ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WALTER FITE

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

STATUS OF INTERVIEW:
OPEN FOR RESEARCH

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Interviews Conducted and Edited by:
Brit Allan Storey
Senior Historian
Bureau of Reclamation

♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦ ♦

Interviews conducted–1994
Interview edited and published–2014

Oral History Program
Bureau of Reclamation
Denver, Colorado

SUGGESTED CITATION:

> **FITE, WALTER.** ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW. Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Brit Allan Storey, Senior Historian, Bureau of Reclamation, Boise, Idaho in 1994. Edited by Brit Allan Storey. Formatted and desk-top published by Andrew H. Gahan. Repository for the record copy of the interview transcript is the National Archives and Records Administration in College Park, Maryland.

Record copies of this transcript are printed on 20 lb., 100% cotton, archival quality paper. All other copies are printed on normal duplicating paper.

Table of Contents

Statement of Donation

STATEMENT OF DONATION
OF ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW OF
WALTER FITE

1. In accordance with the provisions of Chapter 21 of Title 44, United States Code, and subject to the terms, conditions, and restrictions set forth in this instrument, I, Walter Fite, (hereinafter referred to as "the Donor"), of Boise, Idaho, do hereby give, donate, and convey to the National Archives and Records Administration (hereinafter referred to as "the National Archives), acting for and on behalf of the United States of America, all of my rights and title to, and interest in the information and responses (hereinafter referred to as "the Donated Materials") provided during the interview conducted on December 5 and December 7, 1994, at the Pacific Northwest Regional Office in Boise, Idaho, and prepared for deposit with the National Archives and Records Administration in the following formats: cassette tapes and transcripts. This donation includes, but is not limited to, all copyright interests I now possess in the Donated Materials.

2. Title to the Donated Materials remains with the Donor until acceptance of the Donated Materials by the Archivist of the United States. The Archivist shall accept by signing below.

3. a. It is the intention of the Archivist to make Donated Materials available for display and research as soon as possible, and the Donor places no restrictions upon their use.

   b. The Archivist may, subject only to restrictions placed upon him by law or regulation, provide for the preservation, arrangement, repair, and rehabilitation, duplication, and reproduction, description, exhibition, display, and servicing of the Donated Materials as may be needful and appropriate.

4. Copies of the Donated Materials that do not have Donor restrictions on their use, may be deposited in or loaned to institutions other than the National Archives, including the Bureau of Reclamation. Copies of unrestricted Donated Materials may also be provided to researchers. The Bureau of Reclamation may retain copies of tapes, transcripts, and other materials if there are no Donor restrictions on their use, and Reclamation may obtain copies of tapes, transcripts, and other materials at the time that Donor restrictions on the use of the materials ends.

5. The Archivist may dispose of Donated Materials at any time after title passes to the National Archives.

Date: 11-9-94 Signed: [signature]

Walter Pitz

INTERVIEWER:_____
Brit Allan Storey

Having determined that the materials donated above by Walter Pitzer appropriate for preservation as evidence of the United States Government's organization, functions, policies, decisions, procedures, and transactions, and considering it to be in the public interest to accept these materials for deposit with the National Archives and Records Administration, I accept this gift on behalf of the United States of America, subject to the terms, conditions, and restrictions set forth in the above instrument.

Date:_____ Signed:_____
Archivist of the United States

Editorial Convention

A note on editorial conventions. In the text of these interviews, information in parentheses, ( ), is actually on the tape. Information in brackets, [ ], has been added to the tape either by the editor to clarify meaning or at the request of the interviewee in order to correct, enlarge, or clarify the interview as it was originally spoken. Words have sometimes been struck out by editor or interviewee in order to clarify meaning or eliminate repetition. In the case of strikeouts, that material has been printed at 50% density to aid in reading the interviews but assuring that the struckout material is readable.

The transcriber and editor also have removed some extraneous words such as false starts and repetitions without indicating their removal. The meaning of the interview has not been changed by this editing.

While we attempt to conform to most standard academic rules of usage (see *The Chicago Manual of Style*), we do not conform to those standards in this interview for individual's titles which then would only be capitalized in the text when they are specifically used as a title connected to a name, e.g., "Secretary of the Interior Gale Norton" as opposed to "Gale Norton, the secretary of the interior;" or "Commissioner John Keys" as opposed to "the commissioner, who was John Keys at the time." The convention in the Federal government is to capitalize titles always. Likewise formal titles of acts and offices are capitalized but abbreviated usages are not, e.g., Division of Planning as opposed to "planning;" the Reclamation Projects Authorization and Adjustment Act of 1992, as opposed to "the 1992 act."

The convention with acronyms is that if they are pronounced as a word then they are treated as if they are a word. If they are spelled out by the speaker then they have a hyphen between each letter. An example is the Agency

for International Development's acronym: said as a word, it appears as AID but spelled out it appears as A-I-D; another example is the acronym for State Historic Preservation Officer: SHPO when said as a word, but S-H-P-O when spelled out.

Introduction

In 1988, Reclamation began to create a history program. While headquartered in Denver, the history program was developed as a bureau-wide program.

One component of Reclamation's history program is its oral history activity. The primary objectives of Reclamation's oral history activities are: preservation of historical data not normally available through Reclamation records (supplementing already available data on the whole range of Reclamation's history); making the preserved data available to researchers inside and outside Reclamation.

Questions, comments, and suggestions may be addressed to:

Andrew H. Gahan
Historian
Environmental Compliance Division (84-53000)
Policy and Administration
Bureau of Reclamation
P. O. Box 25007
Denver, Colorado 80225-0007
FAX: (720) 544-4840

For additional information about Reclamation's history program see:
www.usbr.gov/history

(Intentionally Blank)

Oral History Interview
Walter Fite

Storey: This is Brit Allan Storey, senior historian of the Bureau of Reclamation, interviewing Assistant Regional Director Walter Fite in his offices at the Bureau of Reclamation in Boise, Idaho, on Friday, December 9 [1994], at about ten o'clock in the morning. This is tape one.

Well, Mr. Fite, I'd like to ask you where you were born and raised and educated and how you ended up at the Bureau of Reclamation.

Beginnings

Fite: I was born in Fredericksburg, Virginia, in 1942, and educated a lot of places. My dad moved a lot, so I lived in most of the western states and have at least visited every state in the union. High school was in Falls Church, Virginia. College was Purdue University in Indiana, West Lafayette, Indiana.

And how did I get interested in the Bureau of Reclamation? When I was looking for jobs when I graduated from Purdue, I wanted to go back out West, and Bureau of Reclamation was one of those outfits that would offer me that opportunity. Plus, I had some experience with it, because my dad worked for a short time with the Bureau of Reclamation.

Storey: Why did your family move around so much?

Fite: My dad, he was in the service for a while. That's when I was born. He was in the Army then. And

then he went to work for the federal government, for the R-E-A, Rural Electrification Authority [Administration], I believe it is. He moved every couple of years as he was working with local R-E-As.[1]

Storey: But then he worked for Reclamation also?

Fite: Yeah. He worked for Reclamation for about five years in Parker Dam, California, and in Phoenix, and then he went back to work for R-E-A in Washington, D.C.

Storey: What was his training?

Fite: He was an electrical engineer.

Storey: Where was he educated?

Fite: University of Illinois. That meant for some interesting rivalries, because they're both Big Ten schools, so me and my dad had interesting discussions about football. By the way, he's still alive. He's eighty-eight.

Storey: Living where?

Fite: Phoenix.

1. The official title was the Rural Electrification Administration, which was created during the Great Depression as part of President Franklin D. Roosevelt's New Deal. The REA was an agency within the Department of Agriculture and charged with administering loan programs for electrification and telephone service in rural areas. For more information see D. Clayton Brown, *Electricity for Rural America: The Fight for the REA* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1980); Leah S. Glaser, *Electrifying Rural America: Stories of Power, People, and Place* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009).

Storey: Do you remember anything about his work with Reclamation?

Father Worked on Parker-Davis Project

Fite: Not a lot. He worked on a Parker-Davis Project, which is Davis Dam, Parker Dam on the Colorado River.[2] His side of it was the generation of electricity. I don't know if he was in the marketing side or the operation and maintenance side. I've never had those kinds of discussions with him. I think he enjoyed the work, but he got caught up in one of the reduction in forces that occurred under President [Dwight D.] Eisenhower. His job was being either abolished or downgraded, so he moved back to Washington, D.C.

Storey: Of course, Eisenhower did not look kindly on public power.

Fite: Yes. I think that was part of it. I never really had a lot of discussions with my dad about, you know, the work for Reclamation. It's kind of interesting, because both me and my brother, through some of the discussions my dad would have about his frustrations in working for the federal government, both decided we wouldn't work for the federal

2. The Parker-Davis Project on the lower Colorado River consists of Parker Dam and powerplant (constructed from 1943-1942) and Davis Dam and powerplant (constructed from 1942-1950). Parker facilities supply power for the Metropolitan Water District's Whitsett Intake Pumping Plant for the Colorado River Aqueduct. Davis facilities primarily regulate water deliveries to Mexico required by the Mexican Water Treaty of 1944. For more information, see Toni Rae Linenberger, "Parker-Davis Project," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation, 1997, www.usbr.gov/history/projhist.html.

government, and both of us are now working for the federal government. I started right out of school, and my brother worked for Bendix for a couple of years and got laid off and went to work for the Department of Army. Now he works for the Corps of Engineers in Washington, D.C.

Developed Negative Feelings About working for the Federal Government

So it's interesting. We had this sort of negative feeling during our high school, growing-up years about working for the federal government, but both of us work now for them. I've thoroughly enjoyed my career with the federal government. I've had many, many different jobs. I'm probably very unique in the Reclamation. I worked for almost every division there is in the organization at one time or another.

Storey: Do you have any sense of the negative feelings about working for the federal government that you were getting in your youth?

Fite: No. I think it was more just my dad's frustration with, I think, maybe the paperwork and the–it's hard for me to tell what it was. I have some of those myself, by the way. When you get frustrated and can't get something done, you get some negative feelings.

Storey: You mentioned that you lived in a construction camp?

Reclamation Housing at Parker Dam

Fite: Uh-huh. Actually, it was a camp that was no longer a construction camp. It was Reclamation housing at Parker Dam. When the dam was building, it was a construction camp. It was so remote, it was fifty miles from the nearest town. Well, it was about twenty miles from Parker, which was nothing in 1948 when we lived there. Blythe and Needles were fifty miles away, and they probably had 5,000 people, if that, right out in the middle of Mohave Desert. Phoenix and L-A were probably 200 to 300 miles away. So there was no housing. The government had to house you. My dad was part of the operations of the facility there.

Storey: What was living in the camp like? Do you remember anything about it?

Fite: Oh, yeah. That was a neat experience, because I was in second grade, so I would have been seven, and you could walk right out of your door, down to the river and fish, or you could go the other direction out into the desert and do whatever you do out there. There used to be an old firing range. So even though we weren't supposed to, we picked up shells.

There was a pipeline that went from the dam itself to what we called a shantytown. All of these construction camps had shantytowns associated with them, where they were not part of the official camp and kind of some of the workers lived there that couldn't get housing in the camp. So this pipeline went over the hill to this little former shantytown. It was so dilapidated that it had all these wooden pegs in it. That's how you'd fix the leak. When there was a hole, you'd grab a wooden

peg, and it looked like a porcupine. And it still leaked. It had a little creek below and had tadpoles ran in it. So as kids, we'd go collect all these tadpoles and bring them home and put them in a tub and then they'd promptly die about two days later. You know, things like that. I remember the scorpions. We'd find lots of scorpions.

Storey: In the house?

Fite: In the house. I have a twin brother and sister. There's four of us, four children in the family. I talked about my next younger brother. But I have a younger brother and sister that are six years younger than me. They were twins. And my mom one day took the mats out of the playpen they were in, and here's a little scorpion underneath that, one of the deadly kind, the real small ones.

Storey: The little white ones.

Fite: Well, they're actually a straw color.

Storey: Yeah.

Fite: They may be an inch long. And they're the most poisonous. So those kinds of experiences. Climbing a cliff across from the house. It probably wasn't all that big. In fact, I remember. I've been back there since. It looked pretty big when I was seven, but it's not that big now. But still if I had fallen off it, I would certainly not be here today. And my mom's seen me on top of it, and I got it when I got home. But I still climbed it again. (laughter)

Storey: Do you remember anything about the way people socialized in the camp?

Little Socializing at Parker

Fite: Not a whole lot. I do remember one thing. We used script. We did not use money. You'd have to go down to the store and buy little tickets or script, and that's what you bought your goods for from the–I guess they called it a company store.

Storey: A Reclamation store.

Fite: A Reclamation store, which was a little grocery store and drugstore.

Storey: You don't remember anything about movies or dances or anything like that?

Fite: The movies, we'd have to go to Parker. I remember going to the movies, and you'd have to take into account the time change, because it was on the other side of the river.

I remember a swimming hole which was above this camp. There was another camp above this one which was run by the Metropolitan Water District in California. They had their pumping plant that took the water. In fact, that's the reason this dam was built is for the forebay and the facility to pump water to Los Angeles. They had a camp above us, and they had a little swimming hole. I remember going up to that.

Then about three or four years ago, I had the opportunity to go back to that camp for a tour

through some of their facilities, and that swimming hole is still there and I went down and swam in it again. It looked just the same.

Storey: What did the kids do? Was it mostly unorganized activities like you've mentioned?

Fite: Yeah. Mostly unorganized. The school, there was all eight grades, but there was only three rooms, so there was a combination of grades. And there wasn't very many of us. Maybe in the whole school maybe forty or fifty. We pretty much did unorganized activities such as going out in the desert. I was talking about catching the tadpoles. I was a little young to remember any kind of social events among the kids. I don't remember much that my parents did socially.

Those camps were very interesting to live in. I've had some experiences, not living in them, but dealing with some of the activities that occur, some of the negative activities, in my job here. You get a lot of friction among the people because they only work together, they socialize together. They never get away from each other. You'll get people who won't speak to each other. They direct their kids not to speak with other kids. I don't remember any of that when I was a kid, but I'm sure it was there. I do remember a little of that friction. Now I just recall my folks talking a little about it. But my experiences with the neighbors there were all positive.

Storey: Did you go to school with the Metropolitan Water District kids?

Fite: No. No. It was a separate school altogether. One interesting experience that occurred later. When I'd gone to work for Reclamation and I was working in Phoenix, a good friend of mine who happens to be crippled from polio, we were talking. We were actually at a party, and his wife came up and said, "I know you." And I didn't know her from Adam. She says, "We lived in Parker Dam together, and you hit me in the head with a rock." And it turns out her family lived right next door to us in Parker Dam. So it's a small world.

Storey: It is. A Reclamation world. (laughter)

Fite: Yeah. Her dad was, I believe, the schoolteacher, I think.

Storey: But you were there for about a year?

Fite: About a year. And then we moved to Phoenix.

Storey: And you ended up going to high school in Falls Church.

Fite: Virginia, yeah.

Storey: How did you decide where to go to school and what to study?

Fite: Are you talking about college?

Storey: Uh-huh.

"Always Wanted to be An Engineer"

Fite: I can always remember wanting to be an engineer. I

think it's different today. I think kids don't get that focused–I know mine haven't–until they get into college. But somewhere in high school or maybe even before that, I was going to be an engineer, and I made sure I studied. I got all the math and science I could get in high school. Part of it was probably my dad talking about it. I think my folks were more involved in what I was going to be in my career than I was with my kids, because I can remember us talking about that. It was kind of a family decision. It's not one that I was unhappy with, because I've enjoyed my career. I've enjoyed everything I've done. Well, most everything I've done in Reclamation. As we get into the interview, you'll bring out some of the neat projects I've worked on.

Storey: How did you select Purdue?

Fite: It was the best school that gave me an offer to attend within a reasonable time. The University of Illinois finally got around to doing that, but it was way late in the summer.

Storey: So you applied to a number of schools?

Fite: Oh, yes.

Storey: Did they give you a scholarship?

Fite: No. I'm in that big middle group where I'm not a straight A student and my dad made enough money. I didn't have any scholarships. Eventually the Navy gave me a scholarship. I took the tests and the Navy paid a good chunk of my way through college.

Storey: And what did you study at Purdue?

Fite: Civil engineering.

Storey: With any specialization?

Fite: Well, civil is kind of a general term for a whole bunch of fields–structural, hydraulic, highways, sanitary, now environmental, and there's some others. My specialty in civil school was hydraulics, hydrology and hydraulics.

Storey: How did you select that?

"Wanted to be Involved in Water Resources"

Fite: Just my interest in water. There was no question in my mind what I wanted to do was to be involved in water resources.

Storey: Why?

Fite: I really don't know. I've thought about it. I think I just thoroughly enjoyed recreation on water, and I enjoy the West, I like the scenery, I like the openness, and, most importantly, I like to be able to get completely away and sit and contemplate my navel or whatever you do alone. I really enjoy that. I've always enjoyed boating, I enjoy sailing. Reclamation was an opportunity to combine a career and the opportunity to be around water.

Storey: So you went through Purdue and then what happened?

Fite: Well, after the interviews, I went to work for Reclamation in Boulder City, Nevada.

Storey: Did anybody else make you offers, for instance?

Fite: Yeah. In fact, everybody I interviewed except the company that I really wanted to go to work for–that's interesting–Bechtel. I would have gone to work for Bechtel rather than Reclamation for the same reasons, because Bechtel was a big dam-builder and water resources. For some reason, they saw fit not to make me an offer. I must have messed up the interview somewhere.

Storey: How did you find out about Reclamation?

Fite: Well, obviously my dad worked for Reclamation, so I knew a lot about it. They did interview at Purdue. In those days, Reclamation interviewed. And I've done a little of that myself. By the way, that was a very rewarding part of my career was to actually go interview college students.

Storey: Do you remember who interviewed you and what was involved?

Fite: I do not remember the name, but I remember he was associated with the Denver Office. He could have very well been the head of the lab. If not the head, he was fairly high up in the lab there. We could probably, through your research, find out who it was at that time. That would have been in 1967. Wagnerson may have been his name, but I don't remember.

Storey: Well, I seem to have lost some time here. I'm presuming you must have graduated in 1960 from high school.

Fite: Uh-huh. I have a master's.

Storey: Oh, it took you seven years to do a Master's Degree. I see. What did you specialize your Master's Degree in?

Fite: Hydraulics.

Storey: And did you write a thesis or a paper?

Fite: Yes, I did. It was concerning laboratory experiments. There was a series of three of them, and I did the last one. I was teaching in the lab as a lab assistant, and my job was to do the final stages of getting some equipment built and developed. My thesis was a series of discussions about how to do the experiment on the equipment.

Also, for one semester, one of the professors went off on sabbatical, I actually taught the undergraduate hydraulics course. That was a rewarding and interesting experience. I learned from that that if you don't know what you're talking about, say you don't, because a student one time just wrapped me around the axle. (laughter)

Storey: Did you find it a good learning experience, to teach?

Fite: Yes, I did, and I've done some of that subsequently in Reclamation in the data processing field. I enjoy it.

Storey: You were interviewed probably in the spring?

Fite: Yeah.

Storey: How long did it take Reclamation to get back and make you an offer?

Fite: I don't remember. Fairly quickly. Most of those companies do that, because they know you're interviewing other people. I don't believe there was any delay on Reclamation's part.

Storey: When did you go to work for Reclamation?

Fite: It would have been in June of '67.

Storey: You mentioned that you had a naval scholarship?

Received a Navy Scholarship

Fite: Uh-huh.

Storey: A Navy scholarship.

Fite: Navy scholarship.

Storey: You didn't have to go into the Navy?

Fite: No, because I got married and they wouldn't allow me to get married, so they dropped me out of the program. But they did pay for two years of my school, which was great. What I had to do for that was to go on a summer cruise, which was fun also. I really did want to be a naval officer and a naval aviator, but I think in the long run, I probably made the right decision to leave the Navy and do what I did.

Storey: Well, if I'm thinking correctly, '67 would have

been pretty much the height of the Vietnamese conflict.

Fite: I would have been in Vietnam.

Storey: But you weren't drafted?

Fite: No. At that point in time, when you were married, you got a 4-F classification, which was a hardship. They no longer do that. I was in a window there where technically when you were removed from the program like I was, because I had violated one of the rules, you went into the service as an enlisted man. And what they did is they gave you three options. They gave you the option to go in as an enlisted man for two years, I believe; to be in the reserve units, which went to meetings; or be in what was, I believe, called the ready reserve, which you were just on a list, you didn't go to meetings, you just were on a list. My choice was pretty easy for me. I went on the ready reserves. Essentially what that is is a reserve unit that's right next to being drafted. There was really no difference that I could see.

Now they don't do that, though. By marriage, a son of my sister-in-law and her husband, he went into the same program and dropped out, and they put him in the service for two years. So they're much harder now. So it was a good deal, as far as I was concerned, and I would have stayed in the Navy or stayed in and completed it, but they decided they didn't want me after I got married.

Interesting what the government will do. In my opinion, they wasted a lot of money. They treated

you like the [U.S. Naval] Academy. If you got married while you were in the Academy, they kicked you out. This program was the first of the services. All the services now have this full scholarship program. This was the first one, though, and it was quite competitive, and I tried two years to get it and the second year I did. You take a test and an interview and a physical. It was a good deal. They paid all the tuition, the books, and most of your living expenses.

Storey: Did you enter Purdue planning to be a civil engineer?

Fite: I entered planning to be a chemical engineer.

Storey: What made you change?

Fite: I decided I didn't want to work indoors in a laboratory all my life, even though I love chemistry. It's an interesting field. And I got really good grades in it. I just one day said, "I really don't want to spend my whole life in a laboratory," and I went into the civil school. That was after the first year.

Storey: Now, what did Reclamation offer you?

Reclamation Job Offer in Boulder City

Fite: You mean as far as the job or–

Storey: A job and location and that sort of thing.

Fite: They offered me a job in Boulder City, Nevada, and my wife said, "What is Reclamation and where is Boulder City, Nevada?" She was pregnant with our

second child when we moved there, and we moved there in June and it was hot, and she thought she had gone to hell. (laughter) She since has learned to really enjoy the desert. In fact, we'd prefer to live in the desert rather than in a climate like this in Boise.

Storey: What was the job?

Fite: I was working in a Planning Office in Boulder City. There was a Regional Office there, too, but this was a little what was called a Development Office. And it was absolutely the worst job I've ever had, and I almost quit. The office was closing down, and within probably six months or again it was going to start the construction of the Southern Nevada Water System.[3] And I didn't realize at the time, but I'd been slated to go to the Southern Nevada Water System.

I showed up at this little Planning Office, which had no work, and they gave me a desk with nothing to do. And you can imagine after coming out of college with all these expectations–you were going to be productive and busy–nothing. I'd go around to the other people in the office and ask them if they had anything for me to do, and they'd just grab it all up and say, "No," because they weren't busy either.

3. The Southern Nevada Water System is often referred to as the Southern Nevada Water Project and designed to pump water from Lake Mead to Las Vegas, Nevada, and surrounding communities. In 1982, the project was renamed the Robert B. Griffith Water Project. Control of the project was later transferred to the Southern Nevada Water Authority. For more information, see Jedidiah Rogers, "Robert B, Griffith Water Project (formerly Southern Nevada Water Project)," Denver: Bureau of Reclamation, 2006, www.usbr.gov/history/projhist.html.

Finally, I was sitting in the same room with a geologist, and I started just going out in the field with the geologist and I learned a lot about geology. But I was doing nothing productive for the Bureau of Reclamation.

The only reason I didn't quit–and I was looking around–was that I didn't think I had the dollars to pay back the moving expenses that they had paid to move me out here. In reality, I probably did, but at that time I was making right around $9,000 a year, and the $1,000 or so they had taken to move me to Boulder City was a big chunk of money.

Storey: What G-S level was this?

Fite: I started as a 9, I believe, with a Master's Degree and B average. I think that was a 9. Most people were started at 5 or so.

Storey: Who was your supervisor?

Fite: Monroe Moore. We didn't get along too well. (laughter) Reclamation had what was called a rotation program for engineers, and the interviewer had promised me that. Monroe Moore didn't much like that program.

The guts of it was I was supposed to spend some time in Denver, some time in some other offices through the first year. He did consent finally to let me spend two weeks in the Regional Office, which was just up the street about three blocks. Then he gave me a poor performance rating after that quarter, because I had been such a horse's butt about going on this rotation program.

So I didn't get along too well with Monroe. He was, in my opinion, pretty lazy. He didn't do much. He sat around and did almost nothing. He liked that, I guess. He'd probably have a different opinion. (laughter)

Storey: Did you try and talk to him about what was going on?

Fite: Oh, yeah.

Storey: What picture were you able to piece together?

Fite: You mean as far as his reaction?

Storey: Well, as to what was going on and why you'd been hired to sit there and do nothing, and just the whole thing about what was going on there.

Fite: Well my picture was, "Who in the world have I gone to work for? This is crazy."

Storey: And boring.

Fite: And boring. And then I talked with Monroe Moore, and he's not very sympathetic, you know. He's not willing to really tell me much about what's going to happen in the future. I had no idea if I was going to end up in the Construction Office until later on. I guess it taught me one thing, that you pretty much look out for yourself and your career, and I've used that learning experience in my whole career. I have not left it to chance as to where I'm going to end up. Every job I go on to, it's something that either I have generated or created or sold somebody on. It was quite helpful because I know what I'm getting into.

Storey: How long did this go on?

Fite: Certainly through the summer. Probably six months. I don't remember exactly when the core of us moved over to the Construction Office. Once we moved to the Construction Office, there was plenty of work because you're getting ready to build things. You've got contracts coming down the pipe. Then there was plenty to do.

Storey: And you moved about six months later?

Fite: I'm trying to think of–yeah, I'm going to guess it was about six months, because we went through the summer doing nothing, and then I ended up working on the survey crew, and that was in the winter. Again, that was well below my skill level. Here I have a Master's Degree, doing work on a survey crew that was a GS-3 or 4, and here I am a GS-9. (laughter)

Storey: What were you surveying?

Fite: We were laying out the pipelines and turnouts and so forth at the start of construction.

Storey: Where you running the crew or were you just–

Fite: No, no. No, I wasn't running the crew. I have run survey crews. Again, it was a place to put me while we were getting ready to do what I guess I was slated to do in the long run, which was be an inspector.

Storey: When did you start inspecting?

Fite: It would have been probably within that first year. Again, that stuff all runs together. Let's say within a year, year and a half.

Storey: What did you inspect?

Inspector on the Southern Nevada Water Project

Fite: I was on what was called raised bores. The Southern Nevada Water Project had a very unique–the first pumping plant. The pump sat on the surface and they were what we call vertical turbine pumps. The shafts went down through some vertical shafts into a pump chamber that was blasted out of the rock below. Then there was a tunnel that went from that down under Lake Meade that came up and tapped Lake Meade. So I worked on the raised bores.

The process is to drill a six-inch hole with a bit, and then down about, I think it was, 100 to 120 feet, something like that, and you attach a reamer on the bottom of it and you pull this back up and try to ream the hole down to their full size. Those were probably at least thirty-six inches in diameter, if not forty-eight. They're pretty big. And then the pump sits down in that.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 1. DECEMBER 9, 1994.
BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 1. DECEMBER 9, 1994.

Storey: You were talking about working on the pumping plant, I believe.

Inspecting the Pumping Plant Construction

Fite: The raised bores that I was working on, my job was to do the inspection, to watch the drill rig and make sure that the shafts were vertical. The way that was done was there's an instrument called an eikonometer, and you run it down the pilot holes periodically as you're drilling, and it puts a dot on a target. You can tell from that how far off vertical this particular hole is. Then the driller will try to jack this huge drill rig one way or the other to get this pit to come back on line. They were not totally successful. They were out of specs when they got the holes done, so they reamed the other holes. They had to oversize them so that the pumps would not hit the side of the wall when they were hanging vertically.

Some interesting experiences on that job, too. There was one down in the chamber below. There was a fan line that took air into there from the outside so you could use the equipment in there. I would go down in there probably once a shift and check the bottom of it. I went down there and they, for some reason, [someone] had a bulldozer on top, moving some dirt around. They pushed small rocks, maybe some baseball size, down these holes. Well, rocks came down and hit that fan line, which is probably two or three feet in diameter, and broke the wire that was hanging from the ceiling. One of them came crashing to the ground. Fortunately, there wasn't anybody under it. You'd get some very unsafe situations sometimes on construction. This particular contractor was very unsafe to start with. That was one of the experiences I had.

Another one, once we got through the raised borings, I worked with an old–his name was Peevey [phonetic], Fillmore Peevey. He's still around, by the way, in Grand Junction. You might try to get hold of him. An old construction hand. As far as I know, he's alive. He was four or five years ago. His thing in life was dynamite, and he was an expert on it. He didn't like to work too hard, and what he would do was would work swing shift or graveyard so he got more money. He liked me because what he liked to do was take old textbooks and work the problems in the back in these textbooks. Of course, I was right out of college, so I could help him do this. We'd sit up there for four or five hours during our shift, working problems in textbooks. And then he'd take a little nap and then he'd go down right at the end of the shift and make sure he was in a tunnel so legally he could get his 25 percent differential in pay.

Working with Dynamite

One experience we had on that hole, which was really very scary, is that they had decided rather than going down through a vertical shaft to build this chamber below, they would do what was called an incline adit. That's to go out a ways and come down on an incline so they could bring their rubber-tired equipment in and out without hoisting it down through the crane. There was a lot of leakage from the lake. They were dynamiting this tunnel on an incline, and the water was leaking and running down and up against the base. It was a lot of water. The pumps would handle it until they got ready to blow the base. So you'd sit down there and they'd drill and they'd load it and they'd put the caps in,

electric caps, and then everybody would get out of there. They turned the pumps off. By the time they got ready to blow this base, it'd be about half-covered with water.

Well, only half of it blew one time, and we all go back in there and one of the construction people grabbed up a pump, which was an electric pump. It had a big wire on it about two inches in diameter, 440 volts, and drug it into the water. Something, the wire pulled loose or something, and there was blue fire all over the face of this dynamite that had only half gone off with electric caps. And I might not have been here today, obviously, if that had gone off, because we were all just standing there. That's another experience of what can happen on a construction job. After that, we used air pumps which would use the air to turn the turbine and pump the water.

Storey: You changed because of that incident?

Fite: Yeah.

Storey: Now, let's see if I'm getting this correctly. This was a pipeline to serve Las Vegas, probably?

Fite: Yes. Yes.

Storey: And in order to take the water from the lake, you were drilling a vertical shaft.

Tapped Water from the Bottom of Lake Mead

Fite: Actually, twenty of them. There was twenty pumps into a chamber, big chamber below, which was

probably, oh, fifteen foot high. And then out of that chamber there was a tunnel with a couple of dog legs in it that went out to Lake Mead, then went vertical and tapped the lake from under the lake.

Storey: Okay.

Fite: The way you do that is you drill a tunnel, and you go up until you're about twenty feet or so from the lake, and then you drill that plug and load it, flood the tunnel, and blow out that last piece. When we got all the way back in there and started up, it leaked so bad that, fortunately, some wiser heads said, "This is too dangerous," and the decision was made to go around on the lake side and drill it from the lake using a big rotary drill that Hughes Corporation made.

Hughes had developed these big rotary drills as part of the [Nevada] test site work that was going on with the underground nuclear tests, and they're big. They're twenty, thirty feet in diameter. It took about a year to do that. They had to use divers to level off the spot from the lake bottom at 100 to 120 feet, so it was hard-hat diving. And bring in a barge with this big rotary drill on it and then drill the last twenty feet. The actual drilling maybe took a week. It took about an extra year just to do the diving work to level it off. It doubled the price of the contract. At that time, I think it went from maybe 2 million to 4 million. Today that would be just peanuts. I was happy, because I didn't think it was very safe either, and I was down in there.

Storey: Were the tunnels and the pump shafts lined, for instance?

Fite: No, they weren't. The pump shafts were in rock. It was pretty solid. But there were some seams that really leaked, because this was all below the lake level. And there would be fractures. What they were were faults in the rock, and they'd maybe be a half a foot wide and they would be broken up and the water would just gush through those.

Storey: So when the plug had been take out of the end of the vertical shafts, water was just allowed to flow in there?

Fite: Yeah. It was already flooded. When that drill went through the thing, you want it flooded. You don't want a big rush of water going in there. It was no problem getting it flooded, because you just turned off the pumps and it filled up real quick. At that point, it was full of water and then the pumps were set in these vertical shafts and they went down. I think they actually went down into the chamber. No, they didn't either. They went down in a shaft right to the top of the chamber, because we had to be concerned about hitting the sides of the–when a vertical pump runs, it tends to go in a little circle because of the torque. So it swings a little bit as it's running, and you had to be careful it wouldn't bounce against the side of the rock.

Storey: So then the water would rise in the shafts.

Fite: Into the chamber and then up–

Storey: Depending on the lake level.

Fite: On the lake level. Of course, then the higher the lake, the more water you could pump, because the

pump will pump a certain head. By the lake rising, it allows you to pump a little more water because you've got a fixed head on the other end.

Storey: Do you know how much water this project was designed to move?

Most of Nevada's Colorado River Allocation Goes to Las Vegas

Fite: There's two stages. There was a second stage. They could move about–I'm going to guess–268,000 acre feet a year. The state of Nevada had an allocation out of the Colorado River of 300,000 acre feet. This project moved most of it. In fact, right now in Las Vegas there's work going on to build a third stage–not Reclamation, but the local utilities there, which will take the rest of the water.[4]

Storey: So basically, Las Vegas is absorbing Nevada's entire Colorado River allocation? Is that what I'm hearing?

Fite: All of it but a little bit in Laughlin and a small amount up at the head of the lake. So probably all but maybe 20,000, 25,000 of that 300,000 [acre-feet].

4. Nevada's allocation of Colorado River water (300,000 acre feet) was set in the Boulder Canyon Act of 1928. Distribution of the waters of the Colorado River among the river basin's seven states was agreed to in the 1922 Colorado River Compact. The Compact divided the river between the upper basin states–Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, New Mexico–and the lower basin states–Arizona, California, Nevada. The compact allotted each basin 7.5 million acre feet. In the Boulder Canyon Act, Congress ratified the Colorado River Compact.

Now, this project pumps–I'm misleading you a little bit. That's a net that's pumping. It actually pumps more than 300,000 because there's a return flow credit from the city of Las Vegas, which is significant. For every acre-foot that comes back, they get to pump a new acre foot out of Lake Mead. So this project, actually on total diversion, pumps significantly more than 260,000. It's upwards of around 400,000 between the two stages pump. So I misled you a little there. I'm mixing up the physical pumping of the plant with the accounting of the Colorado River.

Storey: When you got started on this tunneling inspection, how did you–I think you said you went down into the chamber.

Fite: Uh-huh.

Storey: How did you get down there?

Fite: You walked down the incline adit, in this adit that took the equipment down. I mixed up my sequences on you there. The adit was done before I worked on the raised bores. I was really working with Peevey before I worked on raised bores. So I went from the surveying to working with Peevey, and then at that point on the raised bores. There's another piece that I worked. They had to dynamite the area where the pumping plant sat, so I worked on that. So I went from the surveying to the site, to the adit, to the raised bores, and then on to some other stuff, the pumping plant and other pumping plants in another tunnel.

Storey: Did you enjoy that inspection work?

Inspection Work Tended to be Boring

Fite: Sometimes. It tended to be boring because you stand around a lot. I enjoyed the learning part of it, and once I felt that I learned about everything I was going to learn, then it got to be real boring.

Storey: What did you do as an inspector? Run me through a day, if you would.

Inspector's Responsibilities

Fite: An inspector is there to ensure that the contractor stays within the specifications that are in the contract, and so the typical thing the inspector has to do is, say, on the rock or the site that's being done, you have to run around with a hand level, which is just a little telescope device that you can look at another stadia rod which has numbers on it, and determine what the elevation is. Give you some quick calculations to determine if the slopes that the contractor is coming down with, the dirt on top, are correct, say two to one, one foot vertical for every two feet horizontal.

Then when you get to the rock work, where they were doing what's called pre-split, you use a rock drill and you drill a series of holes on a slope that's probably almost vertical, and you load those holes with dynamite. It's timed so that it splits the rock before the main charge goes off in a big body of rock. What we did there was again ensure that the contractor was drilling those holes with what's called an air drill. You've seen them on the

highway. You just put a level on it to see if you're getting the right slope and then make sure they're measured.

I can remember one experience. Get all that done. To me, I thought we did an excellent job, because when you'd scrape out all the dirt, you could see half the holes, so you can see every line of hole. When you get into a corner, sometimes they will cross. And a damned old field engineer, which to this day I do not like, Rudy Angeley [phonetic], came out there, and the only thing he could comment on was that a couple of these holes across, not how well the others were spaced and how good it looked. He's a character. He's still around, too, by the way. You can find him. I think he's in Jackson Hole. Rudy Angeley. If you want more construction background, he'll give you a different perspective, anyway. There's very few people in Reclamation that I haven't gotten along with. He was one of the ones. He didn't like engineers to start with, which was interesting, because he needed engineers on a construction project.

Storey: What about reports and things like that?

Fite: You did a daily report. Essentially it was your inspection report, and it was a write-up of what had happened that day. I'd hate to see some of those. I wasn't really great in English, especially spelling, and some of the people in the office razzed me about some of my reports. I imagine they were pretty bad. (laughter) But they are important in that if you get into a claim with the contractor, what the inspector has put on the reports becomes the history or the record of what occurred out there on the job.

Storey: So what kinds of things did go into the reports?

Fite: Well, just administrative-type things, such as how many people were working on the job. I did a description of what went on that day, especially if there was a problem. Most of the time, they were very routine, maybe a paragraph, the contractor had moved so much dirt or we had done so many foot of pre-split, or the contractor had–and that the raised bores had completed hole number six or something like that.

Storey: And how did you do these reports? Did you stand around all day and then go up somewhere and write them out, or how did that work?

Fite: Sometimes. Normally I would tend to work on them off and on all day, if things were changing. But if it was boring time, I'd just do them in the evening or right at the end of the shift.

Storey: Was this around-the-clock work?

Fite: Most of the time, at least on that job, the contractor was working three shifts.

Storey: I presume there were other inspectors, then.

Fite: Oh, yes. I mean, there was a bunch of us. Most of your career inspectors are not graduates of civil engineering school; they're technicians. They take people like me and they put them on inspector to give them some construction experience, and eventually you go off it. I did inspection for about two or three years.

Storey: How many inspectors would a project like this require, at any given time?

Fite: It really depends on how many fronts or activities the contractor has going. On this particular job, there was myself on the raised bores. Then there was Peevey on the work that was going on down in the tunnel. So there would have been two of us. When you get into the pumping plant, which I later was on, there would have been myself, and then there was a chief inspector who had more than one job going. I was in the pumping plant, looking at form work and so forth. And as we got into electrical and mechanical, we would have an electrical and mechanical inspector. They wouldn't necessarily be there all day. They may come part of the day, then go to another plant. So you could have as many as from one to maybe three or four inspectors on any given job, depending on what's going on.

Then you get into the dams. In the big work, you'll have significantly more, because there's a lot of work going on. There's also the laboratory technicians who come out periodically and do sampling of the concrete that's being poured, and the earthwork. That's a whole other group of people.

Storey: How did this work? How did everybody work together?

Everyone Worked Together Pretty Well

Fite: Good. As far as all of us working together, I think there was no problem except the field engineer, and

he was kind of universally a horse's butt to everybody. It wasn't just me. He just was one of those kind of abrasive people that nothing was ever right. We all know that's one way to get a job done. The other way is to just work with people. They both work.

Storey: Do you remember his name?

Fite: Rudy Angeley.

Storey: Oh, okay. So he was the chief inspector?

Fite: No, he was the field engineer. Then there's chief inspectors underneath Rudy, and then there was inspectors underneath the chief inspectors, which is where I was.

Storey: Who were the chief inspectors?

Fite: One of them was Bill Holbert [phonetic]. I do not remember the other. There were several of them.

Storey: Is he the one you worked with?

Fite: I did for a while. In fact, I tutored his son for a while in algebra in high school, and his son now works for Reclamation in Denver.

Storey: Did you always work the same shift?

Fite: No. You did trade. The ones I remember the most are the swing and graveyard, just because you worked at night. But I did work day shifts, too.

Storey: What were the hours for the various shifts?

Fite: Oh, let's see. The graveyard or the midnight shift got off at, I think, around eight, so it would go from midnight to eight. The day shift would go from eight to–whatever that goes to.

Storey: Four.

Fite: And then the swing would go from four to midnight.

Storey: Let's see. Since you were working in the tunnels, probably the variations in the shifts were just mostly the time variation.

Fite: Uh-huh. Then what we'd do, I believe we changed every month. You'd go in a sequence. You'd go graveyard, swing, day. And people like Peevey liked to work the graveyard because of the night differential pay, the hazard pay. Then, of course, any holiday you were working, you'd get time and a half. So he would trade. The biggest reason he liked to work the graveyard was he could sleep. (laughter) It was pretty unusual to have both of us on that shift at the same time. I don't remember why we were.

Storey: And you did this for about three years?

Fite: Yeah. Between the tunnel and the pumping plant about three years, a little bit on the pipeline, too, one of the pipelines.

Storey: And then what happened?

Moved On to the Regional Office

Fite: Then I went to work in the Regional Office in what's known as the Water O&M. It would be the operation and maintenance.

Storey: That would be about '70?

Fite: Yeah, it must be. That's about right. I didn't really want to leave Boulder City. I really enjoyed Lake Mead and living there. The Construction Office was closing down, so I went up to work in the Regional Office, and I stepped into a temporary position, I think. They told me it was. So I went into working with the water users, mostly in the Yuma area, and did working on wells. There's a lot of drainage wells in Yuma.

One job I remember was to do a report, an analysis of what needed to be done with those wells to increase their reliability. There was a lot of chemical problems where the screens were plugging up. Another job I had was to try and do an analysis of the whole surface water, groundwater activities in that area. There's a lot of interplay between the pumping and what happened with some of the drain water. The drain water, some of it was going to Mexico. So as we started to pump water, we started to decrease the drain water, which started to reduce the water that was going to Mexico. They get 1.5 million acre feet of Colorado River water a year. Part of it came from the San Luis Drain. So whatever we reduced there, we had to release more water down the river to them.

So I worked on trying to analyze the impact of our wells, the wells over in Mexico, and there was some other variable. I don't remember. When I got

all done with it, you could show a real correlation between–you could see the slope and the line as we were increasing pumping and Mexico is increasing pumping. The issue there was, were we really causing the problem or were the Mexicans causing the problem to themselves, and if they were, then we weren't going to credit them water. It was really hard to determine really what was going on. You could show a trend anyway.

Storey: How did you get this job?

"Go Figure Out What You Want to Do"

Fite: I went up and asked for it. (laughter) Again, it's what I was telling you earlier. I learned from that first experience that, you know, go figure out what you want to do and then go get it. I could see the construction job was going to close down and I was going to move somewhere, and I didn't want to do that. So I started asking around. I had some contacts in the Regional Office. I said, "Well, got someplace where I can work?" [unclear], talked to the supervisor and he said, "Yeah, you can come and work." Reclamation was a little different. Again, there was that paternalistic attitude, and there wasn't any push to get rid of people.

Storey: Did you actually have meetings with the water users?

Fite: In that job, no, I don't believe so. I think I worked only with the staff in our Yuma Projects Office. I don't remember having any direct meetings with the water users.

Storey: Did you get a promotion for moving to the Regional Office? Do you remember how that worked?

Fite: No. I had got promoted in between. There was a piece of my career that we missed. While I was in the Construction Office, I participated in a program that Reclamation had which was called the Interchange Program. I changed jobs with a gentleman in the Denver Office, and I had to be a GS-11 to do that. And that was another reason me and the field engineer didn't get along is because he didn't want to promote me and I had gone off and got this arranged. The construction engineer, he was a very interesting man, a different kind of personality. He really tried to get along with people. I worked through him around the field engineer. I told him that I had been promised a GS-11 within a year when I was recruited, and I had to be an 11 to do this interchange. So he honored that, promoted me, and then I changed jobs with a gentleman who I happened to have gone to school with at Purdue for six months. I lived in his house and he lived in mine, and I did his job and he did mine.

Storey: And what was his job?

Fite: His job was as a designer in the Structural and Architectural Section. So I went in there and I worked on designs of the project that I was working on. Nothing real complex, because I wasn't really a structural engineer. I worked on a lot of the landscaping and did some work on what at that time was called elastic–I don't remember the technical term, but it was to do some computer work on

developing some programs that would automate a certain thing that everybody was doing by hand. I don't remember exactly what it was, but it had to do with elasticity of structures.

Storey: How long did you stay in that position in the Region there?

Moved to the Arizona Projects Office

Fite: Not very long. Probably a year, year and a half. Then I went to Phoenix to work in the Arizona Projects Office, which was right in the stages of starting the Central Arizona Project. So I went back into construction, but in the office side of it, and I went down there into the final planning phases and I went there to be the data processing branch chief. So I made a jump in my career from out of engineering into data processing.

Storey: How did you do that?

Fite: The office engineer in the Arizona Projects Office used to be the office engineer in the Southern Nevada Water System. We were good friends, and he called me up one day and said, "I need a data processing branch chief. Brand-new job." He said, "Are you interested?" And I said, "Yeah." And so I went down there and got a promotion to go down there as a 12. It was a good move. I really enjoyed that job.

As we talk, you'll see I've done a lot of jobs where they're one of a kind or they're brand new in Reclamation, and that was the first. Reclamation was just coming into the computer age, and this was

a brand-new branch, new job, and Mike Thomas wanted me to set it up. So that's what I did. I went down there and set it up and got the equipment and started us in the computer era in the Central Arizona Project.

Storey: What background did you have that qualified you for this?

There Were No Computer Scientists

Fite: At that point in time, there really wasn't anything that you'd call a computer scientist. Thus, the ones of us who got into that were people that were coming out of college and had some experience with it in college. I'd gone out of my way in college to take a couple of computer courses, because I could see that it was the wave of the future, and it paid off. It really was. The field has gone way beyond my knowledge now, but at that time, I was probably in Reclamation one of the few people that had some idea of what was going on in the field. We had a group in Denver themselves who were in the Data Processing Division, and they had been working in the field for five years or so.

Storey: You've mentioned a couple of terms that I'm sort of interested in. Field engineer.

Fite: Yeah.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 1. DECEMBER 9, 1994.
BEGIN SIDE 1, TAPE 2. DECEMBER 9, 1994.

Storey: This is tape two of an interview by Brit Storey with Water Fite on December 9, 1994.

I just asked you about the field engineer and the office engineer. These are titles that sort of interest me.

Structure of a Construction Office

Fite: The structure of a Construction Office, the head is a construction engineer, project construction engineer, P-C-E. Underneath him are two major divisions, an Office Division and a Field Division, and they're both headed, appropriately, by an office engineer and a field engineer. And underneath that group are in the office, various branches, which in the office they deal with contracts, maybe with surveying, those kinds of things. I should say that actually the surveys are under the field engineer.

The field has the inspection and may have some satellite offices which are sometimes headed up by resident engineers, or they have chief inspectors. It depends on the size of the project.

Storey: So what is an office engineer's staff doing?

Fite: Their staff really administers the contracts and ensures that the contractor is being paid, ensures that we're getting all the statistical data that we need on the contractor's force and how far along we are with the project so we can pay him again. I'm sure if there's a contract modification to be done, and there are usually a bunch of them, negotiate those with the contractor. If there's a claim they can get into the data collection for the claim. Usually a claim will come at the end of a project, and it may be done either by the office engineer staff, or if the job is closed down by, say, the Regional Office

staff. Claims can be very intensive and take a long time to settle.

Storey: Your computer work down there, what were you doing?

Tried to Get People to Step Into the Computer Era

Fite: Since it was brand new, I was kind of groping around there to start to get people to step into the computer era. This was back in the days when people were still doing work on the old mechanical calculators. You and me are old enough to remember those, where you keyed in a bunch of numbers. Then you pushed a button. They went ka-chunk, ka-chunk, ka-chunk, ka-chunk, and then spit out a number. Especially if it was a square root, it took forever.

We were just going into the computer era where people then could get on a computer terminal and tie into a computer at 300 baud or 300 bits per second, very slow, and do their work using a computer program rather than a calculator. So most of my job was to try to either find or write some software that would take these people's jobs from the calculator to the computer. And we did.

We got working on an earthwork program out of Salt Lake. I wrote several programs myself that people figured out, yeah, that maybe I can do something for them and actually came to me and said, "Can you automate this?" And we did some of that, I think very successful. In fact, some of those programs are still around today. It's amazing. Every once in a while I'll get a call on something

that I wrote twenty years ago, and I made the mistake of putting my name on it somewhere. I get a call and say, "What's going on here?" At this point in time, I have to say I have no idea. (laughter) I haven't gotten one of those probably in the last four or five years, but it's amazing how long those things stay around.

Storey: This would have been maybe about 1971?

Fite: '71 to–I think I moved to Phoenix in '71 or maybe '72, and then I left there to go to Denver in '75, I believe.

Storey: What computer were you using?

Moved into the Computer Office in Denver in '75

Fite: We started out on the G-E, and I don't remember the model. Then right at the end of the time there we had bought the first Control Data Corporation's CYBER computers. When I moved to Denver, they were just in the process of installing those, and part of my job in Denver was to–actually, I shouldn't say that. Actually, I was part of the training team to do the training, the operating system training, and some of the FORTRAN training for all of Reclamation on the new computer while I was at Phoenix. It was myself and a Control Data Corporation person together as a team. The gentleman I worked with was Ed Fowler, who has since come to work for Reclamation, by the way. He's now an assistant regional director, in Salt Lake, for administration.

It was a neat experience. I do enjoy teaching. We would go off for approximately a week to an

office and teach. The operating system at that time was called CRONUS, I believe. Teach people the commands on the computer and how to load their files and interact with the computer, and then we'd also teach FORTRAN, which is a programming language.

Storey: Where was this computer located?

Fite: It was located in Denver, and then we tied into it with remote terminals. Again, very slow terminals. Then a batch terminal which processed cards. We'd load the cards and then it would go do its processing in Denver and come back over the phone lines and print out on what was called a line printer, which is a big printer, would print the big sheets. That was pretty quick. That used a 96-baud line. That's the number of bits per second that can be transmitted over the line, and each character has so many bits. Obviously, the industry's gone way beyond that today. The little P-C that you can buy and put on your desk is probably as powerful as that machine was, and that thing filled a whole room, between the disk drives and the printers and the processor. I would guess that some of the P-Cs you buy today with the new chips are as fast and they can do as many calculations as that Control Data machine could do.

Storey: The CYBER, we're talking about.

Fite: The CYBER. Now, of course, the Control Data Corporation has gone a long way since 1975.

Storey: What were the major issues that you confronted as the head of the Computer Office?

Fite: I think the resistance to go away from doing it on the old mechanical calculator to doing it on the computer. But it wasn't real prevalent, because not very many people liked sitting there hour after hour and punching those keys. If they could get on the computer, especially we personally had written some interactive programs where it would ask questions and the person would go "yes" or "no," and then it would do the calculation, they liked that.

In fact, I remember having to write a program. It's a piece of software that's called COGO [phonetic]. It's a survey or a right-of-way program that allows you to do calculations around areas and tangents and things like that. We had moved from the G-E system to, I guess, another system, the CYBER. I don't remember. And the format was different. These people did not like the new format, and I said, "Well, I think I can write that in about a week or less, one that has the format you like." So I sat down and I wrote all the subroutines to do this COGO–what it was was just simple mathematical calculations–and put it into the format that they liked, which was the old one, and that thing sat around. That's one of those programs that sat around Reclamation for years, and it was COGO-F. The F stood for my last name.

Maybe I should have gone and thought about being a software writer and gone to work for Microsoft and I'd probably be a lot more wealthy than I am today. I really enjoy writing computer

programs, and that was in the days when they were very easy to write.

Storey: How many people were in the computer–

Fite: In that branch there was only two. It's much bigger today. There was myself and a programmer, and he was a converted draftsman, so I had to train him. He was pretty sharp, but he did have some trouble with it. We finally worked it out and became a pretty good team. He was a neat freak, and I was a person who tends to be pretty messy. If you'd open up his desk drawer, everything was in line, all the pencils. One funny experience is he would go berserk when we'd get a new piece of equipment in, because I wouldn't even open up the manual. I'd start operating it. And he'd say, "You're going to break it."

And I said, "Well, Bob, I do this for a reason." I said, "Everybody and their brother is going to be in there operating this thing, and not very many of them are going to read the manual. And I figure we're going to see if we can break it before anybody gets on it." He never did understand me. (laughter)

But I've lost track of him. We stayed in contact for a long time. He retired and went to Hawaii, and I don't even know if he's still alive. He was a neat guy. His name was Bob Rogers. He was a former disk jockey and he had one of those baritone voices that was just perfect for the radio.

Storey: Did you tell me that Mike Thomas retired while you were down there?

Fite: Mike Thomas retired from Salt Lake City.

Storey: So he was the construction engineer?

Fite: He was the office engineer.

Storey: The office engineer all the time you were there?

Fite: Yeah. And then he stayed there. I don't stay around very long in any place, because I get bored and move on. I went to Denver about three years after I'd gone to Phoenix. Mike stayed in Phoenix, I don't remember how long. And then he went up to Salt Lake to be the regional engineer. The structure in the Regional Office, which, by the way, is no longer, but up until about a year ago there was a regional engineer and underneath the regional engineer were a design group, probably a geology, maybe some construction people. What they did is they supported the construction offices. That's a natural progression to go from some Construction Office into a regional engineer's job. That's the same grade level as a project construction engineer. Project construction engineers tend to come from the field side of the business, and the regional engineers tend to come from the office side. So it's kind of the career paths those people went.

Storey: Why did you decide to move?

Fite: I decided to move to Denver to get a grade raise. You're crazy when you're young. You just want to get more and more power and more money.

Storey: More toys.

Moving into the Administration Area Hurt My Career

Fite: More toys. In a way, that hurt my career. When I went from engineering into the administrative area, which data processing is in, it did hurt my career. Maybe. I did get two quick raises out of it, though. I got a 12 and a 13 within three years. But it was really tough to get out of it once you got into it.

Storey: What did you get into?

Fite: Into the data processing. It was tough to go from that part of the organization back to engineering, because you get a stigma about yourself of being an administrative person and a second-class citizen, because you're in that support area. Really interesting dynamics in people's heads.

Storey: Where did you go? What job did you go to in the Denver Office?

Fite: I went into what's called the section head. In the Denver Office there was a division chief, which was a GS-15; branch chiefs, which are GS-14s; and sections underneath the branches, which were 13s. So I went from a GS-12 branch chief in the Arizona Projects Office to a section head, which was a fairly comparable job in Denver as a 13.

That was the first time I had a significant number of people working for me. I think there was six or seven. That was, again, a brand-new section. Darrell Webber, who was the division chief there, which you probably know, was organizing that whole section to be responsive to the users, and part of it he created a huge support branch, and in that

branch there were two sections, a Training Branch and a User Liaison Branch. As Darrell was fond of saying, I had a group of people that were the personal bankers. That was the buzzword at that time.

My Job was the Complaint Department

My job was the complaint department, and I had these six or seven people, and what they did is when somebody had a problem, they would try to solve it. That was my first experience in having a poor employee. There was one employee in there who just was not good. He just was lazy, and technically he couldn't handle it. I inherited all these people, by the way. That was a new experience also. I didn't have a chance to select them. I was a new kid coming in from the field, and Webber was reorganizing everything, and everybody was grabbing up people. Anybody who was kind of weird ended up with me, because nobody wanted them. It was great, because I like creative people. All but this one guy were really good, but they were a little strange because they were creative. They like to do the technical work and they weren't too social.

So here I had this group of people that needed to socialize with people and understand their problem and get it resolved. We worked well together. We split everybody up. Everybody had a region. And then on top of that, we had expertise, certain expertise within these people. Like one person was an expert in the mathematical types of applications and the engineering. That was Dick McKisson, who was kind of an introvert, but he was an engineer and

just technically a whiz. Everybody loved him because he could get right to their problems right away.

I had one guy who did graphics work, a lady who did–I don't remember exactly what she did, but she was really good with the customers. She had a real rapport with them. Then I had Buddy Meyers, who was the slough-off. Everything thing I gave him, the customer would sooner or later call me up and say, "This guy is not getting it done." He finally went to work for the Western Area Power Administration, so he solved his problem by leaving. But we would eventually have had to have fired him.

Storey: What was it like to be a supervisor? How was your time spent?

Experience as a Supervisor

Fite: In Phoenix, the first one, I spent more than half my time just doing the technical work because there was only two of us. When I went to Denver, I spent almost all my time supervising. I did very little of the technical work except supporting the Earthwork Program that I had inherited, so to speak, and a lot of people would still call me on it. And I continued to improve it so that I kept my technical expertise up. But I would say 75 percent of my time was supervision.

I enjoyed that and I enjoyed the interface with the users themselves when they really needed something done. There's something really rewarding about being able to help somebody. But,

of course, obviously the tough part is when you have a poor performer and trying to deal with that. I learned a lot from that. It helped me throughout the rest of my career, because I can deal with a poor performer real easy now. It still gets to you inside, but I know you've got to do it right away and you can't beat around the bush. You've just got to get it on the table.

Storey: How did most of those things resolve themselves?

Fite: Poor performance?

Storey: Yeah.

Fite: Well, they're all unique, obviously. The best of all worlds is when you have an individual that will listen and will change. Most people really do want to do a good job. Buddy Meyers did not. He was a professional screw-off. But most people either don't understand that there's a problem, they're fooling themselves somehow, or just haven't been told. What I find is that most of them just haven't been told. When you sit down and you say, "This is my perception of what's going on, and this is the problem that I think it's causing," most people respond to that very positively. It is important to not be accusatory and use the "you" word. It's important to use the "I" word, that "This is my feeling. I think this," rather than, "You are."

If you do a little studying on it and take a few courses, your job is much easier dealing with poor performance, and you can deal with it in the federal government. You can get rid of people who are

poor performers, and I have done it. It's not that hard. There's a misnomer out there that you can't get rid of somebody that doesn't want to work. You have to work at it. It's a little bit of an effort, but personnel will support you 100 percent.

Storey: Well, once you understand how to do it, it needs to be done.

Fite: Yeah. It's not that hard to do. But I have really found very few people that you have to do that with. Once you sit down and talk about it, you find a couple of things. Usually you find it's a misunderstanding. There was poor communication or something like that. Then the other thing you will find is that the person is not able to do the job because they don't have the background, or they might not have the–it's almost a desire. It may be something that they just personally are not equipped to do mentally, not because they're slow, but they just don't like it.

I've been in that situation where I've gotten jobs where I just don't like what I'm doing. If you find those kinds of things, then you need to work hard with the individual to get them into another job or you need to work hard to get them the background they need to do the job. As long as you're willing to do that as a supervisor, in 90 percent of the cases you'll end up with a productive employee either still working for you or somewhere else. It is silly to lose those people, because the agency has so much invested in them.

Then there's the 10 percent that you truly do need to get rid of. I'm picking percentages out of

the air here, because who knows what the real percentages are. But my guess is that most people are resurrectable.

Storey: What were the major issues confronting your section?

Fite: In Denver?

Storey: Yes. Major problems.

Fite: I don't know that we had any what I would call major issues like I have in my job here today. They were really could we or could we not help the person quickly, and if we could do it quickly, if we could find out if it was a problem within their program or within the operating system and help them work through that, everybody was happy. If we could not, then they were unhappy and you'd just have to double your efforts or they may make an end run to the division chief or something. And then, of course, that comes back down on your head. So there was a little of that, but not much.

Storey: How would you characterize Darrell Webber as a manager and supervisor?

Darrell Webber as a Manager

Fite: I thoroughly enjoyed working for Darrell.[5] Others

5. Darrell Webber participated in Reclamation's oral history program. See Darrell Webber, *Oral History Interviews*, Transcript of tape-recorded Bureau of Reclamation Oral History Interviews conducted by Brit Allan Storey, senior historian, Bureau of Reclamation, Denver, Colorado, in 1993, edited and desk-top published by Andrew H. Gahan, 2012.

did not. Darrell is very straightforward, and he, at least at that point in his career, was real creative. He made things happen and he moved things forward really quick. Over the years, I created a real personal relationship with Darrell. In fact, he's been my mentor for a long time in the organization. He helped me get to where I am today, and I think it's because we have the same values in life.

There at the end I would say that Darrell had gotten bored in his job in the last year or two, and I think my perception–I never did talk with him about it, but my perception was that he enjoyed jetting around the world and dealing with the global people he was dealing with, and left the E&R Center. He didn't pay enough attention to it, and he wasn't willing to accept that the Denver Office had to change. When he was asked to leave, I can understand why he was. It was time for Darrell to go, and Darrell didn't recognize it.

Storey: So you understand that he was asked to retire?

Fite: I think so, yes. I don't know directly. But certainly I'm in a circle where I get a lot of that stuff pretty first-hand, and I believe that Don Glaser asked Darrell to retire.

Storey: Who was the chief engineer when you worked there?

Fite: Barney Bellport was there, I believe.

Storey: Did you meet him?

Fite: I don't believe I ever met him. We obviously all

knew who he was, but I don't think I personally ever met him. There was probably no reason for me to ever meet him.

Storey: Well, from what other people have described about going to the Chief Engineer's Office, it wasn't an experience you wanted most of the time. (laughter)

"Most Managers Were Autocrats"

Fite: Oh, that's true. But, yeah, he was an autocrat, there's no question of that. In that era, most of the managers were autocrats. Darrell Webber tended to be an autocrat, but I never really saw him in that light because of the relationship we had. He brought me in to Denver. He asked me to come in and apply for the job, and like most of us, we don't leave a lot of selections to chance. We do go out and ask people to apply. Now, obviously we can't load it up, but we can ask people to consider it. Darrell did that with the three or four sections that he was filling, and he asked me, and somewhere when I was in the A-D-P Branch out in Phoenix, I had met him and was sort of working with him.

But he was an autocrat. He said, "I want it done this way," and everybody did it that way. But he would listen. I was one of the inner circle people who would go in there and say, "Darrell, I'm not sure this right." And he would listen. My boss could do that, too, Leroy Burton. But others couldn't. You always had that in the organization. It's the informal leadership or chain of command.

Storey: Your boss was Leroy Burton?

Fite: Yeah. He was the branch chief.

Storey: What was he like?

"Leroy [Burton] was the Best Supervisor I ever Had"

Fite: Leroy was probably the best supervisor I've ever had. He was very people oriented, and he was way ahead of his time as far as how to supervise people. He was an autocrat. He used teams. He liked to have a lot of discussion. It wasn't a group decision, but he would bring out all the sides of an issue before he would make a decision. Unfortunately, he died of a stroke while I was working for him. He taught me a lot. He taught me how to handle Buddy Meyers or my performance problems.

Leroy–his brother worked for Reclamation. His brother was a geologist. They were twins. I believe Lynn was his name. I believe Lynn's probably still alive.

It's unfortunate. I remember being in his office one day and he was talking about having a pain in his arm and I said, "Go see a doctor." And about two weeks later, he was in California. I think he was not feeling good there and he came home that evening and had a stroke that evening, and died about a week later.

Storey: What about the technology while you were in the Denver Office? What was going on with it?

Technology was "Speeding Up"

Fite: It was speeding up. Not like it is today. The

technology was at that time in the large central computer systems. If you were at the head of the line in technology, what you had is a huge computer like the CYBER and a thousand terminals connected to it. Everybody was coming into the central processor, and it was processing the jobs. So you had a huge computer room with one or more of these central processing units and disk drives which are like big disks all over the place, tape drives, printers, and then a big console in the middle of all this the operators were running. It was kind of an exciting environment, because there was so much hardware. The hardware was the thing then. Now the software is.

In the middle of all that, I was the branch chief of the section of the User Liaison Section for about two and a half to three years. And then I became the section head over the Software Performance Section. That was the group of people who kept the operating system running. So I had a group of people that were Reclamation employees and subcontractor employees that worked for the Control Data Corporation.

I didn't have a clue how to write the language that they used. It was a different language. So I had to trust them. I had to learn that as a manager, that when they came in and talked with me, I had to sort through whether they were telling me the truth or they were just trying to get me to go somewhere, without having enough background to really know that technology.

The other piece of it was the performance. We had decided to try to increase the performance of the

system, and there were things you could do to it in the way it was configured to make it more efficient. They were Reclamation employees, and I had more background in that. I'd had some training in that, so I understood that better. The former section head that we over the software people worked for me at that point doing the performance part. So we had a juggling of the section heads at that point.

So I was in and out of the computer room continually, and it was kind of an interesting and exciting part of my career. Again, it was a new thing. A lot of my career, as you'll see, has been setting up new things in Reclamation, and I enjoy that. That's why I go out and search those things out.

Storey: That's one of the things I enjoy, particularly, trying to get things started up and working.

Fite: Yeah. And then once they're started working, I get bored with them and I go on.

Storey: It must have been a funny feeling not to be technically expert in what you were supervising.

Fite: It was.

Storey: How did you finally figure out how to do that?

Fite: I really don't know. I thought about it for a while, trying to get technically competent.

END SIDE 1, TAPE 2. DECEMBER 9, 1994.
BEGIN SIDE 2, TAPE 2. DECEMBER 9, 1994.

Storey: I asked you about how you developed a comfort level with managing people whose specialties you weren't technically expert in.

Managing People with Greater Technical Specialties

Fite: I don't know how well I handled that. The part of it that I remember is that I did try to consider becoming technically competent, because that was what I would have been comfortable with. It became real obvious real quick that I wasn't going to be able to do that, because, in the first place, I didn't have the time. When I got started getting into the software, it was so complex that I said, "Well, I just don't have time to spend the time doing this."

And that was an eye-opener, because that was the first time it occurred to me that, yeah, you can manage people that you don't necessarily know their technical–you can't technically do their job. That was a good thing to learn, because that allowed me to go on in my career as I am now as assistant regional director. I manage a lot of people that I couldn't do their job.

What it taught me was that you have to have an ability to sort through what people are telling you with the types of questions you ask to determine whether they're trying to lead you down some path that they personally want to go or they are indeed giving you all the options and asking you to help make a decision on that. That was a tough learning experience, because my background had been technical and, as all engineers, we enjoy the technical part of our jobs and it is tough for us to decide that we're managing.

I think what finally clicked in my head is that you can use your engineering skills to manage. What you need to do is change your thinking away from numbers and calculations to using those same types of things you've learned in engineering to solve a problem, to make a decision, but with people. The way you manage the people, then, are the variables and the numbers are the people. So you use your engineering skills to get people to do the work.

Storey: It must be difficult.

Fite: It is.

Storey: But it's interesting, because universally all of Reclamation's managers say that you need to be technically expert only as a section or a branch chief and beyond that not.

Fite: You can't be, yeah.

Storey: So it works. Well, I would like to continue, but our two hours is up.

Fite: Okay.

Storey: In truth.

Fite: How long are you going to be around here? Because I'm in the process of moving to Yakima.

Storey: Well, I'm leaving for Denver this afternoon.

Fite: I was trying to think of when we're going to connect up again if we're going to continue this.

Storey: Well, what I may have to do is come to Yakima.

Fite: Okay. Yeah, I won't officially be moved there until the week of the 22nd of January. I will be here. I will be on a house-hunting trip next week, and then here the week after that, and then on annual leave. And then I'll effectively be in Yakima starting the first part of January.

Storey: Okay. I'd like to ask you whether it's all right for researchers from inside and outside Reclamation to use these tapes and any resulting transcripts in research.

Fite: Sure.

Storey: Good. Thank you.

END SIDE 2, TAPE 2. DECEMBER 9, 1994.
END OF INTERVIEW.