25,000, see? And, we'd do, you know, a hell of a lot of work for \$25,000, see? Like, when I'd go to work, I'd leave my dad

and my mother's house and the sun hadn't even begun to peep up. And my dad would always get up and see that I had a breakfast and put me on the road in high gear, see? I'd go down there and go to the jobs, and go work the tractor over, and grease it, and fill the tanks and everything, you know, then start working about the time the sun come up. Work till the sun go down.

C: Was this in the summer, when you were a teenager, or when?

M: Yeah, uh hum. That's when we started the job was in the summer. So, it's about near the end of the summer, why, Dad came down here one day. He said, "Dave," he says, "there's going to be some Army people come down see these new tractors we bought." I said, "Yeah?" He says "Yeah. Those Chalmers bought out the Monarch Tractor Company, and if these two first tractors come off their assembly line, we're down there on that river." So, O.K. Sure enough, he showed up and he give me the signal. I unhitched the old plough that was on back of it and put that thing in high gear and spun that thing around 'front of these guys. (Laughter) They looked at that thing. Dad introduced me, and I forgot all of them except one. One of them was Major Patton. (Chuckles) George Patton.

C: Was he?

M: Yeah. So, I demonstrated that thing to him and he says, "O.K., Dave," says, "we're going to go have lunch now. Would you and Kinky like to go have a bite to eat with us?" I said, "Oh, yeah. Absolutely." San Elizario. We went over to have lunch with him.

C: Really?

M: The job was shut down for while, see?

C: Now, who's Kinky?

M: Stewart. His father was the Colonel out here at William Beaumont. And, Kinky was a roommate of mine up there Kinky Stewart and Dave Stewart. We called him Kinky because his hair was kinkier than mine. (Laughter) His father was the commanding officer at William Beaumont, see?

C: I see. So, you and Kinky were roommates at New Mexico State?

M: New Mexico State, yeah. I had some good roommates. I had David Selby, who just died recently. He was a very fine athlete, and then Vincent Lee, Oliver Lee's son. We were always four of us rooming together, see? And, all good students, all right.

C: What year did you start up there?

M: [19]33.

C: And you graduated 4 years later?

M: 5 years. I went to Hawaii to work on that one job over there.

C: Oh, yeah.

M: Yeah. So, I graduated and I went back another year and got 52 hours in one year.

C: Wow!

M: Yeah. All them in engineering. Nothing in what they call Humanities now. That didn't interest me at all.

C: Uh huh. What about your brothers and sisters? Did all the boys like engineering or just some of them?

M: Well, Bob didn't. He went to work for Mr. Hilton. And he worked down there at Waco, Texas, on the Hilton Hotel and learned to be a cook and a manager of a hotel and stuff like that. And, that didn't last too long. And, then, Bob came up and I think he spent a half a year at UTEP and he didn't like that. So, he just went from here to there, and finally my dad put him to work on one of those jobs as a bookkeeper, see? But, he was not engineering inclined at all. I was, and John, he was an engineer, civil engineer, like his dad told him he should be, see?

C: Did he get his degree at UNM?

M: Hum?

C: Where did he get his degree?

M: The University of Texas.

C: He did?

M: And, then, Philip wanted to be a cowboy, like, I guess, the other side of the family, you know. So, he went to New Mexico A & M and majored in animal husbandry, I guess. And, then, Louis was civil engineering at New Mexico, University of New Mexico. So, as a result, why, our foundation [The Robert E. and Evelyn McKee Foundation] covers all these schools, all the way up and down the line, see?

C: Right, right.

M: UTEP, University of Texas, New Mexico State, University of New Mexico, and right up and down the river, you know?

C: Tell me how your dad. Which of the boys started working for him? All of them?

M: Bob and John and I: the 3 of us, the older ones.

C: O.K.

M: We all started working. I was, uh, probably one of the older employees of the company. But, of course, I worked in summers and everything else. And, John did some, but he was a year or two behind me. And, of course, one of our friends which lived across the alley from us, Bob Hazelton, he, Bob, and myself were the two oldest employees. [We] worked longer than anybody, you see? Yeah. So, let's see the watch that my dad gave us. Bob Hazelton's got one just like it, see? Same dates and everything on it.

C: I'll be darned.

M: Yeah. So, that's a 24 carat gold watch.

C: And he gave this to you in 1936?

M: Yeah. (Chuckles)

C: And he gave one to Hazelton, too?

M: Yeah, uh huh. Bob's got his the same ways. Yeah. And, of course, when I graduated from New Mexico State up here, why, dad took me down to Feder's Jewelers, and told Mr. Cohen down there, he says, "I want to get Dave a watch, a nice pocket-watch." And, so, they give, they give me this Hamilton gold watch. And old Arthur Cohen said, "What you think? We ought to inscribe something in there tells how he got this watch?" Dad said, "No, if he can't remember how he got it, he doesn't deserve it." (Laughter) So, I've got my gold watch, I've got my granddad's, his father's gold watch that his mother gave him when he graduated, see? James David. (Chuckles) I've got his gold watch, too. And, it still runs perfect.

C: Now, you went to Fannin and then?

M: To Crockett. And then to old Austin, which is Houston School now. And then to El Paso High, and then New Austin.

C: Oh, I see. So, you graduated from the New Austin, when it was brand new.

M: Yeah. Brand new, yeah. And, what a time we had. (Laughter)

I was always into doing something, see.

C: Well, you weren't in trouble all the time, were you?

M: No, but, uh, like General Milton one time called my dad up and says, "Mr. McKee, I think you need to come up so we can have a talk to your son." And, of course, the next thing I know I was called to the Dean of Engineering, which was General Milton then. And, there's my dad sitting in there. And they started out. And General Milton said, "Now, Mr. McKee, we like Dave, and everything's fine, but," he says, "we cannot tolerate him going around in a circle up here with this car that he just worked over and," he says (Chuckles), "all these kids hanging all over it." He says, "We don't mind him ditching class once in a while, but we don't like all the other kids to be with him, see?" (Laughter) So, I caught a little bit of it then, see?

C: Uh Huh.

M: Yeah. But, General Milton turned out to be one of our best friends. When he was, uh, Assistant Secretary of the Army in World War II, they sent him to Hawaii to investigate what's happened in the construction industry and so forth over there and why some of the people were unhappy over there, you know. Well, they found out that there was this Colonel Weyman, who was Corps of Engineers, had given this guy who was a German national a lot of work and so-called secret work out in these islands like Wake and Midway and hadn't given any of the local contractors a chance to bid or even be considered, see?

C: Uh hum.

M: And this guy [Rall?] had been letting Weyman use his boat and everything else, see? Flagrant doggone thing he was doing. So, General Milton went out there and he wrote his report

END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A

and said that that work should have been given to Mr. Robert E. McKee. He was the only contractor over there capable of doing the job and one that you could depend on in every respect, see? And, that was in this Roberts report, but what did they do? They took this Colonel Weyman and made a Brigadier General out of him and sent him up to Alaska, see? (Chuckles)

C: Oh, dear.

M: And, so I think probably, that when this thing at Los Alamos came about, that by then they probably had in the back of their minds giving consideration to Mr. Robert E. McKee when

it come to Los Alamos, see?

C: Right. Well, had he done work at Fort Bliss?

M: Oh, yes.

C: He had a lot of contact with the military here?

M: He had built some of the first warehouses at Fort Bliss, uh, at the end of World War I. And in that he had told the military at Fort Bliss that the design of those concrete floors was incorrect. They would not carry the load that they would be submitted to in the warehouse business. And, these guys at Fort Bliss told him to mind his own business, that, uh, he was to build them and they would worry about designing them. They had those new designs and that everybody had confidence in them. My dad wouldn't accept that, see. So, in those days you used to get paid by the Secretary of Treasury and that was, oh, heck I can't remember now right now, but he was a very fine old gentleman. And so my dad wrote a letter to him explaining the whole problem and so forth. And so they told him to come up to Washington and to, uh, bring his things with him and so forth. And, he did. And, they said we'll look at this now, and you and Mrs. McKee take a little trip up to New York and have a couple of days up there. And so my dad says, "I can't afford that." They said, "Don't worry, don't worry. We'll pay for it. We want you to do that." So they did. They went up to New York, and had a couple of days up there, and didn't spend a heck of a lot of money either because they were always afraid to go over spending. (Chuckles) So they came back to Washington and they said, "Mr. McKee, you're correct. We want you to go back to Fort Bliss and they now understand that, uh, they're to do what you tell them in the way of design and so forth. They went back there and fixed those floors, and they're still there today, see? Still being in use, see? So, that was the first job he had at Fort Bliss. Then, after that he had many jobs at Fort Bliss and some of the latest houses that they have there were the new Spanish style with tile roof on them and all that. And, the limitations there at that time was \$12,000 a house. If you can believe it! It's almost impossible to believe it, see? So, he built those. He built a lot of other houses, NCO houses, and he built a lot of other facilities. Built many of the barracks and things over there. And for many years. Many, many of the jobs there. And so. But it was all competitive bidding and everything, and, of course, it was other people, [Charles] Leavell, and a lot of others that put in a lot of stuff, too, you know?

C: Yeah.

M: My dad didn't believe in trying to be a hog on everything.

Other guy had to live, too, he used to say, you know?

C: I know, uh huh.

M: Yeah, that's the way he was taught.

C: So, was Leavell one of the major competitors here in town?

M: Leavell? [Yes] Morgan, Leavell, Ponsford, Bob Lowman used to work for him and all that. And Bob Lowman's father was a house builder for many years here, so. They all were knew each other. And they all knew that everybody had problems.

C: Right.

M: So, never did he ever just try to just lord over anybody.

C: Right.

M: No way. He didn't like that. He liked good, clean competition. Yeah.

C: He enjoyed competing?

M: Yeah, yeah. He didn't ever, ever do anything that wasn't above board. Never. That's some of the things that people admired about him was that he was straightforward in everything he did.

C: Right. That's what I've heard.

M: Yeah. So, he does like the same way at UTEP. And, one of the men that worked for him, Jack Hill, was one of the engineers when they [built] Elephant Butte, when they finished Elephant Butte. Because of Jack Hill's health, he had to stay in a dry climate like El Paso. I don't know whether he had something in his lungs or something. But, anyway, then his son, Jack Hill's, went to work for my dad. A smart, young engineer, not too strong physically. But mentally he was very strong. And we were building a dormitory up there, I think it was an athletic dorm, and this guy that designed it, the walls weren't much thicker than this set here, and they were standing there arguing about some of the things that should have been being done. And, this Jack Hill told this guy that designed it, he says, uh, "I don't want you to lean on that wall. The darn wall will fall down." (Laughter)

C: Sounds like he had a sense of humor.

M: He did. Kind of dry, you know. Yeah. But, uh, anyway, we had some good people work for us. Charlie Kistenmacher, Gene Francis, you know, just name them. Lot of them took training

under my dad, you know? All good people, see? Uh huh. So, anyway, that's, that's the way we were all trained: do a good, honest job. Nothing under the table, regardless what it is. If we can't do it our way, where we're everything above board, we don't want it. Yeah.

C: How did your dad get the contract for the Los Alamos building?

M: Well, I was, uh, over at Artesia, and my dad had a little oil business over there. And so I was over there looking at some of the oil wells and stuff, and a cold winter night and I just come up from Panama. I didn't have proper dress, you know, but I had as much on as I could get. Out there, and the wind was blowing, it was cold, snow was falling, and check in there and they're drilling the well out there, and, and it had to be 15, 20 below 0. It felt more than that. But, I went out there, and pretty soon I got a telephone call soon as I came in from where our office was there. And this fellow Losey used to work for my dad; he used to work drilling the oil. And, he said, uh, "Your dad wants you to call him right away." So, I called. He says, "Get on your car and go to, uh, Santa Fe and meet Jack Brennan up there". Jack was our manager for this El Paso-Rio Grande area. So, we met with a Major Morgan, Elmo Morgan. And, he, uh, says, "We'll see what's what, and see what's all about." So, O.K. So, we were informed by the Corps of Engineers Office in Santa Fe that we had to go to this particular house, Dorothy McGibbens, up on the old Pecos Road, to be interviewed and so forth. And we went up there, were interviewed, and she says, "O.K. You're O.K. You're O.K." And she put the O.K. on it so we could go and start work at Los Alamos. And what we didn't know was that my dad didn't have anything at the time. He said that his word was General Groves'. General Groves said, "Go to work, and do whatever is necessary to take care of what, what they want." That's how we got started up there. And, then they just wrote him a paragraph, [which] says, "Robert E. McKee, we want you to go to work, and work will be designated under the Zia Project." That was called the Zia Project then. And, of course, all these people that we ran into and saw up there were coming in from all over the world. Some could speak English, and some couldn't. And, you'd say, "Yeah, well, some guys there I know had to do with radiation. And, then, there's somebody here over there that has to do with science, and so forth." Yeah, and "I think I have an idea what Jay's working on. (Chuckles) See?

C: Right.

M: Yeah. And that's the first indication we had. And we started to work up there. And, first thing, a job we had was an S-site, which is, uh, high explosive, which is up a little higher than Los Alamos, up in the... It was colder than

blazes. Oh, you couldn't believe it! Snow was about 3 feet deep. We had to start building right then. We didn't know what the heck we were going to do, but we had to clear this area here and this area. We are going to want a building here, we want a building there, we want a building there, and... .

C: Was it General Groves ordering you? I mean, was he up there?

M: Yeah, he had been up there and we met General Groves, but we had met him years before.

C: I see.

M: Down there in Texas on the cantonment camps. We built several cantonment camps at one time in Texas. And so, uh, we had over 15,000 people working in Texas, alone, on those cantonment camps, see?

C: Now, what is cantonment? What is that?

M: That's what they call these Army training camps, where they train these boys in various phases of the Army, see? In how to be a doughboy.

C: Ah, ha. So, so you had already met Lindsey Groves?

M: Yeah, uh huh. He was a Major then.

C: Well, tell me, when you got on the road and drove up to Los Alamos from Santa Fe, what was up there? Describe what you saw when you got up there?

M: What was up there was the old ranch school. And it had the big house and the lodge. It had the professors' houses, all log cabins. And they had contacted [another contractor and he] did a couple of apartment houses, 4-family houses. And the other one was Morgan, here in El Paso; they did some duplexes. And we were working on high explosive.

C: This "S" area?

M: S-Site. [Yes] And so Morgan and [the other contractor] didn't want any more of it. We told them we'd do "whatever you want. It don't make any difference; if you tell us, we'll do it."

C: Why did Morgan and [the other contractor] not want to stay up there and work?

M: They just didn't want to, uh, be pushed that hard or something, you know. And, I guess they just was too

accustomed to Tucson and El Paso and didn't want to change climates, you know? (Laughter) My dad says, "It doesn't make any difference. If the Government wants us to do something, we're going to do it." See? And he'd get out there and he came up there himself and directed things. "Let's do this, boys," or "Let's do that." You know?

C: Where were you sleeping up there? Did you have a bed?

M: Well, well, that was another real nice story. We, Jack Brennan and I went down to the La Fonda, after we first met up there at Los Alamos. And they gave us the word to go to work. We decided right then we'd better find out about where we could get people and stuff. So, we said we'd go down to the La Fonda and get a room. So, Jack and I went in there, and we went up to the desk and a fellow named Wilson, he says, "Sorry, we can't give you a room." "Why not?" He says, "We're going to close the hotel down." "Oh, no you're not. You're not going to close this hotel down." And, he [Jack] says, "Where is Mr. Polk [the manager]?" "Well, he must be down in his room." "Well, go get him. Go get him." So, he brought him up there, and we said, "We got to have these rooms." "But, Santa Fe's going to close it." "No, Santa Fe's not going to close it." "Why not? They've said they're going to close it." "Because, we're telling them they're not going to close it, see?" We couldn't tell him why, see? [The La Fonda manager thought] "We can't understand that." [We said] "Don't worry. We'll take all of the damn rooms you got, see?" (Laughter) And if we ever have people come in there, first thing you know the FBI was all over the place. And, by gosh, everything was just hustle and bustle, you know, and they couldn't understand what had happened to Santa Fe, see?

C: Well, did the people that were sent to work at Los Alamos, did most of them stay at the La Fonda for a day or two before they went on up there?

M: Well, at that time they could have or they could have been housed by the military at Albuquerque or whatever. Of course, then the next thing you know, they, they had already built Bronze Hospital in Santa Fe, and it would take care of wounded people or whatever in the war. So, they had that. And they already had some billeting there for those, some of those people. And some of them went right on up and stayed at the Big House at Los Alamos, and the Lodge. And, some of them were even put into the professors' houses, see?

C: Did you ever meet the Churches that lived up there?

M: Yeah, yeah.

C: Which ones did you meet? Was it Frank?

M: I don't remember. It may have been. I don't remember which of the Churches I met, but Frank Bond worked for us for a long time, you know. And the Churches. I forgot now but we did meet all those people.

C: Really?

M: Yeah. We met so many people and in such a hurry, you know. But the thing is, we had to find out, too, once they got started, then we had this extreme cold day or two, and all the pipelines froze up. And, we had to get water for them, so we started bringing water trucks in from all of New Mexico and West Texas, and even from Arizona. So, that, you'd haul water up there. We'd haul it from the river up there. (Chuckles)

C: Did they finally drill some water wells up there?

M: Oh, yeah. But that was later on. But, see, during the war, then we had this water coming from the Los Alamos dam. And, they had a little water coming from what they call Guaje Canyon. And, that water had froze up. The water in the stream froze solid as a rock. And so that water couldn't come down the pipe. And so that's why we were having to haul water by truck, see?

C: My gosh.

M: It's just everything you can think of became massive and challenges, you know?

C: Right. Right.

M: Yeah. So, we did. We worked on those things and it was just one thing after another. And we had to get coal. The coal came from what we'd call Má-d-rid, Madrid, you know. And, of course, Madrid was the only place in the country that we know of or anybody else ever heard of having bituminous coal and anthracite coal coming right out of the same veins, so to speak. Yeah. The railroad, Sante Fe owned that and they still do. They own that. And, for years and years that coal came out of that, that, and we'd use some coal for the boilers and for steam. And we'd use the others to heat the houses. You couldn't believe it, see?

C: Did you bring in a lot of stuff on the railroad?

M: Well, a lot of stuff came across country in the railroad, and if we needed something we knew it was on the railroad, we stopped the train and get it. Whether it belonged to somebody else or not, we got it.

C: Oh, really?

M: Took it. Yeah. Took it right off the train. And, these great railroad detectives and everything [said], "You can't do that." "Hell we can't. We're going to do it."

C: Well, would you have to show them some kind of paper? Or what would you do?

M: Nothing. We didn't. [It was] just like a highjacking. (Laughter) The old fashioned, like the old movie pictures, you know.

C: Really? You just said, "Well, the Government needs it."

M: Yeah. We didn't tell them who, but we'd [say] "It's needed; we're going to take it." We had some stuff that was to go aboard the ships out there in the West Coast and the ships were being built on the West Coast and they had this stuff on it. And we needed it, we took it. See? No questions asked. And then, the railroads they'd see us coming, they'd be out on the flats there, and we'd stop them out there where we could load them on to our trucks and haul them up, see? (Chuckles) You couldn't believe it, see? So many things happened, and you just had to use all your imagination you could use to get some of that done, you know? So, those things happened and, how you handled it was next to then with a mask over your face.

C: Right. (Laughter) Like the Lone Ranger.

M: Yeah. The Lone Ranger.

C: Well, uh, you had to get a security clearance, didn't you?

M: Yeah, we got the security clearance from Dorothy McKibbin.

C: And, I mean that's all? She didn't...

M: We had McKee tags, and she had the number of those tags: who was this and who was that, that had that number, see? And, she asked us, "What can you do to produce identification?" Well, we had these tags that we could use. O.K. All we want [are] the numbers on them. And, our people used those for a long time, and even some of the other people used them to get up on the hill, see? Yeah. We had one year, several years, when all those cantonment camps were being built, we had a lot of those tags, see?

C: I see.

M: But, certain series of them were brand new and hadn't been used at all, see?

C: But as long as one of your employees had one of those tags, then, they said it was all right?

M: That's right. It wouldn't make any difference who they worked for as long as they had one of those tags. Then later, why, here come the Government security. Well, we'd had badges or stuff that was certified by the Government. Really, they weren't any much different from ours. And it wasn't until after the war that we had definite security from the security police at Los Alamos. And when that heppened, we were 6 of us in my old Chevrolet. We drove up there to the security and we bailed out of the car. And, then 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and I was number 6, getting out of the car. So, I was 6th in getting in line, see? Elmo Morgan was number 1, and Sam Russell was number 2, and a fellow named Cherry was number 3, and, uh, (Chuckles) I can't remember. But all 6 of us lined up. I still have my clearance on that - Z-6.

C: Z?

M: Z was for Zia Project. Yeah.

C: Well, I read in one of the books about McKeeville up there. What was that?

M: Oh, well that, uh, that was we had to have a place to build places for our people to live. Just had to; there wasn't any housing available in Espanola or any place. So, I can't think of the name of what you call [it], we had a little store down there and some housing units. Maybe I'll think of it later. But, we built that, and had our people there, and the store. Mr. Merriman was in charge of all the housing and the store and all that. And his son later became one of the top chemists up there at Los Alamos: Bill Merriman, Jr. And everybody that was involved in that had family or something, eventually became part of the project, you know? So, the store. One time I remember: I was out someplace and Mr. Merriman called and said, "Dave," he said, "Jack's not in town, or can't find him, and here we got a chance to buy a carload of coffee." I said, "Well, so what?" He says, "Well, see, we can get it at the old price, and we can use that as a leader in our store." So, [to] keep our store going, see? I said, "O.K. Buy it." See? (Laughter) So, that's the way we had to get stuff. And people would find out you had coffee at a good price and stuff. So you made deals, selling groceries and everything as long as you had a thing. And, actually, we built all this on Indian land. It was built on Indian land, and I'll think of the name of the darned thing. But anyway, that, that was the so-called McKeeville. That was it. And it was right at the bottom of the hill. Of course, one of the big problems was the road going up the hill. At the time we went up there was only a partially built road up there, and,

come up so far, and they had what called a switchback. You go up so far and then back up and drag it up the side of the mountain, see? And we had to bring our equipment and everything up through that thing until the rest of the road was finished. And, a lot of, you know, brothers from Colorado we brought in to do that.

C: Uh huh. Did you have any of the Indians living around there, the Pueblo Indians, working for the company at all, did you?

M: Oh, yeah.

C: A lot of them?

M: Oh, yeah, we had a lot of them. We had some from the Zia Pueblo, and Zuni, and Santa Clara, Santo Domingo, a whole bunch of them. And this belt buckle was [from] one of the modern, young Indian artists, Black Bear. His mother was Popchalee, the artist. And his aunt was Lady Byrd Johnson. Yeah. (Laughter) Yeah. Lady Byrd's brother married this Popchalee, see? Yeah. And, Jack Hopkins, he worked for us. We started him out as a kid. He worked up in Personnel Division, see? And when I left, I told him, "Jack," I said, "I want, of all things, to have a belt buckle made by you." He said, I said, "I'll buy it." "No, no", he said, "I got one that's for you."

C: So, he gave it to you.

M: [Yes]

C: That's nice.

M: Always gets a bang out of that because Lady Byrd Johnson's nephew, yeah. Yeah.

C: So, did the Indians seek you out to hire them, I mean, were they coming looking for work, or did you go down to the pueblo and recruit?

M: Oh, we, we used to go down and recruit them. Of course, we had to furnish them, a lot of them, you had to furnish them, transportation. So, we had busses. That meant busses, too, see? Yeah.

C: So, oh my, you go down there in the mornings, get the workers, take them back at night, on these busses?

M: Some of them come far as Dixon, which is about 60 miles, every day.

C: Really?

M: Yeah.

C: Well, at the peak of activity during the war years, how many people do you think Zia Company employed?

M: Well, we took over from the Army there at the end of the war. The Army had what they called Special Engineers and other engineering forces. Special Engineers, primarily, were people with scientific talent, from maybe Europe, any one of the countries in Europe. And, yet, they were not in the bracket of being high class scientific people. They were in the class of, uh, mainly graduate from the University, but inexperienced, see? So, by their qualifications they may have been a sergeant in the Army or something else, see? And so they had the barracks and places for them to live, which was what they call the Special Engineers, see? And, then they had the other engineering group, which were also in barracks, up there, which we built. And, they had GIs doing plumbing, electrical and so forth, very inexperienced, but they did have a security clearance, see?

C: I see.

M: So, that's where a lot of the problems developed is that with inexperience, the Corps of Engineers just had to get somebody else, see? And, that's when Groves asked my dad if we'd do that. And, my dad said, "We'll do anything you want," he said. "Now, only one thing," he says, "my son, Dave, is in the Marines, and he's just coming home from the war. And he had been up here before," he said, "and, I'd like to have him back." General Groves says, "We'll see that he gets back." See? So, they had me transferred from the Marines. I went overseas to... I had a group... I went first to San Francisco to unload there, but then they had a railroad strike. So, we had to go back aboard the ship, went down the coast as [far as] San Diego. And from there they sent us back up to Santa Barbara. And, from Santa Barbara we unloaded and got out there and then we were, everybody, kind of glad to get off the ship. And so there was kind of a weekend, and so I decided, "Well, I'll go over to the Officers' Club and see what's going on in there." And I saw one, lone soul, sitting on the barstool there, and I went up and rustled up against him. "Hello, partner," I said, "How are you?" I said, "I'm Dave McKee." He says, "Ah, my name is McDaniel." And, "Yeah, where are you from?" He says, "From El Paso." Pete McDaniel, you know?

C: Yeah. (laughter)

M: He says, "I got to check into your outfit", he said. See? Yeah. So, that's where I met Pete McDaniel: Santa Barbara.

So, then we went from Santa Barbara down to El Toro, and that's where I lost track of the Marine Air Group 45. From there I went to Los Alamos. But, it was just here, there, and there until they could find a place to put me, you know?

C: Right. Now, you were married at this time, right?

M: Oh, yeah. I was married in 1940.

C: O.K. So,...

M: My wife and I were freshmen together at New Mexico State.

C: Oh.

M: She was 15, and I was just turned 18. Yeah.

C: Well, I'll be!

M: Yeah. (Chuckles)

C: So, did she come join you in Los Alamos then right away?

M: Well, not right away. I was commuting.

C: You were?

M: I was flying in a military plane back and forth from Los Alamos to El Paso, see? And I did that for several months until we could get a place. So, my dad told General Groves, he said, "Now, I got to have a place for Dave, and a place for Doctor White. Doctor White had been at Fort Bliss Hospital. They had a hospital at Fort Bliss besides William Beaumont, see? He says, "I know this Doctor White," and he says, "I want Doctor White at Los Alamos, and I want Dave up there, but I want them to have a house." So, General Groves says, "O.K. We'll see that they get to Los Alamos, and we'll see that they get a house. You build them one. So, he said, "We'll call it the Sample Houses." You know? So, Bill White lived in a Sample House and I lived in a Sample House.

C: O.K. And, he was up there to take care of your employees' medical needs?

M: All employees.

C: All employees?

M: All employees. He was the hospital man. A hospital was made from a row of wooden barracks. And, of course, we used that building from end of World War II till the end of [19]47. Our daughter was born in that hospital, an

old wooden shanty. Bill White had to go to some place, up to one of the hospitals back East, I forgot the name. But, anyway, he had to go and he said, "Now, I don't want anything to happen to that girl in there." He says, "I'll take you all on." (Laughter) And she ended up with a some kind of skin disease. It didn't bother her any; she gained weight. And everything was fine.

C: Well, that's good.

M: But she was born in that little old hospital up there. (Chuckles)

C: Well, describe your living quarters that you built for yourself.

M: Well, they were a sample house of what we were going to build for what we call the Westernary houses. And, there was a picture in that book there, "Westernary", when you open the cover there you see the Westernary. That's Westernary up in there, see? [Shows picture in book] You see how it goes up in the air, the Westernary, see there it was, see? And, so we made that house, a little 3-bedroom house. Very nice, well designed and everything.

C: Was it wooden or?

M: Well, the one we had was concrete block, but it had wooden partitions, wooden roof, and the one Bill White was in was wood with stucco on the outside. So the two houses were sample houses, see?

C: Well, tell me about when you brought your bride up there. What was her first reaction?

M: She didn't care. She'd been before. We went to Panama together, and in the first year we were in Panama we moved 7 times the first year we were there. (Chuckles) I told her, I said, " Now, if you can't put what you have in that suitcase, you [better leave it at home].

END OF SIDE B, TAPE 1

BEGINNING OF SIDE A, TAPE 2

C: What you can do when you have to, I guess.

M: That's right. Of course, when the war started, we were down in Panama. And, I was flying on December the 7th.

C: Oh, were you?

- M: My classmates and I were, why, we were flying that night. And, General Andrews got everybody out to this boxing match. Everybody had gone back up to El Paso for Christmas. And, we were all down there and so we got back and the General got up and said, "After this fight, everybody report to their respective bases." So, we went to Allbrook Field and Colonel Andrews says, "We're going to have some, uh, some, uh, qualifying of bombardiers. We're going to go to Rio Hato, we're going to load up with bombs, and to the airbase up there, and so forth and so forth." It was 2 o'clock in the morning, see? So, we all flew up there and got the planes all loaded up and everything. So, we flew up along the coast of Costa Rica, and encountered some Japanese ships up there and we turned them, or they would have hit the Panama Canal at the same time they hit Pearl Harbor, see? So, General Andrews was on the ball, and the guys over in Hawaii were not. So, it just turned out that way.
- C: Because they were going to hit the Panama Canal at the same time as Pearl Harbor?
- M: Yeah. And on top of that, NBC had picked it up somehow, and they were going to put it on the news. And they just started it, when they cut them off, boy, right now. And that would have been several hours before Pearl Harbor.
- C: That's right.
- M: Yeah. It was about 5 or 6 hours difference. So, some of those things you wonder about. And we got back from that that afternoon. We came back about 3:30 in the afternoon. As soon as we landed they ran out and said, "Pearl Harbor's been attacked." See? (Chuckles) So, that's how we found out about it. Of course, then, Colonel Andrews, he said, "We've got to disperse our planes properly" and everything. And, so we just scattered them all over the field, and first thing you know the McKee people were out there helping them build barracades and revetments. And we worked day and night, see? Because it was in Panama [we had] to protect what we had, see?
- C: Right. Well, I'm sure they were glad to have you down there, because you could...
- M: Well, I had, I got a lot of experience. We gained a lot right down there in a hurry, you see? So, we, we, we kind of had our experience there. And of course, the women were there, they would stay. But my wife had already left, and she was having a hard time getting back after Christmas, see? But, I managed to get her back alright. But, she said, "That's where I live. That's where my husband is." And so forth, so O.K. Finally, they let her come. (Chuckles)

C: Well, let's back up a little bit, and tell me about your wife. You met her when she was 15 and you were 18?

M: Yeah. Went to New Mexico State.

C: And what was her maiden name?

M: Carter. Not kin to Jimmy Carter. (Laughter) No, the Carters are a big clan of people back there. But on the other hand the Shelbys were a big clan back there, too. The Shelby was my wife's grandfather. [When] he was, uh, a young boy, he was kidnapped from Memphis, which is Shelby County... Kidnapped and taken to Houston, and was raised by a family in Houston. It was the Shelby family. And the Shelbys, when they were first married in Houston, they had a whole flock of kids. They had 9 girls and 2 boys. They decided that they wanted to migrate west and they migrated west [in a] covered waggon. And, [they] came through the worst deserts and stuff with a team of mules, a wife, and all these kids. And, most of that was walking all the way, you know. It took them, you know, a couple of years to do it, but they did it. They came to El Paso, and a lot of the, uh, houses on Magoffin and in that area, uh, were built by Shelby, you know, when he was a young person here in El Paso. So, a lot of these things, uh, it's amazing how they fit together, you know?

C: So did your wife grow up in El Paso?

M: No, she grew up...her father...Carter, uh, married...Neddie Shelby, and they lived... He was a railroad man. They, they lived over in the area of Amarillo, Canadian. And my wife was born in Canadian, Texas. And then they moved from Canadian to Amarillo, and along the Santa Fe Railroad... And, then, they had a railroad wreck, and he got hurt. So, then they went to another place; after he got over it and out of the hospital, why, they went to Harriman, New Mexico. And they were raised, the girls, were raised there. There's two girls. And, uh, the older girl, Yul Lee, 2 names: Yul, that was a boy's name, and Lee was a boy's name, Yul Lee. She was 6 years older than my wife, and, uh, she married Frank Brown, H. Frank Brown. And, Frank Brown's mother and grandmother were homesteaders at Los Alamos. (Laughter) Can you imagine?

C: No.

M: Yeah. And, so, when they came along, why, uh, we had to start billeting people, taking care of housing and stuff. And they were kind of afraid to turn the billeting over to us. I said, "Don't worry." I said, "I know where I can get somebody to really handle that." "Oh, yeah? Who is it?" "Let's see. His name is Frank Brown. He's sending out migrant farm workers from Mexico. He's headquartered in Mexico City. And,

their daughter is, uh, has been sick, had had some tuberculosis, and they need to get out of that country down there." So, they were ready, willing, and able to come out, and they did. They came up, went to work, and he was the head of the housing. And, (Chuckles) everything worked out fine, you know? And, that was his family's home. And he lived there as a little boy, see? Yeah. Isn't that strange how things like that happen?

C: It is... It is. So your wife really had relatives, when she lived in Los Alamos. There were relatives there.

M: Yeah, yeah. So, anyway, when we were going to school, New Mexico Aggies, my wife was the first girl to play an instrument in the marching band of New Mexico State.

C: What did she play?

M: Clarinet.

C: Really?

M: I got it right up in the closet.

C: Really?

M: Yeah, yeah. Ain't that something?

C: Uh huh.

M: Yeah. Strange how those things are. But, uh...

C: Did you meet her in class, or?

M: Freshman, yeah, I think in Freshman English. They used to rag the heck out of me because I was the poorest student in English they ever saw. (Laughter) Miss Fleming, Mrs. Fleming, she married Professor Fleming who was the dean of engineering. And she kind of took a liking to me. I guess I never would have made it because I was poor, poor in English, [the] English language. Things like..., I could never, I could never memorize poems or anything like that. I could remember dates and things but never could memorize a poem. And that liked to kill me, up in that school.

C: Yeah. Right.

M: Yeah. Because everybody has to know a poem, so to speak, you know? And, of course, my wife, she could memorize any of those things like that, but I couldn't. They [asked] "Why can't you?" You know? "I don't know. It just goes in this ear and out the other one." Yeah. (Chuckles) But, in dates

and, uh, figures and stuff like that, no problem. Yeah.

C: The scientific side of your brain.

M: Yeah, right. Right.

C: Well, how long did you date your, what's was your wife's name?

M: Martha Louise...Carter. Martha Louise Carter. We knew each other for 7 years before we were married. I, of course, I was out on military, and I was doing this and that, and construction. But, when we decided to get married, at least I'd saved a little money, and we had enough to get married on, we thought. See?

C: Uh huh.

M: Which the kids today don't. They (Chuckles) get married, then they wonder what they're going to do, see? Which my granddaughter did just recently. (Laughter)

C: Oh, really?

M: Yeah. So, that's, that's about it, I guess.

C: So, your first child was born in Los Alamos in...?

M: No. He was born in El Paso.

C: Oh? He was born in El Paso.

M: Yeah. When I was, uh, overseas with the Marines.

C: O.K. So, was the daughter...?

M: The daughter, 2 years later, we had this daughter. She was born in Los Alamos.

C: Well, what kind of social life did you have in Los Alamos?

M: Well, strange thing. We built, uh, from an old water tank up there, took an old building, an old Army building, and we made what we called a civic club out of it. And we took this wood from the water tank, which was good red cedar, and used that for the embellishments and so forth in there. We made this nice club. Worked out fine. The scientific people, and, uh, other people, all service people, so to speak, all used the club, all members. Everybody got along good with them. And, so that, I guess, lasted about 3 years, 4 years. And then along come a little change of command up there, and Colonel "G", I think he was sent up there by somebody in Washington to break up the playhouse at Los Alamos, see? "Have to move out

of this building; we're going to tear it down." And, boy, there would be scientists raising hell about it then, see? (Chuckles) No way to treat anybody, see? No way could we have any social life at Los Alamos, see? Of course, you know (Chuckles), it just really got to people. And, he was probably the most detested person you ever saw. And, uh, not only with him, but one time we had a wreck up there. Boys, Army boys, got in a wreck, and, uh, and, uh, they, uh, [got] badly battered up. So, we brought them up to the hospital. And, I guess it must have been about...right after the war sometime. And this Colonel "G" was there quite a while. But, he, uh, we had them in the hospital and they were getting along fine. Then, for some reason or another, he decided he was going to send them down to the hospital in San Antone [San Antonio]. But, Doctor Bill White says, "No. We're not going to let them out of the hospital." He says, "I'm the Commanding Officer." Bill White said, "I'm the Commanding Officer of this hospital, too."

C: Ooh!

M: They had it big, yeah.

C: Uh huh.

M: And, so, somebody in San Antonio at the hospital down there said, "Well," he said, "they don't have the facilities up there to take care of these boys." Colonel, uh, White...Bill White said, "We have spent our time in, overseas, taking care of young people getting hurt. And, we think we've got it well under control." But, they agreed with the Colonel that, uh, gee, that they would take them, and, to San Antonio. So, then, what did they do? They asked me if I would fly them out of there. I said, "No way am I going to do something that Bill White says no." I said, "I'm not going to do it." "So, we're going to get somebody else to, huh?" "It's up to you, uh, I can't keep you from doing that." And, then they kind of said, "But, who's going to light the field?" "I'm not going to light the field for you." (Laughter) So, we had it round and round, see? So, when, when they got to that time, old "G" says, "I'm not going to let you land along this hill any more, either, see?" (Chuckles) I said, "I don't care." So, we got a hold of Clark Carr, who I knew in Panama, who was an old barn-storming pilot. I say he had Cutter Carr of Albuquerque, a flying service. Got them, and they, uh, said, "Yeah, we'll land here if Dave McKee will light the field." Hum? So, I said, "Well, I guess I can't just continue this way; I'll light the field." So, I said, "I got to get all the fire pots that I can get from all these contractors around here, and we'll line the field." So he had a way to land the plane. Well, Colonel "G" said, "Hell, that's no way to light the field." I said, "Colonel, are you trying to tell me, a pilot,

how to do my job as a pilot?" I said, "I think you'd better go take a seat back there. I'll take care of the lighting of the field."

C: Uh huh.

M: We lit the field. Old Clark Carr flew in there just as pretty as anything you ever saw. They put those boys in the plane. He flew them out to Albuquerque. They put them in this Army ambulance plane. The boys died over [in] Big Springs.

C: Really?

M: Yeah.

C: Should have just left them right there.

M: If they had left them alone, they'd have been alright, see? So, I don't know what happened up the road there, but that was our way. And, then, of course, flying and locating these scientists and people who would get lost, that was my job to go out and fly and find out where all these guys were, see?

C: Oh, well, tell me about that.

M: Well, Oppenheimer and everyone of these guys would sometimes walk out on these trails up in the mountain there, in the Jemez Mountains. And they knew that they had left Los Alamos a certain time, and they normally they'd make a mile and a half an hour, or something like that. So, you'd know about where to look for them, see?

C: Right.

M: Now, I'd take this old Army plane that I had, and fly up there, and I'd spot them down below, and, you know. I'd tell them where to go get them and so forth. (Chuckles) And, there was always something, see? Some of the engineering people, firm of Black and Veech, were off shooting the rapids on the Rio Grande, up in the Rio Grande Box. Well, they didn't show up at, uh, the junction, Taos Junction, when they were supposed to. So, what did they do? They called me to see if I could go find them. And, of course, all that black rock down there in that...

C: Right. Canyon.

M: Dark as pitch, you know. So, I'd fly down as close as I could, safely, and look down out of the plane. I saw this, uh, raft, and just a little bit of orange showing there. The damned guys had turned it upside down, and the bottom was (Chuckles) black, see?

C: Oh!

M: And I did spot them, and I called. I had to call to Santa Fe radio, which my plane, uh air..., my, uh, radio was compatible. Called them, and they called the New Mexico State Police. The New Mexico State Police got the message where to go to get these guys and get them out of there, see? But, they were always asking me to do something on the way of flying like that. And when, after the Trinity tests, why, I was the first one to land a plane down there, see?

C: Really?

M: Yeah. (Chuckles)

C: Describe what you saw.

M: Well, gees, it just looked like a big flat saucer that was all burnt, you know? It was just completely clear of vegetation or anything else, you know.

C: About how big, far across? How far across?

M: Well, it had to be about, uh, half a mile across, something like that. You see...

C: Black? Was it black?

M: No, no. It was just light colored, like the sand, you know?

C: Ah, ha.

M: And, you could tell, though, you could see it had a kind of little radiations out. That was a strange thing about the A-bomb: in the explosion of them they had these finger radiations, see? So, in our air tests we made, uh, at Nevada test site, they had, say, "Well, we want you to build a smokestack here. And that will be a half a mile away. Another one we want to build 2 miles away." But, they had it figured it out scientifically: if it hit this one, or, it was in the slot, so to speak, with the fingers, and the other one is at the end of the fingers, the one that was two miles away would be knocked down and this one wouldn't. And, sure enough, that's what happened. And they were able to drop the bomb, and the guy that was the Operations Officer was Major Eddie Miller, who used to be the quarterback of the New Mexico Aggies up there. (Chuckles) They directed them, and they came, flew over, and, of course, they had that thing so directed...radio-wise that that thing came down and did just exactly what they wanted it to do, see? That was on airdrops.

C: Uh huh. Did you have, did your company have anything [to do] with transporting the bomb from Los Alamos down to the Trinity Site?

M: Yes. They couldn't figure out how to get the thing down there, so they got our people and Jack Brennan and all of them, and they got our trucks. And, then, they had what they call "Dumbo", which was a big, big steel bottle that they were going to put that first bomb in, and shoot it inside that thing, thinking that maybe they could contain that explosion. And there Oppenheimer and them said, "No." And, they had that bottle standing up on the end, and the opening at the top, and they decided, "No, we'd better not do that." So, they built a tower on top and put the bomb on the tower. And, then, they thought that if that thing went off in there and split that iron, they'd throw steel all over the State of New Mexico, see?

C: Right.

M: So, (Chuckles) they just abandoned that idea and put it on this tower. It went off, and after it went off, that bomb was still standing right there where it was, I mean, that old "Dumbo" was still standing there.

C: It survived the...

M: Yeah. The blast and everything. And, now "Dumbo," we moved it back to Los Alamos. And they had it there and it had been used for several other experiments. They even put a window on the front of it, and put a camera in there, and watched other shots go off and stuff. Well, when you were up there, you knew there were people that were working in radioactive, fissionable material.

M: Oh, yeah. Well, you know, when you had Oppenheimer and there was, uh,...oh,...any of those guys, there were several of them up there from England, and, uh,...

C: That Fermi, was he up there?

M: Fermi, he was Italian, yeah. And, uh, ...Kistiakowsky was a high explosives man, and, uh, ...Beta...he was one of the scientists on radiation and stuff. Oh, there's so many of those guys I can't remember half of them right at the moment. But, we knew them all, and tried to work with them. And, they'd tell us what they wanted, and we'd do what they wanted. And, "We want this building. Do this, and this." and so forth. And, "We'll need this kind of space here." And, that's what we'd do.

C: Well, did you pick up any, I mean, were they real excited

about the work? Fearful of what might happen? Or...

M: Well, they were, uh..., I think somewhat fearful because they had a heck of a job to do to start with, whether they could even perform that job, see? That was one of the things they kind of feared, you know? But, uh, I know a couple of times when [I was] at the Lodge. I stayed at the Lodge a lot until I could get my family up. Came in out of the rain and muddy and, uh, I decided I'd go up the backstairs instead of go out to, uh, the front with all that mud! So, I started up the back stairs and opened this door, and here Oppenheimer and all these guys were in there in there conferencing. I had no idea they were in there. And they turned around and looked at me, and they could look like daggers, you know? I [said], "Pardon me." I backed out, and (Laughter) they were having a big conference, see?

C: Uh huh.

M: Yeah. And, uh..., there was, oh heck, I can't think of his name, the father of the H-bomb, uh, anyway, this guy, ..., he later became the director of the laboratory out in California.

C: Livermore?

M: Huh? Yeah, Livermore. Uh, ...anyway, I'll think of, uh, but, there's some of these guys that were there they'd lived in the Lodge for a while, and they may have only been there for a limited length of time. So, we knew a lot of those guys. And, uh, of course, then there was also a Army Captain there, and he was, uh, he was an attorney. He was also an engineer. And, uh, he was a, uh, patent attorney for the Government. And, he, uh, stood there, and he was quite... peculiar in a lot of ways. And, he was married, and his wife was just raising hell to find out where he was. And, all he'd tell her was the Post Office Box 1663, see? And she divorced him.

C: Oh, oh.

M: Yeah. Because she couldn't find out where he was. And (chuckles) so, he lived there, and we, of course, we knew him. And anything that happened that had anything to do with or may be possible for a patent, why, he had to jump on that first, see?

C: Oh.

M: Yeah. So he did that.

C: Did you...? You weren't able to...? How did you communicate, uh, with the rest of the world, the rest of the country, if you needed to order something to build or something like that?

Was it a problem?

M: Well, lots of times we'd get our office in Santa Fe, we had an office there, and we'd get them to do the ordering and buying and stuff.

C: I see.

M: And even for the Government, in some cases. The University of California, clear over in Berkeley.

C: So, how often would you go in to Santa Fe?

M: Many times every day.

C: Really?

M: Right. See, we'd, it would depend on where we were staying at the time, see?

C: Uh huh.

M: And, uh, we stayed at La Fonda, commuted from La Fonda, or we stayed wherever we could find a...[If they] had a extra room at the Lodge there, why, we'd stay there.

C: Well, when you brought your family up to Los Alamos, did you all have a phone, and they could call long distance or was there somebody listening?

M: No, no. We used the phone in the Lodge.

C: Oh, you'd have to go there?

M: Yeah, yeah. And, uh, the, uh, telephone was monitored all the time by anybody using it, the only difference to it was... But, uh, of course, I had also the phone in the office in Santa Fe. So, I could use that. But, uh... communications was pretty well restricted to everybody.

C: Did they censor the mail? Letters?

M: Oh, yes. Definitely. Yeah, mail was all censored. It all had to come through that box.

C: 1663.

M: (Chuckles) Ah, I can't think of these guys' names now to save my neck.

C: Well, let's turn this off, and stop for...

[Recording Paused]

M: O.K.

C: O.K. It was Edward Teller.

M: Edward Teller, yeah, and his wife and little boy lived at the Los Alamos Lodge at the same time my wife, Martie, and my son, Michael, lived there. And Michael and Teller's son were within a year of each other. And they used to play together in the Los Alamos Lodge. And, uh, of course, we got to know him pretty well. And, uh, he'd come there and spend, he'd spend 6 weeks, and, uh, maybe leave, then come back for another 6 weeks' stint. Because he was, uh, in demand, I guess, all over the atomic energy set-up. Oakridge, or at Los Alamos, or at Hanford or wherever it would, might be. He was always running from here to there. And, the, uh, that Captain that I can't think of his, uh [name], just yet, right now, but, uh,... You want to turn it off again? (Chuckles)

C: Yeah.

END OF TAPE 2, SIDE A

BEGINNING OF TAPE 2, SIDE B

[Side B of Tape 2 is blank]

BEGINNING OF TAPE 3, SIDE A

Today is November 17, 1992. This is an interview with David McKee in El Paso, Texas. The interviewer is Becky Craver.

C: I am reading from the book, The Zia Company in Los Alamos: a History, by Robert E. McKee, published in 1950 by Texas Western Press, El Paso. "C. David McKee went to work for his father, Robert E. McKee, in Honolulu in July 1936, and in August 1937 he returned to New Mexico A&M College, from which he was graduated in July 1938. He then returned to Honolulu, and worked there and in Panama until November 1939, when he returned to the States and trained with the U.S. Army Air Force at San Diego, California. He then returned to work for his father in Panama, where he remained until he joined the U.S. Marine Corps in July 1944. He served with the Marines in the Central Pacific, and was discharged with merit in March 1946, retaining his commission as a Reserve Officer. Following his discharge from the Marines, he became assistant project manager for the Zia Company under Mr. Morgan, whom he succeeded in November 1947."

M: That was the Zia Company.

C: Yeah.

M: That was on April 1, 1946. And we, Jack Brennan and myself, my dad called us to go up to Santa Fe and meet up there and to go see the Corps of Engineers, who had an office right off the plaza there. So, we went up to the second story up at that Engineers' office, and those fellows were waiting for us up there. And then there was a, uh, Colonel Lex Stevens and Major Morgan, and, uh, another Colonel, that now slips my mind. But they said that, "Better get yourself prepared. You'd better get you a place to stay tonight, and because tomorrow we've got lots to do, see? And, if you all were interested tomorrow, why, fine." So, we said, "Well, we'll go over to La Fonda and get a room." So, we went over to La Fonda. And, we went up to the desk there and told them we wanted a room. "Sorry, we can't give you one. The hotel's supposed to close up." We said, "Well, we got to have a room." "Can't do it." "Let me see Mr. Cole." Mr. Cole was the manager. We said, "Mr. Cole, we got to have a room." "Can't do it. We're closing up from Santa Fe and Fred Harvey said they're going to close the place up. No business." "You can't do that. We've got to have a room tonight." And, so, they finally said, "Well, I don't know. You'll have to find out from somebody else." Then Jack said, "Get the Santa Fe Railroad on the phone," and said, "I'll talk to them," and told them, "We've got to have these rooms." And, so, we got the rooms, and from then on we had that hotel filled. And, it's been filled ever since. (Laughter) And that was [what] happened when we were, wait a minute, when we were up there during the war. And, then the same carried on over into when we started the Zia Company; we had to have a lot of rooms again. Same thing, so...

C: How long did you live at Los Alamos?

M: Well, I was off and on. I, uh, was up there at first, stayed in the hotel, and I used to commute back and forth by a plane I had, a little Army plane. And my wife and my little boy was living in El Paso. Then, we were able to get into the, uh, Lodge. They put us up in the attic, a little lodge and old Ralph Carlisle Smith was there, way up in that top floor. And, he was the, uh, patent attorney for the Army, and later for the laboratory. And we were up there, and then the floor below us was, uh, Doctor Teller and his family. And, so when we moved up there, brought my wife and son up there, Michael, and Michael and the Teller boy used to play. And, everybody was afraid those two little kids were going to fall out through the handrail, down into the floor below. But, God forsake, only [He] knows why they didn't. (Laughter) But, that was part of it. So, then, it was quite some time before General Groves gave you the O.K. to build those, uh, sample houses. And that was when Dad said, "Doctor White", who was

at the hospital here at Fort Bliss, not William Beaumont, but Fort Bliss. He said he knew Doctor White was a good man, and would like to have him up there. And, so Groves said, "We'll get him up there." So, then, he said, "Will you go ahead and built those sample houses that," he said, "for your son and Doctor White." Because both of us had been overseas. So, uh, then that was, uh, just before Thanksgiving, I guess it was, that we were able to move into the house. [19]46. And, we had cold and cold and cold. Doctor White says, "Dave," he says, "I'll make a deal with you. I'll take care of the sickness, you take care of the heat." (Laughter) So, that's good. So, that was part of the whole deal. But, uh, that was a cold winter. And, we, uh, enjoyed part of it, part of it we didn't, because the part that we didn't enjoy was the part that, when we were getting all the complaints from people and either they were too hot or too cold or (Chuckles) something, and no water or electricity or something else, see?

C: Well, tell me, give me a description of a typical day, workday, for you, that winter.

M: Well, work, a typical workday would be, uh, probably at the end of the complaints on the day before to (Laughter) the end of the complaints that next day. And, I had to [work] anywhere from 12 hours a day to 24 hours a day. It depends. And, many days there was 12 hours or more. And, Saturday, Sunday, it didn't make any difference. Holidays, nothing. Everything was a workday. Of course, there was, the whole idea was getting the, uh, operation and continued to grow. And we had that case where before the bomb was built, that we had to, the McKee organization had to keep that thing going. We had a problem there. And, then after the war, why, we had the same kind of situation, because the Government started bringing in a lot of people.

C: Right.

M: And, the University of California was, uh, put in charge of the Laboratory; before that, the University of California was there, but it was still in charge of the, uh...General Groves' organization was in charge of it, and the University of California was under them. Then, when General Groves' people pulled out, why, there was only one man left, and that was Colonel Betts, who later became a General. And, uh, ...they were, General Betts, of course, was a fine person to work with, and for many years we got along with him very well.

C: And, how long were you up there...? When did you...?

M: Well, I, uh, was told by my dad that I would have to come down and help him in El Paso in his office here. And, uh, he said, "You'll have to start designing you a house or something,

because you'll have to build a house." I had a lot up there at Government Hill. I didn't like it, and I had a chance to sell it. Sold it, and, then bought some land in the Valley here, which is right here, our home address now, and started designing a house, based on building a house here. And, uh, so we moved back to our little house on Federal Street in March of 1950. But, I was still commuting back and forth to Los Alamos, and overseeing the work up there. And, Jack Brennan was also up there, so he was part time McKee and part time Zia, as well. We had plenty of supervision there.

C: Did he stay up there, then, through the business...?

M: He stayed up there, and lived there. And, then he, he left our organization; started his own business, Jack Brennan did. And, a few years afterwards he died of a heart attack.

C: So he was a good employee for a long time?

M: Oh, yes. He was one of the older employees.

C: Can you think of some other employees of the Company that worked for your dad, or for you, or for the family a long time?

M: Well, yeah. There was, uh, Tom Brennan, Jack's Brennan's older brother, one of his older brothers, worked there on some of the laboratories at Los Alamos during the construction period. And, uh, then we had, uh, several of them, uh, that had been with our organization in Brownwood, Texas, on the big cantonment camp there. Some of those were transferred to Los Alamos to work up there. And, uh, Wendel Miller was sent up there for the charge of the bookkeeping and accounting, and he had been in Brownwood. And, uh, then, as the place grew, we got up to the point where we were about 3,000 people. And, about that time we begin to expand pretty heavy, why, we hired Tom Cooke, who was Cooke family in Espanola. And, he had been a Navy pilot in World War II, and I guess we had an affinity (Chuckles), the Marines and the Navy. And he went to work for us up there. Then we still needed more people, so my dad sent, uh, oh, ...well, he sent some other people from El Paso in the accounting department up there to help because of the need for maintaining good records in accordance with the Government's requirements. And also in the warehouse we had to have the, uh, a good system of accounting for all the materials and things that were being bought and stored there. Else Paul was sent up to help Mr. Miller in the accounting department, and he said that the day he walked in that building, that which we called the office and was actually an old barracks building, he heard this noise and screaming and hollering going on. And, he said, "Jesus, God, I don't know whether I want to be in this place or not." (Chuckles) So,

he decided, "Well, I'll go in, and see what's happening." He said, "I saw Dave McKee and Frank DeLuggio arguing." Frank DeLuggio was a sergeant in the Army, and he was trying to direct us to do things, and I didn't agree with him, see?

C: Uh huh.

M: And, the louder he got, the louder I got. And, the people said that's how we always settled our problems: who could holler the loudest. (Laughter)

C: Well, you were the project manager up there for a long time. When you came back to El Paso, what was your position with the company then?

M: Vice president. Next to my dad, see?

C: And, which other brothers worked for the company at that time?

M: John, my brother John, and my brother Robert in Dallas and then Louis later on.

C: Uh huh. Well, he was a lot younger.

M: A lot younger. 18 years younger.

C: Now, what were the...what major projects did you oversee and manage in the 50's and 60's here?

M: Well, from El Paso, why, all those pictures (Chuckles) over there's the start of it, see?

C: O.K., name some of them.

M: The Air Force Academy was one of the projects. Actually, it was under the Santa Fe office with Jack Brennan, but I used to go up as an arm of my dad, who was always wanting to know from other people's views of something. So, he'd send me to find out, and see what it looked like. So, we had the Air Force Academy, we had a hospital in Pueblo, Colorado, uh, we had a bank in Albuquerque, the First National Bank I believe it was. Anyways, Senator Anderson and some of those old timers up there at Albuquerque were with that bank. We had been doing business with them, so I, uh, had to go up there frequently to see how that building was coming along. And, uh, there was a little hotel adjoining that bank, which we always kind of got a kick out of because my dad and Senator Anderson and all of us met about the time that things were beginning to go, and Castle Forrest was the Albuquerque office manager, and he had, uh, somehow fouled up a little bit, and we didn't underpin that old hotel properly. And, pretty soon we heard a big "pop!" and a bang, and something was giving way in that old

hotel. And about that time here come all these girls, come a-running out, and they were, uh, the place was loaded with a bunch of whores, see? (Laughter) And, Senator Anderson and my dad, everybody, looked and said, "What's going [on] in this place?" (Laughter) And, so that's, that was real truth right there. Anyway, it got rid of the girls anyway. (Laughter) Anyway, then we did a lot of work at Sandia. Of course, it all was, uh, we had a sub-office in Albuquerque, and the sub-office there at Santa Fe was Jack Brennan was vice president in charge of. And in the houses at Albuquerque, the Government houses, why, uh, about that time General Groves was still there, and he was still an important person. And, he'd call Jack Brennan in Santa Fe and me in Los Alamos to come down and see what was happening at, uh, down there at those houses. He didn't like the looks of them. We said, "Yes, Sir, General, we'll be right there." And, we jumped in my old plane and flew down there and landed at Sandia base there, and the General and his half a dozen automobiles [were] waiting for us. We climbed in there, and we climbed up on the roof of this house, and he says, "See here, look what I see." And, Jack Brennan says, "What do you see, General?" He says, "That flat roof." He says, "You know better than to build a flat roof in a climate like this." Jack Brennan says, "Yes, Sir, General," he says, "we only build them, we don't design them." (Chuckles) He says, "I'll take care of that." And, he never did a thing about it. (Laughter) Oh, me, I'll tell you.

C: Well, most of the projects you mentioned are in Colorado or New Mexico. Did you work in California, too?

M: Oh, yeah, I had to go out to California likewise, uh, we were doing several hospitals out there in California, in the latter [19]50s and, let's see, and into the [19]60s. And, uh, of course, the airport in Los Angeles was started in the [19]50s, which was one of the largest in the country at that time, probably was. And, uh, it was, of course, we the sub-office there in Los Angeles, but, uh, I'd have to go out as the usual right-hand man of my dad to oversee what was needed and what we could do to help progress because progress was the main way you'd make money. Be sure you got the job completed well and in time, and so forth, which we rarely see these days. And, we had that project. And then later we started the Dallas-Fort Worth airport in the [19]60s. Then, uh, then we had the, uh, airport in Honolulu, which came under the Los Angeles office, too. That was one of them, the international airport.

C: Well, in the late [19]50s and early [19]60s was your dad, uh, kind of removing himself from the affairs at all in the business and letting...?

M: Well, yeah, he, he didn't travel as much then because he'd

probably be pretty well wore out, you know?

C: Yeah.

M: So, he'd have me doing a lot of the traveling, uh, for him. So, I would do that, travel all over, and, of course, he relied on me to give him the full, best details of everything, whatever it was, what the trip was, and, uh, take there the job there, not to bring home the bad news to him, but to take care of it right there on the job.

C: Do you think, uh, your brothers that were working with the company at that time were, uh, jealous of your being your dad's right-hand man at all?

M: (Chuckles) You know, that's always... How come some people ask those questions? (laughter)

C: Do you think, uh, they wished that...

M: Well, I definitely think so. (Chuckles) You know my older brother, he, uh, was interim president after my dad, and my family fired him.

C: Oh, really?

M: Yeah. They said he didn't even belong there. He didn't even have a degree. He was not a degreed man. And, uh, he, all he knew was how he had worked in the office on a job, in and around the office; he had no idea what the outside work was all about. So, that was a bad thing. And, my brother John, did you ever get to interview him?

C: No. I haven't talked to him.

M: No? Anyway, he was, uh, kind of sickly or something, you know. When he was going to school, he tried to be perfect. [There's] no such thing.

C: Uh huh.

M: And, he thought he had to be a civil engineer like my dad thought. And he did. He did make good grades and all that, but he didn't have the stamina that was needed to fulfill an administrative job with the capacity which they had in that company. And, uh, see, I was one of these, uh, boys that enjoyed doing a little bit of everything, see?

C: Uh huh.

M: So, my grades may not have been as good as his, but my experience was a lot better. So, you have to have a little of

each.

C: Right. Well, see, it's, it's of great interest to people who study and teach courses in business management to find out how family-owned businesses operate, and how the family dynamics affect the business, and how the family resolves conflict that has...

M: Yeah, well, uh, the problem with families, see, you do have conflicts.

C: Yes.

M: And, uh, of course, you can have people who are 100% right, but never get anything done.

C: Uh huh.

M: I know you've heard that, uh, many times, see? Which is true, and if, if you are dealing with people, somebody's going to make a mistake once in a while, see?

C: Right.

M: You can't have too many, see? But, you know people are going to have some problems, see?

C: Uh huh.

M: And, you're going to have likes and dislikes, and you've got personnel problems and everything else you've got to handle, and you can't wait to get a decision from a group of directors or something else, you've got to do it right now.

C: Right.

M: Those things have got to be taken care of immediately. And, that was my job. (Chuckles) My dad used to say "the complaint department." See? He was the complaint department and I was the second complaint department.

C: I see. O.K.

M: When he, uh, retired and all that, I managed to take care of the complaint department and everything else, see?

C: Uh huh. Well, when did he retire? Or, did he really?

M: Well, yeah, he did. Uh,...

C: He died in [19]64?

M: Yes. He retired about 1960, somewhere in there. And, uh, my brother was in there about, about a year before, well it was about, about, right after he died. And, uh, he was, he was president the last year my dad was alive, see? After he died, why, then the rest of the family fired him.

C: Uh huh. But, they left him in there as long as your dad was alive.

M: One year, yeah. And, my dad had that, uh, problem, and, uh, ...and then they made me the president of the company. Now, the whole family did that. So, they were the one that picked me to take his place, see.

C: And, did they have a meeting, or did they have a board of directors of the family?

M: No, we, at that time it was a family deal, and we just got together as a family.

C: Uh huh.

M: So, they, the family, said, "We vote for Dave." See? That's how the family picked me.

C: I see.

M: Of course, I was probably O.K., because I accepted responsibilities, and one of the reasons, uh, as far as John was concerned, he, physically, he was kind of a nervous wreck from trying to excel in everything. And, it doesn't pay.

C: Uh huh.

M: Too many times you'd see that happen, see?

C: Yeah.

M: And, uh, they didn't think I should be in the Marines, but I was. (Laughter) They didn't think, they didn't think I should be a pilot, and I was, but you also do something else, see? I was also a racing driver and a few other things. (Chuckles) Yeah, so, no problem, see? Just keep on going. Try something, you know, you've got to do something. So, but that's the difference, I think, in getting a job done is, is you've got to be willing to try anything, you know?

C: Now, when the company met then and put you in as president after your dad died, were the girls included?

M: Oh, yes. They were owners, too. Everybody that was an owner.

- C: I guess this is a silly question because the times are different now, but did either one of the girls ever show an interest in the company, to work there? I mean they were raised like I was raised to stay home and have children, and...
- M: No home staying for my sister Margaret. She had been, uh, on the airlines, American Airlines. She worked as a hostess on there, and she used to fly from El Paso to San Antonio to, uh, ...to Mexico City in those old DC-3's and no oxygen or anything else, you know, in high altitude, waiting on all the drunk Mexicans. (Laughter) She said all these Mexicans, she said, would get on the plane in Mexico City and have a big party before they got on the plane. They'd all get sick on the plane. Of course, the old DC-3 would bounce around all over the skies, see?
- C: Yeah, I remember riding one, you had, when you got on, you had to walk up, because they were like this (Chuckles). I love to ride in those DC-3's. It's a good plane.
- M: Oh, yeah. I flew them a lot, too.
- C: Did you, really?
- M: Oh, yeah.
- C: Well, Margaret sounds daring like you, huh?
- M: Yeah, somewhat. But, uh, she changed a lot after she got married and had a daughter.
- C: Ah, ha! (Laughter)
- M: And, uh, Margaret was, well... We had office hours normally which was about 8 to 5. And she'd come in 5 minutes to 5 and ask to have somebody give her some information she needed. (Laughter) We'd say, "Now, Sis, you got to come back tomorrow before the sun sets for sure. Now, you can come in the morning, if you want, or you can come right after lunch, but not at 5 o'clock in the afternoon."
- C: Not at 5. During the [19]50s and [19]60s do you remember any particular incidents, like strikes or anything like that, that affected the business?
- M: Strikes?
- C: Or anything like that?
- M: Oh, I used to have to be the, uh, the, uh, labor relations man for the company, too. That was part of my job.

C: And, you had union people working for you?

M: Oh, yeah. We were always a union company. Always. And, uh, everything that we built at UTEP and, and every place else was all built with union labor. And the reason why my dad used union labor, because he said that when he was a young fellow starting out, he said, the working man had to have some help, and that the wages and everything was so low that it was really an injustice to a good craftsman, see? And, of course, we had good craftsmen, very good craftsmen. And so that really was his whole thought of everything. Nobody had any idea that it was going to be all the, uh, hospitalization and retirements and everything else added on later on, see? Nobody had that idea at all, see? But, every time the unions would negotiate, they'd always add something, a little thing at a time. And, I, we, I'd, I was in many of them here, Los Alamos, Los Angeles, Dallas, labor union problems. I'd go all over the country with them. So, I'm pretty well familiar with labor problems.

C: Do you remember, uh, any particular labor leaders that you worked with?

M: Oh, yeah. (Chuckles)

C: Tell me about some of them.

M: Well, up there at Los Alamos, uh, we had the fellow in charge of the plumbers, that's, uh, that big, big fat fellow, and he used to come bolstering into the office and expressing himself in a big deep voice and so forth. And, he'd say, "Well," he says, "now, we have to come down and get this things straightened out." And, so, uh, his name was Charlie Cooperman. And, he was a business agent at Los Alamos, Albuquerque, El Paso, and, uh, for all this area. And, so I told him, "Well, I don't know, Charlie, we'll have to see what we can do, but it's not going to be all the things you want." And, he says, "Well, I don't care about doing this, and you don't, we're not going to talk to you." I said, "You are going to talk to me." And I said, "Now, we're going to get things settled alright, and we're going to get these guys back to work." And he said, "I'll decide whether they go back to work." I says, "Well, we'll see about that." See? (Chuckles) So, he says, "I'll just take you out and whip you." I said, "O.K., we'll go outside and we'll see who's going to win." See? (Laughter) Now, not only did we have it, that was the days when there wasn't anything at all to have a fist fight, see?

C: Yeah.

M: Today, you don't dare lay a hand on anybody, you see? But,

then, uh, also, uh, we always get our problems settled. Everybody settled, shake hands, and that was it. Everything was a little bit of show on both sides, you know. You had to have a little show in there, you know? Because you couldn't, you couldn't let anybody buffalo you, you know.

C: Uh huh. Were the Indians unionized? Did they work...the Indians that you hired at Los Alamos...were they part of the union?

M: Oh, yeah.

C: Were they?

M: Yeah. Most of them were laborers, but, uh, there was a few of them, we had some electricians, and some worked with the plumbers, the parkers. But, most of them were laborers.

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE A

BEGINNING OF TAPE 3, SIDE B

M: ...and he came over, and he was going to run the hill at Los Alamos. I said, "No, you're not going to run the hill. I'm going to run the hill, and if you don't like it, we'll just get you right off this place. We'll take care of that right now." "Oh, you can't do that;" he says, "[what] I'm going to do is run this place." "You're not going to run anything, see?" I said, "We may negotiate wages for the men, but that's all." Right? And, he got really kind of tough there, but we got him settled, even if we had to get a couple of military police, why, we took care of him, see? (Laughter) And, so he knew better than to let the military police get him, because then he'd never come back. So, anyway, we, we always managed someway to get things done. In those days, the, uh, labor relations were a lot different than they are today. And, I remember one time out there in Los Angeles, uh, the labor situation there was more, much more advanced than the rest of the West. And, we went in there at the AGC, Associated General Contractors, had a fairly strong group. There was over 1,100 contractors in Los Angeles alone. So, they had a pretty good organization. They had a young fellow, was red-headed, and just as ornery as he could be, too, whether it was the manager for the AGC. And, the union would come in and he was going to check everybody that came in there for the meeting. First thing you know, so here come one of the guys, and he says, "Who are you from?" He says, "Well, I'm the attorney with the Statler." He said, "Get out! You don't belong here." And, the guy said, "Well, uh, these people are striking our, uh, building we're building over there," he says, "I'm going to listen to it." "You're not going to do anything at all. Get out of this place! If you don't get

out, I'll throw you out." See? (Chuckles) That's what he told the lawyer, see?

C: Really?

M: Yeah. So that's, that's the difference in, the then and now, so to speak. And, today, it's very unusual to see where you have any kind of a bolstered type of meeting. The last one that I can remember being in was in, in Atlanta, Georgia, when we were building that big hospital over there. That was the Grady Gamidge Memorial Hospital. It was, uh, one of the biggest hospitals in the country. I went over there on behalf of Reynolds Electric, because they...the guy that they had over there as a business agent, was a lawyer, and they had the Reynolds people scared to death. And, I went over there, and I said I'm going to take a look through here, and I'm going to do whatever is necessary to be done. They had 144 electricians on the job, and that day I fired 44 of them. (Laughter) That business agent came [and said], "You can't do that." I said, "I can't? Well, that's too bad; I did. And, it's going to stick, just like that." See?

C: Uh huh.

M: He says, "Well, we'll walk off the job." "O.K. Walk off the job. I'll get some of those non-union guys to take your place." "No, no, no, no. Don't do that." "Alright, then you just forget about what I did, and, uh, those guys are fired, and that's it." See? "You want to go back to work, then I want to see some work accomplished." They went back to work, and we had no more problems. (Laughter)

C: I'll be darned. That's a good story.

M: I fired 44 of them that day. I found some of them underneath the stairwells and everything else, see?

C: Not, not working.

M: Not working at all. (Chuckles)

C: Oh, my gosh.

M: So, my labor relations was, uh, not exactly on the educated basis, but it was on a "get the job done" [basis].

C: Right, O.K.

M: Well, one of the things you have in some labor relations is there's too much law, too much this and that, and not enough "get the job done", see? That's one reason why I kind of

liked old Ross Perot.

C: Yes.

M: You know? (chuckles)

C: Yes, yes. Uh huh. I did too. (Laughter) Yeah, get the job done.

M: Yep.

C: Well, tell me [again], the company started out on Texas Street, the headquarters here in town?

M: Originally, it was down there on San Antonio Street, by the old Toltec Building.

C: Oh, it was.

M: Across the street from the Toltec Building.

C: O.K.

M: And then in 1920 my dad built, uh, he built that new office on Texas Street: 1918 Texas.

C: O.K. And, then what?

M: I think it was 1918, because I think he got, uh, got that address because of the end of World War I.

C: (Chuckles)

M: Brilliant.

C: Yeah.

M: I think so. Because right in the middle of the block he could put 1918, 1920, whatever, you see? So, he started that office, I think, about 1919.

C: Uh huh. And, did that remain the office then for the McKee...?

M: Yeah, and then finally, when Santa Fe sold it, sold it to the YWCA, and they have leased part of it the United Way. And, they're keeping the building in pretty good shape, too. Of course, see, most of the woodwork and everything in that little building was mahogany and real nice stuff, and that was all hand worked by our craft people that worked for the company, see? And the people really loved it because it was real fine, uh, work.

C: Yeah. Well, I hope they all keep it in good shape.

M: Well, they have so far.

C: Uh huh. Well, there were big changes in the company in the early [19]70s. The [company], they, uh, went public...?

M: That's right. You see, what happened there, the reason why we went public, I was the only one that was really working for the company. John McKee was in charge of real estate, and that's all he was doing.

C: Right.

M: Well, I guess Louis was really not interested in it; so, he wasn't doing too much. And, I was getting a little older, and a little older, and you had to say, well, eventually we got to do something. So, everybody agreed the best thing to do is to, to, uh...form a corporation and go public. We had a corporation but it wasn't public. So, we had to go public. We thought that was the best way to do it, and we did. About that time we were going public, why, uh, Santa Fe approached us, because we had worked for Santa Fe Railroad on many projects, when they were building the railroad from Hutchinson, Kansas, to Los Angeles. And, uh, there were the Grand Canyon and all those places we had worked on with the railroad. So, they thought it would be good for us, if we wanted to join them. So, we said, "We can't do it right now, because we're in the process of going public." "O.K. that's a good way." "O.K.", I said, "Yes, it's a good way, because we don't want our stock is worth and everything else." And, I said that we, I said, "We go with you, I want to be sure every stockholder in the company is treated well." I said, "I don't want anybody to say we mistreated them." See? They said, "That'll be done." And, that's what happened.

C: Were there are a lot of stockholders not in the family?

M: Oh, yeah. Employees. A lot of the employees. You'd take Charlie Kistenmacher, who was the division manager at El Paso, and, uh, I know you know him and his art work and stuff. Yeah.

C: Yes.

M: Charlie was a very fine engineer. And, Gene Francis, he went and left us and went to a construction company of his own. Bob Lowman, another one who worked for my dad; of course, his father was a house contractor in World War I time. But, uh, dad, uh, had Bob Lowman, and, gosh, there's just a lot of other people that went through the organization and learned to be a contractor, you know?

C: Uh huh.

M: Yeah. So, everybody that's said, well, almost everybody in El Paso in the building business at the time had worked for Mr. McKee. (Chuckles)

C: Yeah. Really. So, you went public in 1973, or something like that, and then it merged with Santa Fe Industries shortly after that.

M: Right.

C: And then was that the end of, uh, the Zia Company?

M: Oh, no. The end of Zia Company was in 19, uh, let's see, our last, 1940 years plus 46 is (Chuckles) [19]86. April, uh, the first of 1986. That was the end of our contract at Los Alamos. We did have some more work, and the Zia Company went on, uh, a couple of more years. And, they had the property on the freeway; I have that now. I, uh, in my settlement with Santa Fe, which the Zia became part of the Santa Fe, too, and they gave me, uh, that property over there for so many shares of Santa Fe stock. I said, "Fine. That'll take care of it."

C: Uh huh.

M: And so, other than that we had the contract at, at, uh, White Sands, uh, for NASA. That, we finished that contract, and, of course, incidentally, uh, the Zia there helped, uh, test the engines that went to the moon and back. Every engine that went to the moon and back, we worked with them on testing of the engines, see? (Chuckles) That's where I got that thing over there on the wall, uh?

C: Oh, the picture of the man on the moon.

M: Yeah. And, the certificate of accomplishment or whatever they call it from NASA. So, anyway, that was Zia, and the end of Zia. And, then, uh, Santa Fe didn't want to be in these government-type contracts; they were scared to death of them for some reason or another, and they really didn't push to keep it. We could have kept that contract at Los Alamos, if Santa Fe had been interested. And, they didn't show, they didn't show their colors until one time they went up there, and they told the manager at Los Alamos they didn't particularly care for that kind of work with all that radiation and things, you know?

C: Oh.

M: Yeah. So, then that's when they put our job up for bidding. Pan American, we bid it, but Pan American got it, and they

couldn't handle it. And, now that was being under Johnson control, and, of course, the Government has, uh, with all the lawyers and everything, they made things almost impossible. Yesterday, uh, this Ross, uh, Russ [Rush Limbaugh], the news guy on radio, he was telling about that at Rocky Flats, that it would take 50 hours of work to get one light bulb changed in the laboratory there at Rocky Flats. And the reason is not so much that there was any boondoggling as far as the contractor; it is that fouled-up Government operation, you know? Because everybody's scared of the law and everything and because Rocky Flats was shut down there for quite a while because somebody had made some mistakes, and some plutonium got out. (Chuckles) Really. I was up there one time that, uh, we had a big meeting up there at Rocky Flats. And, uh, they were very cautious that I had a badge and somebody else had a badge, but, what you'd do with that badge is what counts. (Chuckles)

C: That's right.

M: Yes. So, that was one of the problems, see?

C: Uh huh. So, aren't you glad you're not doing Government contract work now?

M: No, no. We did real well working for the Government because we didn't ask for much fee, and we did a good job, and our efficiency rating was very high. Even, never have had anybody equalled it at Los Alamos or any place else yet. White Sands, we had, White Sands was 96.8 top efficiency. And Los Alamos was almost equally as good. So, we had nothing to worry about as far as quality workmanship; we did a good job for the Government, and we'd be glad to do it again. That's the way we look at it. Well, how I look at it, anyway.

C: So, you're very proud of that?

M: Oh, yeah. I'm very proud of what efforts we put in for the Government. And did you get a copy of that thing from Louis McKee on my dad, Robert E. McKee?

C: Yes, I did, that you're writing up for the...?

M: Where he had 40,000 people in one year work for him, you know?

C: That is something.

M: (Chuckles) Really.

C: And, what were you all telling me on the ...

M: And, not only that, but when we were at Los Alamos, the, when

during the silly season, and that was June 30th then, the Government, they couldn't get the bills through Congress, because the Democrats and the Republicans were fighting each other, Robert E. McKee made the payrolls of Los Alamos.

C: Really.

M: So, (Chuckles) we were proud of that, and we didn't get anything except a normal, little fee for that work, see? But, my dad was so intense on doing a good job for the Government, and that was his way of doing things, see?

C: Uh huh. Something to be proud of.

M: Right.

C: Well, did your dad try to get his supplies from local businesses?

M: Always from local business. Always. We bought more stoves in El Paso than anybody can imagine, see? They didn't, nobody could, uh, understand where all these stoves were going either, see?

C: Uh huh.

M: (Chuckles)

C: And, who made those?

M: It was the stove manufacturers, was made by different ones.

C: Here in town.

M: But, we bought stoves and stoves and stoves and heaters and heaters and everything you could imagine from local suppliers here and Albuquerque and wherever, but always local. Never from back East or anything like that. Everything we ever did was on a local basis. My dad believed that the other guy had to live, too. So, that's the best I can answer that since he was always interested in the other person, see?

C: Yeah. Sounds like it. Well, Louis was telling me that your dad, he [Louis] thought, was a real pioneer in employee benefits.

M: He was. Yeah. You see, when we started, uh, employee benefits, my dad could see the future coming up, that it was going to be difficult for salaried people and hourly people, likewise, if they didn't have something to show for their many years of work. So, he started this profit-sharing plan. And, I think he was correct in that the best way to compensate

people is: you produce and we'll see that you're taken care of, see? And that was the whole idea of that profit-sharing plan. And, uh, then it was based purely on the efforts of the people, see?

C: Uh huh.

M: And, no company can survive on just the boss, you know? It has to be the efforts of all, right?

C: Right. It does.

M: So, that's the way he looked at it.

C: I noticed on that McKee Foundation list of trustees that there's one person not a McKee, it looks like.

M: Bob Hazelton.

C: Yeah. He's practically a part of the family.

C: Well, tell me how he became such a part of the family.

M: Bob Hazelton is the same age as my brother John. And as little teeny kids they used to play with each other across the alley. And, they've always been friends from that day on, and they were both very small, even before kindergarten, see? (Chuckles) And, so it goes a long ways back.

C: Yes.

M: And, they've been very close friends ever since. They still are today, see? But, if it hadn't been for the profit-sharing plan, and, then we finally got some, uh, health... Virginia Life Plan and some other benefits, but it was always based on profit-oriented, all oriented based on profit. Of course, the health plan is, once you started, it was just pretty well fixed. So that, that was the way that was.

C: So, did Hazelton come to work for the company when he got out of college?

M: He didn't get through college. He, he was, uh, his family, his dad was, uh, an engineer for Texas Company, and he was, uh, head of the, uh, distribution point here in El Paso. And, they lived just across the alley from us, and we were all kids. There was, uh, the older one, uh, Bob's older brother, Jack, and I were very close. But, he wanted to be a cowboy, see? So, he went off to be a cowboy, and, of course, that kind of separated us, but John, uh, John and Bob always worked for my dad, see? So, Bob became very good at handling stocks and bonds and personnel problems and stuff like that, and did

a good job, and he got the best education from my dad that anybody could ever get, you know? And, today, he still is one of the best stock people that he's recognized in this part of the United States. (Chuckles) Just from his education he got from working with the company, see? Yeah. And, he's, uh, a fine person. His wife is a nice person. But, uh, then he, he could have gone to school, but he went in the Army Air Corps, and served his time with the Army Air Corps. And, then, uh, [he] went back to work for my dad. Of course, my dad was a great believer in that if a person had to go in the service that's fine, and if he came back to work for him, he carried right on as if nothing had happened, see? That's the way it was.

C: Well, back, let's say, in the [19]50s, after you came back here and your dad was still alive, would you all have a lot of big family gatherings, where everybody would, I mean, get together? Yes?

M: (Chuckles)

C: There's a picture showing...What occasion was that picture?

M: Oh, just Christmas or something like that. Always Christmas, Thanksgiving, or something like that. Of course, you know, when we were coming up, we didn't have the, any holidays whatsoever. None. But, my dad says, "Well, we'll all take half a day off for Christmas. Go home and have Christmas dinner with your family and so forth. And, Thanksgiving later came on. But, most of the time we had Thanksgiving out on the job, see?

C: Really?

M: Yeah. And, New Year's, we never took New Year's off. And, uh, for years and years, I know, Los Alamos, well I just worked all the time up there. Yeah. But, Christmas was, my dad thought, was one thing that everybody and every family should have; and, that, he basically could see where he could let them off and have a paid holiday. That was for a long time that way.

C: Oh, you all worked hard. You all really worked hard.

M: Had to. You know, when you get to thinking, these people today don't know what a depression is all about. They don't. We could see these poor people that camped along side of Mount Franklin, if they had rice and some chicken wings or something like that, they were lucky, see? And, uh, lots of times a pot of beans was going on a stove or a fire all the time, you know? And, uh, but, my dad got to where he had these people that were very loyal and everything, and he'd have Fredswick

or Bob Hazelton check around, see who's needing this or needing that, go buy them a turkey, or do this and that, and, you know, be sure they had something for their Thanksgiving or Christmas, see? And, that's how he got mixed up in Southwest Children's Home. He built the Southwest Children's Home, and he always wanted to be sure those kids had Thanksgiving and Christmas, see? (Chuckles)

C: Are you fluent in Spanish? You speak some...

M: I speak "construction" Spanish, and poor English. (Chuckles)

C: Well, uh, how did you learn your Spanish? On the job or at home?

M: My mother, my mother.

C: Your mother.

M: Yeah. She used to speak, she spoke very good Spanish. But, she learned her Spanish in Guatemala when she was a young girl.

C: And then you all had Mexican maids when you were growing up?

M: Well, when my mother was growing up, my mother had a Mayan Indian girl from Guatemala.

C: Oh?

M: Paz. And, she finally got homesick for Guatemala, and Mom and Dad sent her back to Guatemala. But, she was, uh, [the] maid of the house when I was young coming up, and I can never forget every day she used to make me take a tablespoon full of olive oil. (Laughter) In those days it smelled like heck, you know?

C: Yeah.

M: So, but, uh, that was just something to keep you healthy, see?

C: Yeah. Uh huh.

M: It was her remedy for it. (Laughter) You know, a strange thing, I never did, I had double pneumonia two years straight when I was a little kid at Christmas time. I can remember my dad taking me out of bed and taking me in to see the Christmas tree and then take me and put me back in the bed. Two years. I don't know why, but it happened to be right at Christmas time. And, from that time on, I've had little or no problem.

C: Got it out of your system when you were young, I guess.

M: Yeah, yeah. I kind of built up an immunity, I guess, and...

C: I guess so.

M: And, colds, flu, whatever, you know?

C: Uh huh. Can you, uh, tell me, uh, a little bit about your dad's personality?

M: Well, he was, what you'd say, a person who was very friendly, but he was firm in his beliefs, and he'd tell people how he felt about certain things, and if he wanted them to follow those, he was very firm to see that they did follow them. And yet he was very kind and very friendly, and he was liked by many, many people, see? You'd never find everybody liking you, and, (Chuckles), but I've never run across anybody that didn't like him, see?

C: What about your mother? Was her personality more quiet, or?

M: Well, she was uh, she was the manager of the kids at the house with 8 kids. She could get really tough, you know? (Chuckles) Yeah, yeah. I remember one time when she told me to do something and I didn't do it, and I crawled under the bed, and she almost had a heart attack trying to get me out from under it. My dad came home about that time. He just turned the bed upside down, and then she just really worked me over good. I didn't forget who was boss, see? (Chuckles) But, that's the way it was, see?

C: Yeah.

M: Nobody had any objections. You got your whipping because you needed it, see?

C: That's right.

M: And, I think kids appreciated it more. I used to get a lot of them.

C: Well, do you think when the 2 youngest children came along that your parents had mellowed and didn't whip them as much?

M: That's for sure. (Laughter)

C: That happens.

M: Oh, yeah, that's for sure, but, uh, of course, different personalities, too.

C: Yeah, sure.

M: Philip, he's a kind of...like a little cowboy...but he's kind of low key, himself, see?

C: Uh huh.

M: And he never did really do a heck of a lot. He has these maids taking care of him and all that; Louis, the same way. Louis [was] a little more, uh, iron-headed and so forth, you know. But, uh, you had to look. And then, of course, Bill, he was in an automobile accident. My brother Bob was driving an old model "T" Ford, and Bill was sitting on my lap, a little old kid. And, there were some kids in the back seat of the old model "T" araising sand, and old Bob turned around and told them to shut up. About that time he come he hit right into the rear end of an old Essex automobile, and Bill went off my lap through this plate-glass window, windshield, in that model "T" Ford. In those days they didn't have anything but plate glass windows.

C: Right. Oh, yeah.

M: And, then after the 1928 model Ford came along, that was the first shatter-proof windshield.

C: Oh, really?

M: It was laminated with 2 pieces of glass with a plastic film. And it would break, but it wouldn't shatter. But, that's how they were started. So,...

C: Well, what happened to Bill? Did he just get all cut up?

M: Yeah, cut right along here. He almost died from loss of blood. And, that was, right at the, uh, Memorial Park swimming pool, and Charlie Burns, who was the lifeguard and manager of the pool, heard the big smash, and, see, he was a policeman, and he was so little that he had to have an Indian motorcycle, because that was the only motorcycle that was small enough for him, see? So, he rode up there real quick to where the wreck was, and he saw what had happened. People ran out of the houses with towels and wrapped them around Bill's head, and he took off for the old Providence Hospital down there at Five Points, see? Got him in there, and they had, they, in those days they didn't have, uh, blood-banks or anything else. They used some kind of saline solution, and replaced the blood, see?

C: Oh, really?

M: Yeah. He survived.

C: I'll be darned.

M: But, he was always kind of, little bit sickley for a while there, and so everybody babied him quite a bit, and spoiled him, see? (Chuckles) And, he became the spoiled brat of the family, just I think from that accident.

C: Yeah. Right.

M: And, even when he was in the service, he was spoiled, and he tried to tell the Navy how to run the Navy. The Navy used to contact my dad, and my dad said, "You've got to do what you've got to do." You know? And, so Bill, he, uh, he, finally they gave him a discharge. Got him out of the Navy because they couldn't stand him trying to tell the Navy how to run their business. (Chuckles) And, so he carried that on for a long, long time. He came in the office one time, and that was after dad died, and he was going to tell me how to run the office. The first thing he knew he was thrown right out in the middle of Texas Street. And, from that time on, I never had any trouble with him. (Chuckles) So, anyway you go, you have to treat it as it comes, you know?

C: Do you think, uh, that, uh, the rest of the family looks upon you as sort of the patriarch now?

M: Yeah. They always have. That goes back [to] when I taught all of them how to drive the car. I used to take my sisters to the music lessons and all those things. And, even after I was off at the University, why, Philip, Louis, the little kids, I used to have to take them for an automobile ride and various things. They all looked to me, you know. Even today, they keep in touch with me on things. Which is fine. That's fine.

C: Sure.

M: But, my brother Bob, being the oldest in the family, he didn't have much to do with anybody, see?

C: People looked to you.

M: Spoiled brat, you know? (Laughter) That's what it amounts to, you know? You're spoiled for being the first child, see?

C: Yeah.

M: And, then being junior makes it that much worse, see?

C: Yes. That's true.

M: Really, it does. It doesn't do a kid much good.

C: When you had your sons, you didn't name them junior, did you?

M: No, no. No way. David Michael and Charles Stephen.

C: Ah, ha. Well, that was a good way to handle it.

M: Yeah. And, but, uh, that, that Steve is the same way with his kids, see. His boys are Steven Michael and then there's Kevin Carter. Carter was my wife's family name. And so they made sure they didn't get any juniors around there either, see? And, of course, anyway, the kids were varying in discipline and everything else. Now, the little one, Steve's boy, the littlest one, he resembles my dad in many ways.

C: I see.

M: He's very smart in mathematics and all his doings and everything. He'll sit and work on a book of problems.....

END OF TAPE 3, SIDE B

END OF INTERVIEW