K-25 Oral History Interview

Date: 9/21/05

Interviewee: L.C. Manley

Interviewer: Mitch Jerald

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Name/Org: Gary W. Snyder 721567_Pro2Serve Date: November 17, 2005

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My name is Mitch Jerald. I am the interviewer. Today’s date is September 21, 2005. I will be interviewing Mr. L.C. Manley for his recollection of activities associated with the K-25, K-25 facilities during the Manhattan Project and during the Cold War Era.

Mr. Manley, can you state your name and spell your name for me?

My name is L.C. Manley. L-C M-A-N-L-E-Y.

Thank you sir. Mr. Manley, where were you born?

Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

Were you living any other place other than Tuscaloosa prior to coming to K-25?

I lived several places prior to coming to K-25. I spent time in Brent, Alabama, Birmingham, Alabama and I served a stint in the U.S. Army.

Where did you work prior to coming to K-25?

Just for hired projects. Places -- Primarily I did, ah, construction work, factory work, and saw mill work. Just about anything to stay alive.

Yeah. Tell me something about your education and your educational background.

I finished high school at Bill County training school, and I spent a stint in the Army. And I came back and spent four years at Stillman College on the G.I. bill.

Stillman. What area? Where’s that located?

Stillman College is located in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

Okay. Do you still have family there in Tuscaloosa?

No close relatives.
Okay. Alright. So when you came here to K-25, were you married?

Yes.

Okay. Did you bring your family immediately here to the Oak Ridge area?

Yes. If you let me elaborate on that a little bit. My father came up here in the early '40's. That's prior to the time that families was able to come up here. And while I was in the service my father moved the family here, and I moved back to Alabama, because I had married already. And I had a family in Alabama.

Did your dad work for K-25?

Yes. He worked at Y-12.

Y-12?

Yes.

How many years did he work there?

Oh, Lord. He came up here first in the early '40's. And he came up with J.A. Jones Construction. And after the construction job ended, he got a job at Y-12. And I -- I'm not sure exactly when he started working at Y-12 to distinguish between his work with the contractor and going to work at Y-12. I really don't have that information.

He -- Your dad lived in the huts.

Yes, he did. Yes, he did.

Did your mom come up?

No. No. She came up in the early '50's while I was in the service.

Okay. Can you -- For your time and what you know about the
huts, can you talk about that community setup that was here?

Manley, L.C.: Well, not in any accurate detail. All I can go on is basically hearsay that they had a certain number of men that lived in the hut. Anywhere from four to eight people I think. And there was a separation for the women that was in the area. There was no families here. And the women and men hutment was separated.

Jerald, M.: So while your dad was here, the family, you guys were still in Alabama.

[06:14]


Jerald, M.: Alabama. Yeah. Okay. Okay. Ah, so the setup for the huts were they had recreation areas. They had all facilities for the family as far as your father living here and all, right?

Manley, L.C.: Well, I -- From my understanding, the basic facility didn’t -- wasn’t built until, you know, I guess the late '40’s, early '50’s. What now we call Jambo (phonetic sp.) Valley where we had recreation. You know, recreation centers, school system and all that. Prior to that, there was no school system here.

Jerald, M.: The huts mainly because there were no families here.


Jerald, M.: So there was no reason. But did he ever talk about going to work, accessing the buses, or how did he get out to the plants being inside the secret city.

[07:16]

Manley, L.C.: Well, since my dad was a non-driver, he used the bus system and later on they used carpools. I’m trying to think. Shortly around '53, between '53 and '58 they cut out the bus system.

Jerald, M.: So when they cut out the bus system, what was the -- You had to have your own car.

Manley, L.C.: Carpooling. My dad carpooled, and I carpooled the early years that I -- when I first came up.
Alright. Getting back to your career, what put your mind to wanting to come here to work at the Oak Ridge facility?

Well, number one I had family here plus the fact that after graduating from Stillman I had a difficult time finding a job.

Being a college graduate you had a difficult time finding a job.

Yes. Yes. Very difficult time.

What was your degree in?

Social science.

Social science.

Yes.


Well, what brought me here was having family here. My dad says, "Well, son, since you're out of work, come up and maybe you can get on at one of the plants." And so that's what motivated me to come up, being out of work and the possibility of getting a job here.

Okay. And explain to me. When you arrived at the secret city, if we can call it that at that time. What was your recollection as to what did you picture in your mind? What did you see? Can you elaborate on that a little?

Well, it was -- I saw a unique situation. All blacks lived in one area, you know. Even though segregation was the norm in the south, in Alabama at least black lived all over town. But once I got here, we were just confined to one area.

So what years was it that you showed up here and came for that employment?

1958.


Jerald, M.: So was that the year that you got employment working at X-10?

Manley, L.C.: No. I -- After getting here, I was very disappointed because I wasn't able to get a job at the plant. I worked at the hospital between '58 and '62.

Jerald, M.: Okay. '62. So your employment here at the reservation at the plant area was what? Sixty --


Jerald, M.: Okay. Alright. So did you live with your dad and your family at that time, or did you have your own house?

Manley, L.C.: When I first moved up there while I worked at the hospital I lived with my dad. And then I brought my family up here in '62.

[10:57]

Jerald, M.: Okay. Can you elaborate on when you hired on? How was it the group atmosphere with fellow co-workers? Can you elaborate on some of that?

Manley, L.C.: Ah, that's --


Manley, L.C.: With the college degree I was able to get a job as a janitor. There were no other employment beyond janitorial and labor-type work for blacks from '62 up until -- I guess when was it? '64, '63 or '64. My dates might be a little wrong. But '63 or '64. Someone lit a fire under someone, and they started looking for blacks that had education or a craft-type skill to move into other positions other than labors and janitors.

Jerald, M.: How long did it take you? So you were given the opportunity of a promotion? Or you were transitioned up?

[12:17]
Manley, L.C.: Well, it's sort of a strange thing working as a janitor. And the supervisor stopped by and told me that a man named Banker wanted to talk with me and Melvin Ceramic. And after my talk with him, the interview I would guess, he offered me a chance to come in to replace a co-op student. Ah, they had I guess requisitioned a co-op student for six months, and he didn't show for one reason or another. And I worked as a co-op student for six months. I worked in the co-op student's place for six months. And I was sent back to the janitorial force, and I stayed with the janitorial force about three months, and they hired me. I got a call from Mr. Baker, and he called me back for a permanent job with the Milton Ceramic division.

Jerald, M.: Okay. During your tenure there in the beginning, can you recall any of the senators, the president? Did any famous people come through while you were there?

Manley, L.C.: Oh, yes. Several senators and so forth came through. I guess the most noted one to come through was President Carter.

[13:55]

Jerald, M.: President Carter?

Manley, L.C.: Yes.

Jerald, M.: Okay. Okay. Did -- Give me some ideas as far as the things that you liked there. The things that you would like to remember. Some of the vivid thoughts that you can think about being there at that time. Some good times.

Manley, L.C.: Ah, good times? Well, you know, that's -- When you think of going to work, you know, it's rather difficult for me to just come up with any grand or happy time, you know. A job was a job. You show up. You do what you're supposed to do and go home.

Jerald, M.: Being a laborer, janitor, were there times when you were asked to clean certain areas that you were suspicious about what you were having to clean up? You didn't know what that was, but you figured it was something nasty?

Manley, L.C.: Well, I was in a position to be able to understand, you know, all the safety rules and regulations. So I don't think I put myself into harms way as far as dealing with some of the things that I had heard about in the past where they would put laborers and so forth in ditches that were highly contaminated. And doing cleanup...
behind people that didn’t give them the proper clothing or proper protection. Ah, as time went on, the regulations for safety changed somewhat, because early in my career, we used a lot of hydrocarbons for degreasing metals.

And today -- under today’s standard, those -- We couldn’t have used the hydrocarbons in the way that I -- that we were using back in those days. You know, targulene (phonetic sp.), xylene, and all those hydrocarbons were very casually used. You know, with a minimum of ventilation. No -- The rules and regulations back then that you had to have a certain amount of hood ventilation. But things about getting those hydrocarbons on your skin was very questionable about the practices with it that was used at that time. So --

Jerald, M.: Working conditions, working environment. Was it safety conditions, safety for -- just typical safety? Was all that satisfiable (phonetic sp.) for you?

[17:26]

Manley, L.C.: Well, basically satisfiable at that particular time. But look, like I say, the rules and safety changed somewhat. And looking back on them now, the safety rules that we had back in the early ’60’s just wouldn’t cut it today.

Jerald, M.: Yeah. Yeah. What did you like most about working there? If you don’t think you’ve already kind of responded to that. What do you think you liked about it?

Manley, L.C.: What I liked most about when I was there at the hospital making a dollar an hour. And when I went to the plant I was making two dollars an hour. Inflation set in. [laughter] So you know, it was an economic factor with me. You know, I guess I worked hard and struggled hard all my life. And doing the things that fellas (phonetic sp.) was doing as technicians, that -- You know, that was a move up. That was a real move up now.

You know, the work -- The work situation compared to some of the things -- I don’t know whether you’ve been around a factory or not or know what the works like. The heat condition and everything in the factory. It’s just no comparison between, you know, being a technician at the lab and working at the factory in Birmingham.
Jerald, M.: I can imagine. My granddad worked there in a steel factory. Ah, so tell me what you disliked most about working there on the reservation.

Manley, L.C.: Well, you know, I guess the thing that upset me a great deal was the inequities and the way promotions was carried out. I think -- And also the hiring of minorities. That was one of the common complaints of mine the entire 30 years that I was there. It seemed as though the lab official would get a token, a certain number of black female in a position and feel like well, we've met what is recommended. And I just didn't feel like that was the proper attitude for either the officials at the local plant, either Union Carbide or Lockey (phonetic sp.) Martin to have.

Jerald, M.: Along those lines, it was kind of like meeting a quarter mainly from a standpoint of quantity. And as far as advancement, especially you, advancement to me it seemed like it would have been pretty easy for you being a college graduate. But I guess you saw other friends and acquaintances that went through the same thing.

Manley, L.C.: Well, you know. Like I said, the number of minorities in -- and then Melvin Ceramic was very few. And promotions came very slow. So you know, they -- I have the feeling it was almost a situation where the supervision had to be pushed into a situation where an individual would -- well, I should say a minority would be upgraded to.

Jerald, M.: What -- Your fellow co-workers, were they friendly?

Manley, L.C.: Well, you know. A situation like that, you always going to find some people that's friendly, and you gonna find some people that, that they're difficult to get along with. You know. I guess I knew how to handle myself in both situations.

Jerald, M.: Yeah. Ah, so co-workers on a daily basis and communication, was it basically routine as to communicating? Knowing what your tasks were? Was it easy for you to do your task?
Manley, L.C.: Well, I found my situation to be a situation where I worked directly for a metalurgist (phonetic sp.). And in fact, might one or two that would rather not have worked for, but there was others that I thought was just they were good people.

Jerald, M.: Yeah. Yeah. Okay. Supervisors were good people?

Manley, L.C.: Yeah. I worked -- My relationship was directly from -- I'd go in and the metalurgist that I worked for, we would go over why the experiment, what experiment he wants done. And we'd talk about what procedures that we would use in order to get that job done. And I'd go out and implement it and then bring the data back to the PhD. So with the other technicians -- I wasn't with a group of technicians. All of my working experience, it was basically I worked for either one or two metalurgist.

[24:35]

Jerald, M.: So this basically the time of the Cold War Era.

Manley, L.C.: Yes.

Jerald, M.: Were things still segregated?

Manley, L.C.: Well, like I say, basically they start the desegregation. I don't know what little fire found them, because you know, it might be some feel that since this was a government run area that segregation wasn't a problem. But that's just so far from being true.

Jerald, M.: So you can tell me about the cafeteria. Was it still segregated in the cafeteria that you were attending? Your --

Manley, L.C.: Well, they opened up the cafeteria about the same time they open up -- They changed water fountains. When I first started to work there, water fountain was segregated. Restrooms was segregated. The change house was segregated. So around '63 or '64, a drastic change was made. Because we didn't even have black truck drivers. You know, a black man could not drive a truck at X-10. And I'd assume the same thing was true at the other three plants.

[26:12]

Jerald, M.: And that was -- As far as segregation, that was even the cafeteria area.
Manley, L.C.: That includes everything.

Jerald, M.: Everything?

Manley, L.C.: You a man from the south. You know what the south was like when even -- You’re a much younger man than I am, but you got a feel for what was happening in the late ‘50’s and early ‘60’s.

Jerald, M.: You know, sometimes, and I -- It really didn’t even make any sense for a government to come in with a plan and implement it like that. I don’t know what, but I sure -- This is your interview.

Manley, L.C.: Well, you know, I guess the government basically had to appease the area. This was a segregated area. What I mean back -- Was it ’55, ’56 that things were so drastic here in the general area, they decided to blow up the Clinton High School. And by blowing up the Clinton High School would let you know that the surrounding area had the same mentality that the people in Alabama, Mississippi, and wherever else had.

[27:40]

Jerald, M.: So you do --

Male: I’m going to stop you for a minute so I can change the tape, because you’re just rolling on here. This is so good.

Jerald, M.: You’re doing good man. We got to change tape.


Jerald, M.: We got a 30 minute.

Manley, L.C.: Well, I’m rambling on too long.

Jerald, M.: No. No. No. No. You are doing excellent. This is what I’m -- When you brought up the Clinton thing --

[End of Tape 1]
[crew talk]

[00:34]
Mr. Manley, let’s talk again about how the area was set up, established based on segregated rules and how you feel that kind of influence or was the setup of the hut community or the living quarters of the people here, was that mainly established from how you think the area, the living conditions were already established? By that, I mean when I look at a segregated government facility established by the government, how do you think that kind of influenced the surrounding community as far as high schools. Can you talk about that?

You know, if a group of people that’s got the mentality to blow up a high school, they -- they won’t have the mentality to -- to -- to accept integration. You can take -- a good example, Oak Ridge High School started their integration well ahead of any other school system in the area. And -- and the black kids that -- that played basketball, that’s about the best example, they -- they couldn’t travel with the basketball team. And -- and they could only play against a team if the team approved of it when the team visited Oak Ridge. So -- so, you see, when you -- when you try to look at things [laughing] what happened then versus things happening today, it -- it just, you know, just no real comparison because, you know. If you want to look at the government bein’ segregated, when I served in the United States army during the Korean War, segregation was the rules of the day then. Although Truman had already declared that the armed services would not be segregated. I was -- but the -- with the Bailey Bridge (phonetic sp.) outfit and the reserve outfit from World War II that came out of Little Rock, Arkansas, and there was a reserve outfit that had been compliment our company, we had barracks right across from one another. And they -- though the guys from Mississippi wouldn’t eat in the same mess hall with ‘em. And that was, of course, a fight everytime you look around. But that’s beside -- sort of besides the point.

Get -- get wrapped up in what I’m talkin’ about.

That’s good information. I want you to share that. So I can’t help but reflect back on -- because when you come up here and your dad pretty much established himself here, how did your dad, at
what point and what time did he take his family and more or less move out of the hut community? How did that happen?

[4:36]
Manley, L.C.: Well -- well the only -- that only transpired after the government built what we know now as Gamble Valley (phonetic sp.).
Jerald, M.: Gamble Valley is where?
Manley, L.C.: In the Scarborough area.
Jerald, M.: Scarborough?
Jerald, M.: That was -- I guess at that time, those were great times because that gave families a chance to --

[5:06]
Jerald, M.: -- come together?
Jerald, M.: And was that the end of the huts as per se?
Jerald, M.: Okay. I want to ask you this. So Scarborough community was basically a community that was set up -- was a segregated community?
Jerald, M.: By design --
Manley, L.C.: Yes.
Jerald, M.: -- it was just like the huts. It was just an area set there, set aside for the blacks that worked at the plant?

Jerald, M.: To live?


Jerald, M.: Okay. Right now, did the people in Scarborough community, after the community was established, could they branch out and live in other sections of the town?

Manley, L.C.: Well, I -- I guess the first group of blacks moved out of Scarborough, moved into the other section, areas of town, it had to be somewhere around '60 -- it was after '65 anyway. It was mid to late '60s.


Manley, L.C.: A challenging assignment? I guess when I was sent to work with the AVILISC (phonetic sp.) Project, I thought that turned out to be rather challenging. I got a chance to [laughing] work on -- on something that I thought should’ve been real important, but.

Jerald, M.: It was, right?

Manley, L.C.: Well -- well, it could’ve been, but -- but it went the way of the centrifuge. We got -- we got out of the business of enriching uranium.

Jerald, M.: And call the name of that job title, that task was called what now?

Manley, L.C.: AVILISC. Atomic Vaporization -- oh, God, I can’t remember all that, but it dealt with vaporizing uranium and using laser to -- well -- well, I don’t think I can go into a whole lot of detail about, but vaporizing uranium.

Jerald, M.: And your job involvement, your surrounding, was all satisfactory for you at that time? Was it?
Well, I -- I don't think -- well, you know, basically, people don't change. It -- you -- you might change a situation, but people never -- in my experience, they don't change. You have your good, your bad, and your ugly, you know.

Yeah. As time passed and you touched on this, but as far as being a minority within the K-25 facility and all, groups -- did your friends and everybody else fair out, did most of them buy homes in the Scarborough community and everybody fare well?

I think at one time, Scarborough was just about 100% homeowners, you know. Once the government released the houses, you know, for purchase, I expect, you know, people bought up in Scarborough stuff.

All right. Is there anything else that you want to touch on as far as your career and when you started, things were really changing. That's when you made the statement that seemed like something lit a fire under the plan, the government plan is to do things like it should've been established in the beginning.

Right.

Did you feel or see any resentment toward that, those changes? Can you expand on that 'cause it would've had to have been.

Well -- well -- well, you know, that -- that -- (indiscernible) me, it showed a lot of, to me, a lot of thing that were hid that they said, well, you got to have a certain background in order to get -- do certain things. You have to have so much science in order to become a technician. You got to have this. You know, just a whole lot of little things that they'd put on paper and -- and you get into a situation and you find out some of your -- your co-workers had less than a high school education. I doubt but 1% of them had a college degree.

And when you say co-workers, you're meaning the whites?

Well -- well, technic -- I'm dealing with co-workers talking specific like about technician that -- that was working for other metallurgists. And also you think things like not only on the work
situation when you’re talkin’ ‘bout the inequality of the situation of that day. We -- we couldn’t [laughing] belong to a bowling team. One of the reasons why I took up golf on purpose was to break down the -- the situation of blacks not playing golf. I was -- I was one among the first four -- first four black from the plant to -- to -- to join a bowling team. Of course, we had some whites that was basically pullin’ for this other thing, but then, there was a lot -- another group that frowned on it, you know, so. That’s the reason I made the statement earlier about, you know, in a situation you involve yourself in, you gonna find the good. And the bad goin’ to be there, also. And you just have to learn how to deal with it.

[12:45]

Jerald, M.:  
Spouses, your kids, how did, from a family standpoint, did the wives and the kids happy times for them? Was it just typical family life, or? Can you talk a little bit about that?

[13:05]

Manley, L.C.:  
Well -- well, after I get my family up here and especially got on that plant where the economic situation was better, I -- it was good times for them because the change in the economic situation. And by the time that my kids moved up here, they -- they -- they integrated the junior high and high school system. So -- so my oldest kids, they -- she -- she started at Robertsville (phonetic sp.), but the elementary school still segregated. Even in the early ‘60s.

Jerald, M.:  
Yeah. Yeah. So from a standpoint of having good teachers, Oak Ridge -- Oak Ridge had the good teachers?

Manley, L.C.:  
Yeah. Yeah. I -- I guess I can vouch for Oak Ridge schools bein’ one of the best, well, all four of my kids, they’re college graduates and all away from just -- just the BAs to PhDs, so. And they -- when they went off to college, they -- they didn’t have any problems.

Jerald, M.:  
Well, tell --.

Manley, L.C.:  
You know, with the academics.

[14:58]
So how many kids do you have?

The four.

Four? All of them college graduates?

Yeah. Uh-huh. (affirmative)

Tell me about that.

[laughing] Well, that was just one of the things that we stressed, you know, my wife and I, and she, my wife was sort of the sheriff of that department. You know, she was the one that enforced whatever rules we set down.

And your kids? Tell me about their degrees, their graduate certificate. Talk about it.

Yeah, the -- the oldest girl got a Master's and she works in Inkston (phonetic sp.), Michigan as a social worker. And the next girl, she -- she got her PhD and she’s the librarian nowadays at X-10. And my -- my oldest son, he got his own business. He does -- he’s a computer -- a computer programmer and he programs system for -- for oh, now [laughing]. Well, he does a lot of work for casinos in a way, where they -- their security system. And he done a lot of work for some of the rich and famous. What they have in large houses, security and their system of -- entertainment system, a huge entertainment system. That’s one of the notable. He did one of Oprah Winfrey’s latest houses, last -- one of the last ones she built out in L.A., so.

You gotta be proud of that!

Oh, yeah. And the youngest boy, he’s a salesman. He sells connector system for computer connector system for -- for -- for Gortex (phonetic sp.), of all things. I -- I didn’t realize -- I thought Gortex just made fabrics, but they into electronics also.

Great! With the system, the way you had your family life structured and the wife, and I know her personally; I can see that in her. And I met a couple of your kids this past week. And man, you gotta be proud, especially from how you come up here, you establish yourself, you got four kids, and each one of them’s a college graduate. I think that’s a hat off to you and your wife.
Like they say, you know, they got this thing about no pass, no -- no play, my wife made that a long time ago, long before I came up -- she told the boys, you know, you wanna play sports, you got to get your homework first. They didn’t bring in passing grades, they didn’t play.

Yeah. Yeah. That’s great! Anything you would like to close on?

Not that I can think of other than thanking you for this opportunity here. You know, I -- I guess I’ll leave here and think of a million other things that I could say -- could’ve said, but -- but you know, that’s.

Yeah, well, there are things that we might be able to approach at a later time that you and I talk about sometimes anyway, but I want to thank you, too. I think it was a great interview.

Well, I hope it’s something you can use.

I think it’s something the DOE, Bechtel-Jacobs can use for their archives. You shared some great information. And we can close.

[End of Interview]