

LINE WORK AT DWP

WARNER HOWARD RAMSEY

Interviewed by Dick Nelson

One of a series of oral histories covering the growth and development of the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power as seen by the participants - its employees.

Produced by

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Biographical Notes

Warner Howard Ramsey

Born in Whittier, California on November 17, 1911.

Parents: Allan W. and Annie M (Warner) Ramsey.

Sister: One.

Married: Zelda (NMI) Meadows, 1955 in Van Nuys, California.

Children: Patricia Lee (Ramsey) Decano and Geraldine Ann Ramsey from first marriage.

Grandchildren: Four.

Warner served in the merchant Marine from 1942 - 1945.

Warner joined the Department of Water and Power in March, 1938 as a Laborer. Retired December 1976 as General Superintendent Transmission, Trouble and Street Light.

This is to certify that I have reviewed this transcript and attest that it is true and accurate. Also, by my witnessed signature below, I grant the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, or its designee(s), sole right to use this material in any way, and for any purpose, it deems appropriate.

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**TAPE NUMBER: 1, SIDE ONE**

**WARNER H. RAMSEY**

**GIVEN WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 22, 1992**

**AT**

**HIS HOME IN NEWHALL, CALIFORNIA**

**THE INTERVIEWER IS DICK NELSON**

**NELSON:** Okay Warner, why don't you start off by telling us where you were born and when and your early years.

**RAMSEY:** Okay, Dick. Well I was born in Whittier, California, on November 17, 1911. When I was about a year old, the folks moved

to the Owens Valley due to my father's health. We lived on a homestead about a half a mile north of North Haiwee Reservoir. We lived there until World War I when my father got a job at Cartago in a soda plant. I became six years old and went to my first school at the Little Red School House in Olancho. I went to school there one year. The next year they had a school in Cartago.

Along towards the end of World War I, the family moved to Lone Pine. My dad had been a photographer in Whittier. He opened a studio in Lone Pine. I went all through the rest of grammar school, second grade, through high school in Lone Pine. In 1930 three days after I graduated from high school, another boy and I went over to Keeler and applied for a job up at the Cerro Gordo Mine. Tom Chapman was the superintendent. I think to find out whether we wanted to work or not, he put us to work working over the road that goes up to Cerro Gordo. It was a dirt road, very steep with many big boulders. We were given big sledge hammers and we broke those boulders up for about a week. I guess he decided we wanted to work so he put us to work in the mine.

I worked in the mine for a year as a mucker and made myself enough money to go to UCLA for a year. In those days my folks couldn't help me and I had to pay my own room and board so I could only go for one year.

Shortly after that I went to the Hemphill Diesel School on San Fernando Road and Verdugo. I was there for three or four months learning about diesel engines. I went back up to Lone Pine and got a job with Owens Valley Electric which was owned by a

fellow named Art Stringer who was a very capable and knowledgeable fellow. We did everything -- electric wiring, motor rebuilding, plumbing. Art was a good teacher. I learned a lot from him.

I worked for several years for Art. While I was working for him, I got married. We had two daughters. One day while I was working for stringer, Charlie Southy, who was the foreman of the patrolmen in the Owens Valley, came down to talk to me about going to work for the Department. He said, "They wouldn't be able to pay me as much as Stringer was paying, but it would be a way of getting started with the Department." So after giving Stringer notice that I was going to leave and go to work for the Department, I was hired as a laborer and put to work as a Patrolman's Helper with Mose Ruiz in Lone Pine.

After working with Mose for about a week, I said, "Mose how do you learn to climb?" He said, "Do you really want to learn to climb?" I said, "Well if I'm going to be in this business, I might as well find out how you get ahead, I want to learn." So out of a bunch of old hooks, belts and tools that were in the patrol shack, he got me an outfit together. I learned to climb poles. We'd put in services, replace broken insulators on the telephone line, any work that was not high voltage. Moze would be the helper.

I got pretty good at climbing and one day we ended up patrolling the line west of Haiwee and headed home to Lonepine. I always looked for broken telephone insulators because I was anxious to use those hooks any time I could have an excuse to put them on. I was up changing broken insulators on the telephone

line and Mose was standing down by the truck. A Chevrolet, black coupe, pulled up behind our truck and a fellow got out and was talking to Mose as I finished the work. When I came down Mose said, "Warner, I want you to meet Ivan Bateman. He's our big boss." So Ivan kind of looked at me and then looked at Mose. Mose said, "He's learning the business." Nothing more was said about it.

Working up in the Owens Valley, even though I was just a laborer and working as a helper, I got to climb a lot. I think it was nine months after I went to work, I filed for the Lineman examination. I really didn't qualify. I just put down what I had been doing, climbing poles and doing line work. I received a notice to come down and take the lineman's exam. I drove down from Lone Pine. The exam was being held at the Wall Street Power System yard. It was raining cats and dogs that day. I walked over with my tools and I heard the inspectors, the men giving the examination, talking and they said, "Well nobody's going to show up today, why don't we just fold it up and leave." So I walked up to them and I told them, "I've come all the way down from the Owens Valley to take this exam. I'd like to take it." They said, "Well we'll see what kind of a lineman you are. Climbing in the rain, I had to pick out the hardware to install a cross arm. When I got through, they really gave me an examination. At that time the State Code was GO 64A. Now it's GO 95, but I knew that book by heart. I had really studied that and everything about line work. Well to make a long story short, I passed 115 on the list. I didn't think I'd ever get a call, but soon after the exam, I got



a call to work on the telephone line going to Boulder. Our camp was at Silverlake near Baker. Mac Keeney was the camp boss.

I was working for a foreman by the name of Ezell. I don't know his first name now, but Ezell had a drinking problem and he was just about to be fired from the Department. So working on his gang, we went out first in the morning and we were the last ones in at night. Sometimes we didn't have time to take a shower or clean up before it was time to eat. After two or three weeks of batting on arms, I knew how to do that. I went to Mac one night and knocked on the door of his tent and said, "Mac, you know this is my first job as a lineman. I know how to put on arms, is there any chance to get on a wire-stringing crew?" He said, "Well somebody has got to put on arms." I said, "Okay Mac, thanks a lot."

The next morning when we got out to get on the trucks, Mac called me over and said, "You get on Cy Wiggins' crew." That was a wire stringing crew. I worked on that until the job was done and we finally finished up in Boulder City. I went back to the Owens Valley when that job was done, McCullough was the boss up there. When I left, he said, "Go ahead take the job, well have something for you when you come back." I had no Civil Service rating. Laborer didn't mean anything. Mac put me back working for the Department. In a few months I got another call as a lineman to a job building the "shu fly" at Victorville for the third Boulder line.

**NELSON:** What is a "shu fly"?

**RAMSEY:** A shu fly is a line to take all the high voltage lines away from the switching station and just bypass it on both sides. The station had to be rebuilt for the third Boulder line.

**NELSON:** Would that be in case of an emergency at the station?

**RAMSEY:** No. This is to rebuild the station for the third line. At that time there was only Boulder 1 and 2 line. This was going to be the Boulder 3 line. I called down and asked about the job. A D & C clerk, his name was Fitzpatrick, said, "It's the middle of the summer and it is hot out here and incidentally they're 100' poles and steel arms. Think you can cut it?" Oh boy. Any pole up in the Owens Valley, if it was 50' high, was a high one. So I said, "Yes, I'll take it." Well I had to be down there on Monday and I'll tell you all weekend I sweat over that and my hands were perspiring all the way down, driving, worrying about these 100' poles, and whether I'd be able to cut it. They sent me out to Victorville and I went to work.

Our first job was to dismantle a test structure. These were H structures with steel arms that were bolted together. The poles and crossarms were the material for the shu fly we were going to build. I went up about 2/3 of the way up the poles to take the steel arms. Then it was time to go clear on up to the top, I got up there and looked down and I thought, "Oh gosh, is this all there is to it?" The 100 foot didn't bother a bit.

It took a couple of months to finish the shu fly around the Victorville Switching Station. When we finished that job we were

assigned the job of installing guard structures for the third Boulder line. Guard structures are built to protect roads and other lines where the conductors for the new transmission line would cross over them.

Don Haremza, our foreman, arranged for me to run the crew installing the guard structures from Victorville to Acton. He ran the crew from Acton to Receiving Station E in the San Fernando Valley.

Before we finished installing the guard structures, I received a permanent call as Line Patrolman at Independence. I worked for McCullough again. Mac took a liking to me and whenever there was anything special they were doing, I got called off the gang and I'd go with him.

I remember going up there to West Portal where they had some alarms that were where the water came out of Grant Lake and into the aqueduct. I worked with him on that and other troubleshooting jobs. He was always very good to me. In 1941 I got bumped as line patrolman and had to go back to Van Nuys as a lineman.

While working in Van Nuys as a lineman, I got laid off at the early part of the war. The Department was short of material. I bummed around the country, worked out in Las Vegas, Barstow, Oakland, and at Camp Parks. As a lineman, I worked out of Local 6 in San Francisco as an electrician. While I was there I went into the Merchant Marine. I spent over two years in the Merchant Marine. When I came back and was living at Lone Pine, I worked for a fellow named Tom Schwab repairing radios and juke boxes. Tom Witt at that time was the electrical superintendent in the

Owens Valley. He came to see me two or three times and finally got me to go back to work for the Department.

Three days after I went to work, we were taking down the lines around Manzanar at the Japanese Relocation Center. I got caught underneath a load of poles and got my left leg broken. I was off for seven months. I went back to work for Tom Longbauer, who was the line foreman in the Owens Valley. When I first went back to work, I wasn't climbing, I worked more like the bull grunt on the crew.

**NELSON:** What is a "bull grunt?"

**RAMSEY:** He is the lead helper on a big line gang, usually fourteen men or more. The lead helper or the man that lays the material out is called the "bull grunt." "Tom, I think I ought to start climbing." "No, no take you time," he said. Because my leg would swell up up above my boots every night and it would be almost twice as big as the rest of my leg. We were working west of Haiwee one day, they had a new lineman on the crew and we were going up to make some hot taps. I told Tom, "I'm going to work. I'm going to start climbing." So I went up with this fellow and we made the taps and from then on I was expected to climb just like all the rest of the guys. There was no more bull grunt.

Shortly after that we were working next to the Gorge up above Bishop and the wind was blowing hard. Whenever the hand line would get away from the helper, it would blow way out so you had to put a wrench or a hammer on it to weight it down so he could

get a hold of it again. Tom Witt came up there and hollered up at me. I couldn't hear what he was saying because the wind was blowing so hard, so he motioned for me to come down. He said, "Warner, you've got a call as a line foreman down at Van Nuys. Do you want to take it, or do you want to think about it?" I said, "I'll take it."

So on the 5th of July, 1948 another lineman, Ralph Smith, who was in the Owens Valley, and myself, (he was a patrolman and I was working as a lineman) came down to Van Nuys and went to work for Roy Sissen, who was the superintendent. I was given a heavy gang and the first day out all I had was a flat bed truck with a couple of tool boxes on it, a whole bunch of line, blocks and tools and four linemen and two helpers. They gave me some jobs to do and we went out in the field to do line work.

Everybody else in the yard had a line truck. They had a pickup and they had a station wagon to haul the men in. We got out on the job and the guys said, "Is this how we're going to work every day?" I said, "I'm new down here, I'll see what I can do?" The fellows pointed out what the other crews had for equipment. When I went in I said, "Roy, we've got to have a pick-up. We've got to have something better for the men to ride in. I can't expect them to ride up in the back end of the truck."

It took time to get the equipment because there was just so much work to do and so many gangs. I finally got a full crew and one day we finished up a job early. I guess I'd been on the job as a foreman there for almost a year. We finished early and so I said, "Go in the yard fellows and load up the material for

tomorrow." I went into the office. I asked Mr. Sisson, "You know when I worked here as a lineman for Paul Hampshire, they had a sheet that they used to rate the forman. How they did their jobs."

**NELSON:** Performance evaluation?

**RAMSEY:** Yes, and whether you did the job within the estimates, etc. I said, "Do you still have that?" He said, "We don't do that any more, but we do have cost sheets on the jobs." I said, "Can I see it?" He said, "Yes." I said, "You know Roy, I've been on this job as a foreman now for almost a year and nobody's ever even come out to see me." He said, "You know we're awful busy." I said, "I just wondered why." He said, "Well if things weren't going right, we'd have been out there, you can bet on that."

I should skip back a little bit. I guess we'd been there about a month or two and one day the word came around to me that Roy Sissen had said, "You know I don't know what's going to happen to this department. Now they send me a couple of grunts down from the Owens Valley to be foremen." Well I found out that Ralph and I had passed the examination higher than a lot of the temporary foremen they had working there and that there was a lot of really ill feelings about it when we took their jobs. I didn't realize it because I was so busy trying to do the job.

When I got around to asking Roy about this evaluation, he told me that things were going fine. When he finally retired he called me in and said, "Warner, I want to thank you. You're the

only foreman that's been in this yard that we haven't had the gang in here complaining about something." I said, "That makes me feel good. Don't think we haven't had a lot of problems though, but I thought it was my duty to take care of these problems out in the field and that's how we did it." He said, "Don't think we don't appreciate it."

That made me feel pretty good. Finally they cut back a little bit and I had a light-heavy gang for a while. We had another foreman in the yard that moved up to a superintendent's job. He was Duane Romines and he was going to take the job as superintendent of street light. He asked me to come in and take a foreman's job. The present foreman, Mickey Walker, was retiring and he wanted me to come in and take that job. I knew very few people in the Department before moving to the Street Light Section.

I came down from the Owens Valley, worked several years at Van Nuys, but when I transferred to street light the work I had to do there put me in touch with many people. I had to go down to the shops at Main Street, over to the main office at Boylston. That was all under Mac Keany. He was General Superintendent of Transmission, Trouble and Street Light. We worked with all of them. I really got acquainted. Probably one of the best things that ever happened to me because that way I got to know many people, bosses and all.

So from street light, I got a call as Assistant Superintendent. My first job was in overhead down in District 7 which was on Wall Street. My first day was August 8, 1954. From there I

worked in several overhead Districts. Mac Keany wanted me to come to work for Transmission and Trouble. I went to work as Assistant Superintendent of Transmission and I worked for Barney Chambers. Barney was a great guy, a good guy to work with.

I finally got a chance to move over as Bill Wagner's assistant in Electric Trouble. I learned a lot from him and in those days we were allowed to administer our own disciplinary action. We didn't have to go up to the engineer in charge for his approval. We took care of it and I think that was the best way to handle it because you knew the man. I can remember one time I had Slim Edwards working over at Main Street, he'd gotten in trouble, got drunk, and had an accident with the Department car. He had his driver's license taken away. He couldn't be a patrolman without a driver's license so I sent him down to Station B to work on the washer. He didn't have to drive a vehicle to work on the washer. Ted Blakesly had his office in the back building. I was walking down the hall and Ted, our Principal Engineer, saw me go by. He called me in and asked me, "Warner about Slim Edwards trouble?" I said, "What about it Ted?" He said, "Well I just wondered about it." I explained to him what had happened and what I had done. I said, "As far as I'm concerned, he's a valuable man to the Department. When somebody gets to be a patrolman, all the training, etc. this will probably do him good. He's six months down there in the washer, he'll get his license back and he'll be a good employee." "Okay, Warner," he said and that was it.

Then we had Edward Robinson. He was a 34.5 kv patrolman. Went down to Culver City one day, was drunk and wrecked a



Department car. I gave him thirty days off without pay. He always thought well of me. He said, "Warner, I certainly appreciate you saving my job for me."

While I was there as Assistant Superintendent, Dan Greenwood and Barney Chambers were ahead of me. They weren't very old and I'm looking to get myself a job as a full superintendent. My chances to advance were pretty slim. I looked over to in the overhead group where you've got all these old superintendents that are going to retire or have to retire when they're 65, so I went to Mac Keany and I said, "Mac I want to transfer to Overhead as soon as there is an opening over there." He said, "What's the matter, don't you like it here?" I said, "Sure I like it here, but I'm looking at all those old guys over there and I look at these young guys around here, I never will make superintendent if I stay here."

Well he wouldn't let me go so I thought, I'll "take the bull by the horns." I asked him a couple of times and finally I wrote a memo to Herb Kinch, who was the General Superintendent of Overhead. So Herb called Kearny and said, "I got one of your guys over there that wants to transfer." Well I'll tell you, Mac really chewed me out, but anyway he said, "If that's the way you feel about it, okay."

So I transferred to Overhead and I finally worked up to and became General Superintendent of Overhead. I followed Warren Bacon on that job, he was ahead of me. I was there several years. Dan Greenwood was the General Superintendent of Transmission Trouble. That's where I thought I'd like to be when I retired.

It was a different kind of work and when Dan retired, I was given that job up. That's where I worked until I retired.

**NELSON:** Warner, let's pick up a few things here, questions. When your family moved to the Owens Valley initially, your father had been in photography in Whittier, was he a photographer in the Owens Valley at that time?

**RAMSEY:** Well when they moved to Lone Pine, they moved there with the intention of having a studio which he did. In those days there were soda plants on the Owens Lake and lots of Hispanics. Hispanics are great for family pictures and family portraits of the whole family. Then he did a lot of scenic work. A lot of his stuff is Ansel Adams type of work and there's quite a few of his pictures in the museum in Independence.

**NELSON:** What happened to his negatives?

**RAMSEY:** Well a lot of his work I left when we sold the house in Lone Pine after my mother passed away. The fellow that bought it was Mr. Jacoby. I should have saved a lot of dad's pictures but I didn't. It didn't mean too much to me then, now I wish I had. But at that time, I had no place to put or store them. Mr. Jacoby gave a lot of the pictures to the museum in Independence.

**NELSON:** Some of it was not destroyed? It ended up in the museum.

**RAMSEY:** Well I think probably lots of it was destroyed. Dad took pictures and they weren't 35mm. When he took pictures, if it was an 8 x 10 or an 11 x 14, that was the size of the camera and that was the size of the negative. So very few people could handle those negatives and do anything with them.

**NELSON:** In high school. What high school did you attend?

**RAMSEY:** Lone Pine for four years.

**NELSON:** How did you get to and from school?

**RAMSEY:** Just walked. We lived in town.

**NELSON:** Do you remember the size of your graduating class roughly?

**RAMSEY:** Yes, I think as I remember there were 22 or 23. It was a pretty big class for the school at that time. Sometimes there would be a graduating class of only two or three, but we had a big class.

**NELSON:** Did you keep in contact with any of those other kids?

**RAMSEY:** No, not really. One or two I see, but the only time I see them is when they have a class reunion or a town reunion in Lone Pine.

**NELSON:** They stayed up there?

**RAMSEY:** Very few. This next June there's going to be a town reunion at Lone Pine. They call it more of a town reunion than a high school reunion; about every five years they have one and every year there's less of the classmates that I knew.

**NELSON:** You mentioned the Cerro Gordo Mine and the road. That, even today, is a pretty rough road. I suspect it was not an easy road to get up there at that time.

**RAMSEY:** No, I think it's more adaptable to 4-wheel drive although in those days, when I worked up there, one of the miners didn't drive, but he said, "If I buy a car that will go up and down this hill, would you drive us up and down?" He liked to go down to Keeler to drink beer because we worked 30 days a month. We only had one day off. So he bought this old Dodge four cylinder car. It had a cut-out on it. We'd go up and down that hill with the cut out open. Some of the grade there was almost 30% and it was pretty steep and rough. The bottom part went up through a wash and whenever it rained or there was a cloud burst, it would wash all the dirt out and it was a rough road to drive over.

**NELSON:** Do you recall during that time, seeing the lake level? Did you watch Owens Lake dry?

**RAMSEY:** No, it was dry at that time. I can remember right at the end of World War I when the people who lived in Cartago, my folks included, would go north of Cartago maybe a mile or two where there were some springs on the edge of the lake. The water was a little fresher and they could swim there. It wasn't quite so brackish. I can remember when the lake was, you might say, almost full. It was shortly after World War I. It was just before that when the aqueduct started taking the water, it just gradually went dry. It was 1913 or 1914 when the Department started taking the water out of the Owens River.

**NELSON:** By the late 1920's most people agreed it was pretty much dry. By 1930 there were still some pockets which occur today with a good winter rain. Do you remember any dust off of Owens Lake?

**RAMSEY:** Oh do I! At one time, I guess it was after I came back from World War II. I worked for Columbia Chemicals as an electrician. A friend of mine wanted me to come down and work. They had a ground on their 440 volt system that had to be located and cleared up. Sometimes we worked out on the lake where the lines ran out to electric pumps. It just seemed to me like the wind would blow three days from the north and then it would stop for about an hour and then start blowing about three days from the south and there was always dust either way. It was quite dusty.

**NELSON:** What are your recollections of Keeler at that time? That would have been around the early 1920's or the late 1920's?

**RAMSEY:** That would have to be the late 1920's because I graduated from high school in 1930. Prior to that there was a swimming pool over in Keeler and we used to go over there. There were several families that sent their children over to Lone Pine to high school, who lived in Keeler.

**NELSON:** You mentioned that you had worked as a "mucker" at the mine. What does a "mucker" do?

**RAMSEY:** In the mines, they have miners that drill the holes and shoot the ore or if you're driving a drift or a tunnel to another ore body or an area which the engineers have planned to explore. The miner drills the holes and puts the dynamite in and shoots the holes. The mucker, after the miner shoot the rounds, mucks the waste out into cars and trams it out to the station where it is hauled out on the dump.

**NELSON:** Kind of a "pick 'n shovel" job.

**RAMSEY:** That's right. Mostly shovel. We only worked one shift up there. We worked a day shift and at four o'clock in the afternoon they'd shoot. We'd go out and then the next day we'd go back in. We would turn on the air to blow the gas out and go in and muck out the round.

I worked in a drift or tunnel as you call it. I'd muck out the round which was usually 10, 11, 12 one ton cars. We'd muck off steel sheets, with a square point shovel, over our shoulder

into these cars. The miner would tram them out to the station. We always had a wide place so that we could change cars. He would always have one car there and I'd muck out the 10 or 12 tons by noon time, when we went out to lunch.

Then we'd set up with a vertical bar with a liner on it. He taught me how to drill the holes, the angle to put them and to load them with the dynamite. The way he and I worked it, the miner and mucker did practically the same thing. In some of the crews the miner would get the muck back from the face and then he'd start drilling. It would take the mucker all day to muck out because he'd have to muck the cars, tram them out to the station, bring another car back that took a lot of time. The way we worked it, I worked a steady mucking until we got it all out and then we would set up and drill. I learned how to handle the powder and how to drill the holes to make a neat drift or tunnel.

**NELSON:** How did you move the cars about? Were they electrified or by hand?

**RAMSEY:** By hand.

**NELSON:** You pushed them in and out?

**RAMSEY:** Yes, pushed them in and out. The little track was about 18" wide and the cars handled a ton of waste. That was the size of them. Your light was a carbide light. In fact I still have two of them hanging out in the garage.

**NELSON:** How far back did these drifts go?

**RAMSEY:** You'd sometimes start a drift pretty close to the station. Stations were on different levels. As you extended your drift, it got farther and farther from the station. Sometimes it would end up 500 to 800 feet from the station. The engineers or geologists would figure out where the ore bodies might be from information that they had. That's why you'd run the tunnel a certain direction to intercept an ore body.

**NELSON:** What were mining in that mine?

**RAMSEY:** Lead and silver.



TAPE NUMBER: 1, SIDE TWO

WARNER H. RAMSEY

**NELSON:** Warner you were saying that you then went to diesel school. What prompted you to attend that school?

**RAMSEY:** To try to come up with some kind of an education that I could work at. There had been diesels for a long, long time, but they were becoming popular in trucks. We had the Cummins diesel used in truckers. Also lots of ships were diesel powered. The thought was I might become a diesel mechanic. This was in the depression, I'm trying to figure out something to make a living for myself.

**NELSON:** What was the name of that school?

**RAMSEY:** Hemphill Diesel School.

**NELSON:** And where was it located?

**RAMSEY:** It was at San Fernando Road and Verdugo.

**NELSON:** How many students were in a class?

**RAMSEY:** The total number of students in the school was probably about 50. It was just like a trade school.

**NELSON:** How did you earn your tuition?

**RAMSEY:** I had enough money to pay my way there. Another fellow, from Visalia, and I finally ended up renting a little apartment and shared that. We were there about three months. Incidentally that knowledge of diesels is how I finally got into the Merchant Marine.

I was working in San Francisco as an electrician and every Friday afternoon I'd take off from work. I'd joined the International Seaman's Union, ISU, as an electrician and they told me when I joined, "Well electricians are a dime a dozen," but I thought I wanted to do that rather than go into the military. The draft board was kind of breathing down my neck too.

So on Friday I'd go by the union to see if there was anything cooking. When I signed up for the union, I had diesel engine knowledge written on my application. One Friday he said, "Boy I'm sure glad to see you today. I have a job for you." I said, "What's that?" He said Kaiser at time was building some concrete barges that were shaped like a ship. They were built down at Redwood City. The hull was about four inches thick, reinforced concrete, and they were almost 260 feet long. They were made for hauling bulk cargo. They had two diesel generators in the back

which supplied electricity for refrigeration, lights, stove and everything for the living quarters. Up forward they had a big diesel that was used to work the anchor windless.

These barges were supposed to be pulled by Maritime tugs and the plan was that they'd go up to Vancouver, British Columbia, fill them up with wheat and take them where wheat was needed. I stayed on that base for seven months, anchored out in San Francisco Bay living the "life of Riley." We had fresh food, fresh everything. I couldn't stand it. It was too easy and I wanted to go to sea. One time I went into the union and I told them to get somebody out there to relieve me. I was in the union hall for five days. Pacific Tankers, which was a war time subsidiary of Standard Oil Company, was taking a new T2 tanker out of Marin shipyard. I'd never been to sea.

The First Engineer interviewed me. He was really younger than I was, but he had been at sea for quite a few years. He was to be the First Engineer on this new tanker. He interviewed me and we talked quite a long time and finally he hired me. That's how I finally got to go to sea. On that tanker we had lots of trouble with the engines. The tubes in the main condenser would develop leaks letting salt get into the boilers.

I was on that ship for over a year. It finally came in into San Pedro for a new crew and for repairs. The Port Engineer that came aboard had looked over my records for the ship and asked me if I'd take a new ship out for him from Swan Island in Portland. I said, "Chief, you know it's union, can you arrange it?" He said, "No problem." So I came home and at that time my family was

living up in Lone Pine. I guess I was home about 25 days when I got a telegram to report up in Portland, Oregon.

This tanker was a much better ship. Both of them were built by Kaiser, but this ship had a lot better engine. We never had any trouble. We sailed all over the world with no problem.

**NELSON:** Your sea career, your maritime career was just on two ships and the barge?

**RAMSEY:** Yes. The barge, like I said, it looked like a ship, but made of concrete if you can imagine, reinforced concrete.

**NELSON:** You mentioned Manzanar, and I'm wondering were you in the area when the camp was built?

**RAMSEY:** No. I was gone then.

**NELSON:** Then going to work prior to the Merchant Marine, I guess, you were with the Owens Valley Electric Company?

**RAMSEY:** Yes. I had quite a bit of Department time in before I went into the Merchant Marine, but before I went to work for the Department the first time, I was working for Owens Valley Electric. It was just a machine shop- an electric repair shop in Lone Pine.

**NELSON:** You worked on motors and anything electric?

**RAMSEY:** Yes, motors and wiring.

**NELSON:** Electrical contracting?

**RAMSEY:** Yes, we also did plumbing. We sold oil heaters. A lot of people up there used oil stoves for heat in the house and we'd make a copper coil that we'd put in those stoves to heat their water.

**NELSON:** How was that road from Bishop on down here to Mojave or Palmdale at that time? Do you recall?

**RAMSEY:** How far back? I can remember when from Mojave north there was nothing but dirt. I think it was in 1924, 1925 somewhere about that time, when they started paving that road. There was a strip of pavement up around Aberdeen that was eight feet wide that had been put in many years ago. I don't know when that was put in.

**NELSON:** Or why?

**RAMSEY:** Because it was so sandy. That's the first place I ever rode in a car over sixty miles an hour. It was in a Star roadster. Rudy Henderson worked for the Doe interests in Lone Pine. He bought this Star and another kid and I were with him one time when he was going to Bishop. We rode up with him and when he got on that strip of road. It was eight feet wide, he got it up

to 63 mph and boy we were really going and I'll tell you that pavement looked awful narrow at 60 mph.

The way it worked, a car would drive on the pavement, when you met another car, you'd pull off and put one wheel in the dirt and keep one wheel on the pavement until you passed then get back on the pavement again. You almost had to stop. There wasn't much traffic.

**NELSON:** After the Owens Valley Electric Company, then you went to work for the Department? How did you get that job again? You didn't initially take an examination?

**RAMSEY:** No, Charlie Southey came down and talked me into taking the job and that's when I met McCullough. McCullough was the boss up there, Charlie was the foreman over the patrolman. I was able to stay right in Lone Pine. I worked with Mose Ruiz who was a terrific guy to work with. But I was hired as a laborer. That was no rating at all. I never was a lineman helper or an apprentice. I went right to a lineman.

**NELSON:** Labor to lineman.

**RAMSEY:** You couldn't do it anywhere else except up in that country.

**NELSON:** What was the organization in McCullough's operation up there?

**RAMSEY:** Of course McCullough was in charge of everything electric in the Owens Valley. The generation and the distribution and the whole thing. He was not in charge of the electricians that worked up in the Mono tunnels.

**NELSON:** He was strictly in operating, I guess.

**RAMSEY:** Yes.

**NELSON:** Did you happen to know the Blair family?

**RAMSEY:** No, I knew of them. They were at the gorge power plants where they lived but I didn't know them.

**NELSON:** How would you describe John McCullough? What did he look like?

**RAMSEY:** Well he was kind of a stocky built fellow. He wore glasses and had white hair.

**NELSON:** Did he know his business?

**RAMSEY:** I'm sure he did. He was telling me one time about before he went to work for the Department. He went somewhere and they had a generator that wouldn't generate, just spin and not generate. I don't know how big a generator it was and he said, "I picked up a very big sledge hammer and I hit it a blow," and then

said, "Okay let's try it." They started it up and it generated. What it did with that blow was set the molecules in the iron so that it took off. The "Well how much do I owe you?" And he said, "\$25." And he said, "You mean \$25 just for doing that?" and he said, "Not for doing that, knowing how to do it."

Whenever there was anything special or a different problem to work on, Mac would take me with him. I remember him taking me to Haiwee after we tied in the Owens Valley system to the Gorge system. They were tied in above Bishop, above the Gorge. They had trouble down at Haiwee. There was some dust coming out of the generators which was caused by some kind of a eddy currents that developed after two systems were tied together. This was making the varnish come out of the generator. I remember going down with him on that and trying to figure out what was wrong.

As I mentioned before, he took me up to one of these big shafts below Grant Lake. We had a problem with some relays that were controlling the flow of water or pumping water below Grant Lake. We went up there and between the two of us, we'd decide what we could do to make it work. When I left there, I had no rating and he said, "Warner when you finish that job, come back, we'll have something for you."

**NELSON:** And he did.

**RAMSEY:** Yes, finally I got a rating as Lineman.



**NELSON:** You mentioned you went out on the Boulder line and you were stationed at the camp at Silver Lake near Baker?

**RAMSEY:** Yes, the Southern Sierra Power Company built the first line out to Boulder. That's the power they used for building the Boulder Dam. They furnished the power. Along with that line, that's that line that you see going from the highway. It's just one steel cross arm an H structure. Have you ever noticed it going out there?

**NELSON:** Yes.

**RAMSEY:** Well that's the line that was used to build the Boulder Dam. They also had a telephone line for their communications. It was on 25' poles with a bracket on each side, two wires. What we were doing was putting our line in for the Department. We'd take the brackets off, put on a four pin arm, transfer their two wires to one side and our two on the other side. That was what we were doing, working out of Silver Lake. It really was Silver Lake where the camp was located just out of Baker.

**NELSON:** Do you remember that camp, the way it was constructed and laid out?

**RAMSEY:** There were rows of tent houses. They had a wood floor wood up maybe two or three feet. The top part was a framed in canvas tent. That's what we lived in.

I lived in another similar camp when we were working on that Shu Fly at Victorville. Adalanto is where the camp was located and I don't think we had any heat at the Silver Lake camp. We had just single beds in there. I don't remember any heating.

**NELSON:** You ate at a central commissary?

**RAMSEY:** Yes, a Mess hall. They fed us well.

**NELSON:** Did you go back for lunch or did they pack you lunches?

**RAMSEY:** They packed a lunch.

**NELSON:** What did the Department charge you for food? Did they charge you?

**RAMSEY:** They charged, but it wasn't very much. I really don't remember. What we were really interested in was the final check. Of course, it might have been \$2.50 a day for food and lodging.

**NELSON:** Were you able to put away any money working out there?

**RAMSEY:** Oh yes. There was no place to spend money although at the last part of the job when we were working out on the telephone line, we stayed a week or two in Boulder City and, of course, we'd go into Las Vegas. I was married and had a couple of kids, I didn't have money to waste.

**NELSON:** For recreation, didn't some of those camps have athletic teams that competed against each other or do you recollect that?

**RAMSEY:** No, we didn't. We worked six days a week. We only had one day off, we wouldn't have time. Sometimes when we were working on the Shu fly we even worked on Sundays. Normally, it was six days a week. I don't remember going home very often that was for sure.

**NELSON:** Your family was in Los Angeles at that time?

**RAMSEY:** Let's see. When I worked out at Baker, they were still in Lone Pine. It wasn't until I moved down to Van Nuys to work that the family moved to Van Nuys.

**NELSON:** You said that you went from laborer to lineman. Over the next two or three decades, you saw whatever technological advances that occurred in linework. I'm wondering, did the lineman's tools and equipment change drastically over the years?

**RAMSEY:** Not too much at that time. Towards the end of my career with the Department, of course, we were getting into bucket trucks. When I came down first from the Owens Valley we had diggers that dug the holes and set the poles. Up in the Owens Valley we did most of it by hand.

**NELSON:** Did you still continue to do as much "hot" work as you had done at the beginning or was the proportion of "hot" work still the same?

**RAMSEY:** Most of the work up in the Owens Valley was cold. The only "hot" work you did was if you had a new line that you built was when you made the taps, that would be it. I came down as a lineman working out of Van Nuys. We were working "hot" work all the time. You couldn't have any outages and you were always taping into hot stuff or rebuilding and it was always hot.

**NELSON:** Owens Valley, because of the weather up there, you had more outages or you worked in poorer conditions at times.

**RAMSEY:** Well some times of the year it was kind of miserable, wind. We didn't have too much stormy weather up there. Rainy weather, very little of that. You seldom had any occasion to work in that. After I was gone from up there, they had some sleet storms that did a lot of damage. First they had to get out and work in that. That must have been really miserable.

When I worked as a lineman out of Camp Parks and up in that area when I was off from the Department, we had canvas pants and canvas jackets that were treated with paraffin that we wore. We called them tin suits and if you didn't have something like that to work in, you wouldn't work.

**NELSON:** Were those lineman's gloves, the rubber gloves, were they provided or did you have to provide them?

**RAMSEY:** No, they were always provided. They were tested regularly.

**NELSON:** And even back in those early days? They were tested, then they would have to come down to the test lab and then be sent up?

**RAMSEY:** Yes. Like down in Van Nuys you got new gloves every week. You had two pair issued to you. One was in the test lab and the other was on the truck. They were all numbered so everybody had their own number for the gloves. We didn't test them that often up in the Owens Valley because you didn't use them that much, but every month they would be sent in and new ones issued.

**NELSON:** Each lineman did his own field testing? What was the procedure for that? Just a visual test?

**RAMSEY:** You had your own test where you'd grab a glove, spin it around to trap some air and then you'd hold it and squeeze it to see that there were no pin holes in them. But that was just your own test because in working, although I wore a leather protective cover over them, it's still possible to get a pin hole or damage them.

Where they test them down in the test labs there is an electrode put down inside of them and then they are put down in liquid in order to test them with high voltage.

**NELSON:** I know, Warner, you mentioned earlier that you had seen Ivan Batemen on the job. I guess that was your first "brass" that you had met. Were there other occasions in those early years when the "brass" came out to where you were?

**RAMSEY:** Yes, and that kind of impressed me because here Mose was the lineman, and I'm the helper. Ivan pulls up behind him on the road and he's talking with him. I'm the helper up there doing the line work. When I came down Mase said, "Ivan, I want you to meet my new helper." I've got the tools on and the hooks. Ivan never forgot that.

**NELSON:** You made a lasting impression.

**RAMSEY:** In other years when there would be retirements or something like that, he'd mention it.

**NELSON:** You said that you came down and took the exam for lineman, that was your first examination that you had taken?

**RAMSEY:** Yes that was my first examination. Boy did they give me a going over. You know like the guy says, "You haven't even been working as a helper for nine months." I said, "I put it down just

what I was doing and they sent me the papers to take the exam so here I am. So he said, "We'll see what you know about G064A." Boy he went through that book, but I knew that book from cover to cover.

**NELSON:** What does G064A stand for?

**RAMSEY:** It was the general orders for a line construction for the State of California. Now it has been changed to G095. It's been changed to 95 for a long time, years. But at that time it was called just G064A.

**NELSON:** That was pretty much the Bible of a lineman, electricians, or?

**RAMSEY:** Well that was all the rules and regulations. What voltages and the spacing between the voltages, vertical and horizontal and everything pertaining to line construction.

**NELSON:** Up in the Owens Valley, was there the range of jobs that would allow you to become familiar with G064A or was a lot of this that you knew the book?

**RAMSEY:** I knew the book. Of course you know how far apart when you are putting on primary arms. You knew how far the insulators are supposed to be spread. Somebody knew. They said, "Okay, we'll have 18" spacing here." But for an examination, of course,

there's a lot more in an exam than you'll ever use. And transformer hook ups and stuff. They had dummy transformers. They said, "Make a star hook up on this one" or "Okay, now I want a Delta connection." They really gave me a going over, I'll tell you, but like I say, I must have barely passed it because I was 115 on the list.

**NELSON:** But off of that list you were then picked up and that was with a permanent appointment?

**RAMSEY:** It was temporary appointments to start with. I got on the construction for the telephone job and then the shu fly at Victorville. Those were just temporary jobs for Design and Construction.

**NELSON:** Coming back to patrolman. Where were you a patrolman?

**RAMSEY:** I got a call for patrolman up in the Owens Valley. That it was McCullough again. He wanted me back up there, so I went back up there and in 1941 or early 1942 the Department had cut back and I got bumped out of there. That's when I had to come down to work as a lineman in Van Nuys.

**NELSON:** What did that patrolman job entail?

**RAMSEY:** Well a patrolman up there, they didn't have any lineman so the patrolman did whatever construction work there had to be



done. Then you patrolled for the street lights and the telephone, patrolled 34/5 transmission lines and distribution lines.

Whenever there was a construction job to do, all the patrolmen and helpers would get together. We rebuilt Bishop one time. We'd drive up there every day to work. There'd be two patrolmen at Bishop, there were a couple at Independence, there was one at Lone Pine. We'd all go to Bishop and work all day and come home at night. That's when we rebuilt it when they took it over from the California Electric Power which used to be Southern Sierra Power.

**NELSON:** As far as patrolman, then, you didn't patrol a certain area?

**RAMSEY:** No, not regularly. When we would have a storm and we the 34/5 kv lines that ran around Owens Lake and went over to Darwin would go out. If we ever got a rain up there, usually those lines would go out. We had a set of fuses down near Lubkin Canyon, south of Lone Pine. We put some light fuses in and then closed the switch and tried to see the location of the flash. Then you might have to go over line and do some repairs before you could really get the line back in again.

**NELSON:** And that's where you were spotting the outages.

**RAMSEY:** It gave you a general idea where the trouble was. It could be over by Keeler or Swansea. Somewhere over there you'd see a big flash.

**NELSON:** What kind of vehicles were you using at that time?

**RAMSEY:** Mostly Ford pick-ups with a modified sort of body on them. You had a set of drawers that worked from either side for tools, fuses, and parts. The back part was covered over. It was a screen side with hooks that you could hang rope, blocks, and your hand line in.

They were only two-wheel drive. We didn't have four-wheel drive in those days.

**NELSON:** Now did you take an examination for patrolman?

**RAMSEY:** Yes.

**NELSON:** That was your second examination?

**RAMSEY:** Yes,

**NELSON:** Was that one easier?

**RAMSEY:** No. It wasn't as technical. It was a more practical examination.

**NELSON:** Then after the stint in the Merchant Marine, you came back. Was the Department your first job?

**RAMSEY:** No, I came back to Lone Pine. My mother was still alive then and I lived with her and I worked for a fellow that had most of the juke boxes in the Owens Valley. I sold phonograph records and radios and repaired radios. We did a lot of work like little repair jobs like Owens Valley Electric used to do. They were gone by that time. They had gone out of business.

**NELSON:** Did you work from a location, did you work from a vehicle?

**RAMSEY:** I worked right in Lone Pine in a little store or shop. That's when Tom Witt, the superintendent that had the job that McCullough used to have up in the Owens Valley, came down several times and said, "Warner, you know you had five years when you left the Department as lineman and you've only got about two or three months left. I'd like to see you come back to work for the Department. You're not going to ever make it here. You might make a halfway living." They were short of linemen up in the Owens Valley.

They couldn't get anybody to go up there at that time. They had a line gang, beside the patrolmen, because there was more work to do. That's when Tom Langbaur was the line foreman up there. I went to work. We were pulling poles at Manzanar, laying them out on the truck to hayl them to Independence. Paul Robinson was just another lineman, but he was kind of spearheading the crew. He said, "Take it on up and we'll turn it the other way around to load this truck." We were trying to get as many poles on the

truck as possible. Somehow or another when they raised the pole up, the butt swung down, the hook wasn't hooked on properly, and it came unfastened. The pole started falling toward the loaded poles on the truck. The four or five poles laying on the truck started to fall towards me. I turned to run but I got my feet tangled up in some brush, thistle, and tumbleweeds. I fell down and the falling pole pushed those poles off of that truck on top of me. I had an ear torn, blood running out of my ear and this left leg was smashed. It has stainless steel in there now. It was pretty badly broken. Compound fracture - bone sticking out and everything.

**NELSON:** Where did they take you? To Bishop?

**RAMSEY:** No, to Lone Pine. This doctor that was working with Dr. Schultz at that time, had been down in the South Pacific in the Army. He had lots of experience putting bones back together. They worked about four hours on that leg. It works. I never even think about it any more. For years whenever there was stormy weather, it kind of ached, but no more.

**TAPE NUMBER: 2, SIDE ONE**

**WARNER H. RAMSEY**

**NELSON:** Warner, when you became a foreman, from that time on you were in the Los Angeles area?

**RAMSEY:** Yes.

**NELSON:** Where did you work out of?

**RAMSEY:** My first job as foreman was in Van Nuys out of District 5 which was the only District they had in the Valley at that time.

**NELSON:** Where was that located?

**RAMSEY:** At Van Nuys Boulevard and Oxnard Street in Van Nuys.

**NELSON:** You said earlier that the first few days you were there, you only had one vehicle and other foremen had kind of a little convoy, I guess.

**RAMSEY:** Oh yes, they had a line truck, always had a pick-up and usually had a station wagon to haul the men.

**NELSON:** Have you ever thought that was a test, maybe, of this new guy coming in?

**RAMSEY:** I don't know really. I never thought about it at that time. You know linemen, when we got out on the job, they said, "Boss is this how we're going to operate?" or something like that and I said, "What do you mean?" Of course I'd seen the other guys with the line trucks so I was probably told this would have to do for a while, I don't know. I really don't remember that, but I know we acquired an old pick-up and then we got a station wagon. I guess we got all of these within about a week.

But I worked off of that flat-bed truck for months before I got a line truck then I got a brand new one. So they were just short trucks. I never rode with the men. I rode with the helper in the pick-up. The rest of the helpers and the linemen rode in the line truck and the station wagon. I figured if they wanted to talk about me well that's good for them - get it off their system.

**NELSON:** Your ears never burned?

**RAMSEY:** Like I say, it wasn't always roses. We had problems sometimes, but we always straightened it out on the job.

**NELSON:** Can you give me an idea as a foreman, what was a typical day there for you? What did you do on moving around? How many troops did you have? How did you get organized to approach the jobs?

**RAMSEY:** Well, of course, you always got the specs for the job a day or two ahead of time and you'd order out your material from the warehouse. We had a bin or area where the material would be assembled for the job.

**NELSON:** Was that what they used to call "cribs?"

**RAMSEY:** Yes. Then when we went out on the job, I would get the crew around and explain to them just exactly what the whole job was going to be. How we were going to run in a new feeder or if we were going to take out an old line, or put in a transformer bank to feed a new customer. I always wanted them to gather around so everybody knew what was going on.

The fellow that drove the pick-up, who I'd call my Bull Grunt. I used that term before, he'd be the man who I could give a set of specks. If we were going to build a tract or install a new feeder, he'd go to the bone pile where the material was delivered and load up the arms and hardware and distribute the right material to the poles throughout the job.

A typical day was usually when we'd get out on the job, about 10:00 a.m. somebody would fire up a hot pot for coffee then they'd have a break. We always had a lunch time where you'd usually take about 45 minutes. The guys would usually eat their lunches as fast as they could and then play cards. I never played cards with them because whenever it was time to get back to work, I'd say, "Okay guys, better make this the last hand, it's time to get back to work. Usually about 3:45 p.m. when we were picking up the guys

would climb up in the truck and have a hand or two - poker or whatever they played. I don't know what card game they played.

Nobody could touch the cards until everybody was through, down off the poles. I remember one time, we had sagged in some secondaries. That's when we were changing over from all cross arm construction and they were using racks for secondaries, with the three wires on them. This fellow dead-ended the wires and they weren't even. I told him, I forget the fellow's name now, Paul? something like that. I said, "Those wires don't look very good, better go back up and redead-end them." Well he growled about it, but finished the job. Like I say, nobody got any break until everybody was through working.

So anyway he had to redead-end those wires and by the time he came down, it was time to climb into the vehicles and hurry to get to the yard so we wouldn't be late. That's why I say I liked the guys to be able to ride by themselves. He'd gotten in the station wagon I understand and was bitching about the boss working him right up to the last minute.

The guys said, "Paul if you don't like the way things are run on this crew, well why don't you get off of it?" They said, "you held us up tonight."

**NELSON:** Kind of a self-policing operation. I know in the last few years there had been regular "tailgate" sessions to speak on safety and things like that, was there that same emphasis on safety or when did that come about?



**RAMSEY:** Well we always had, in the yard, monthly safety meetings on company time and as far as safety out on the job, about all I can say is what we would get the guys together and we would discuss the job or something particular about it. Something that we were going to do like working over 34/5 kv or something dangerous so the men would really be on their toes. As far as tailgate safety meetings at that time, we didn't have many.

**NELSON:** What about the hard hat? When did that come into use?

**RAMSEY:** I think in 1948 when I came down to Van Nuys. We had hard hats then.

**NELSON:** But you had not worn them earlier, had you in the Owens Valley?

**RAMSEY:** In the winter time, you wore a felt hat and then in the summer time you wore a white cap or something light. The idea was that a felt hat was some protection when working around hot stuff. You'd feel it touching the hat before you got too close, but gosh I can't tell you what year the hard hats came in.

**NELSON:** After foreman you became an assistant supervisor?

**RAMSEY:** Assistant superintendent. That's what they called it then, I think it's supervisor now. Superintendent was what we called it, Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent. Civil Service classification was Senior Line Foreman.

**NELSON:** It was interchangeable.

**RAMSEY:** The Senior Line Foreman was both Assistant Superintendent and Superintendent. The General Line Foreman was over all. On the job he was called General Superintendent.

**NELSON:** Well as Assistant Superintendent, is that at the point at which you now came out of the field so to speak and you had to spend a fairly substantial portion of time in the office?

**RAMSEY:** Yes. In the Districts for instance. The Assistant Superintendent gives the different jobs to the different crews. You'd go out and visit the crews, you conduct safety meetings with the safety engineer in the yard. About the only work we did out in the field was to go out and look over the jobs before I would give them to any line gang. I would decide who would be the best crew to do the job and then issue it to them. We would visit the crews on the job.

I remember one superintendent, when I was first an assistant at Van Nuys. He was Roy Simpson.

I had four or five jobs that I was going to go out and look at and I'd been talking to Roy about I had to buy a new pair of

shoes. So when I got in he said, "Did you get the shoes?" I said, "No, I didn't have time, maybe I'll get them tomorrow. He said, "Listen, you know there are certain little perks when you get to be a superintendent. You should have time to take care of these things." So I said, "I'll get around to it." He was a real nice guy to work with.

**NELSON:** You appreciated the perks?

**RAMSEY:** Yes, that's right.

**NELSON:** From Van Nuys, were you promoted from there and stayed in Van Nuys or did you have to go somewhere else for your next position?

**RAMSEY:** When I was working at Van Nuys was when I was offered the job as Assistant Superintendent of Trouble Section. I went to work with Bill Wagner. He was the Superintendent of Electric Trouble at that time.

**NELSON:** What exactly does that "trouble" mean and what does that entail in the Trouble Section?

**RAMSEY:** We had a number of trouble headquarters. At Main Street, you had one, Hollywood you had another one, down at DS41 you had another one. We had line patrolmen that were really troublemen at those bases with their helpers, their jobs there were to patrol

all the overhead lines and everything in those districts. When there were trouble calls like lights out or wires down, they'd get the calls. The trouble dispatchers would dispatch them to the trouble location.

At Boylston where we had another trouble headquarters, we had underground trouble men. We also had the fellows that did the 34.5 switching for the crews to take different 34.5 lines out at the orders of the load dispatchers for work or modification.

Whenever you had underground trouble, of course you had crews to go on that. We used to have quite a bit of it and our job was to get things working again even if you had to make temporary repairs. That's where we used to get in trouble with station maintenance. Like Bill Denton's group. For example, we'd go out on a trouble call, there'd be some transformers in a building, maybe one that burned up or something like that. We'd cut that one out and hook the other two up so that they could have power. Maybe they wouldn't have as much, but they could operate. We were always in a hassle with them. Like Bill said, "You know if you would just call us, maybe with a couple of hours longer outage, we could have the new one put back in. Now we've got to get another outage sometime in the middle of the night to make the job permanent.

Our philosophy in the trouble section was, "Do whatever you can to get it working as quickly as you could." And I am pretty sure that's the way it is today.

**NELSON:** What happens when there are major storms that sweep across the city, obviously, you need more repairmen than you normally have assigned? Where do those other crews come from?

**RAMSEY:** You call the men in that are off duty. We also assign work jobs to the overhead districts. You'd call them for help. You call and talk to the superintendent. He'll turn over as many crews to work for the Trouble Section as needed.

**NELSON:** Some of these might be people that were working on new construction or something? They'd pull them off temporarily to restore service. Then they go back to their other jobs?

**RAMSEY:** Yes. The biggest Trouble job that I ever had was when we had the 1971 earthquake. I was Assistant General Superintendent of Overload at that time, and I had to arrange for material to be sent out to where we had our "bone yard" out in the valley. I had to have drinking water tanks and I had to have toilets out there. I had to arrange to feed the men. We were able to get a small caterer from Burbank who could supply the meals. I'd say, "I need 400 meals at such and such a time at such and such location, at the bone yard." And he said, "Ramsey, I can do it, but I'll have to be paid every day." Well you can imagine the discussions I had with the Chief Clerks at that time. They said, "We can't do it. We must have bids." I said, "You have to do it. We can't wait for bids. This man will feed us." And they finally did it.

**NELSON:** Ernie Benson or Paul Jacobsen?

**RAMSEY:** No. Ed Roth and Ed Moran. Then, of course, we had guys working overtime but they wouldn't send a clerk out there to keep track of the material. If the men needed a transformer, they went and got it, they needed cross arms, they went and got them. Then on the meals, we had firemen, policemen, along with Department personnel. They got in the line and they were being fed too. The clerks were raising hell about that. I said, "How are you going to refuse them? You can't tell those fellows no. I had to have the meals out there because if I let a crew go somewhere to find a place to eat, they would be gone for hours. You've lost them. If you feed them there, they're happy and they are back to work in a much shorter time."

**NELSON:** Did you have the materials stockpiled so that you couldn't run into unmanageable problems as a result of the earthquake restoration?

**RAMSEY:** Well I don't know whether they ever got it straightened out. If we only had a clerk out there to check this material out to the proper accounts, it would have been easy, but the clerks didn't want to pay overtime and so Dick Warnke, he was the head clerk at 5, wanted a clerk on the job at the bone yard. Ed Moran was one of the clerks. Ed Roth was over Ed Moran and he was the one I had to do most of the arguing with to try to get these payments made for the meals and to get the work done.

**NELSON:** Warner, you mentioned a couple of times here "bone yard."  
What's a "bone yard?"

**RAMSEY:** A "bone yard" is where you take material out for a job and store it. We used to be able to do that. I don't think they can do it any more, the stuff would all disappear.

**NELSON:** This is kind of your supply depot on site?

**RAMSEY:** Yes. You'd pick a vacant lot somewhere and then just haul all that stuff out. Insulators, cross arms, through bolts, space bolts, everything you had to have. But they'd take it out there and dumped it. You worked out of that while you were building a tract or building a new pole line.

**NELSON:** You're probably right. You probably can't do that today.

**RAMSEY:** I don't think they can. The way things are, you'd go out there and the stuff would be all gone.

**NELSON:** Speaking of that, did you have much, in your career later years in the City, have much vandalism or theft?

**RAMSEY:** No. Not then. Not very much. We had, when I was General Superintendent of Transmission and Trouble in my later years, had a guy that was stealing gas at Boylston. We caught him at it. It wasn't the first time that he had been involved in some

kind of thing that required disciplinary action. I pushed it through civil service to fire him. We finally got rid of him. He never was a good employee.

**NELSON:** How does one steal gas? He would bring containers and fill them up?

**RAMSEY:** Yes, he would run his own car in and fill it from the pump down in the lower level there at Boylston or 1141 West Second Street, as what they call it now.

**NELSON:** This would be out of a Department garage where we had gas pumps to fill the Department vehicles?

**RAMSEY:** Yes. We caught him red-handed stealing.

**NELSON:** As you moved up to General Superintendent, where were you headquartered then?

**RAMSEY:** At 1141 West Second Street. Both when I was General Superintendent of Overhead, which was in that old Stationer's Corporation Building, just inside the gate and then later on we had our offices up adjacent to the parking garage area.

**NELSON:** How long were you there at Boylston? Was that over quite a period of a few years?



**RAMSEY:** Quite a few years, yes, in both jobs it was probably five or six years.

**NELSON:** You got involved in the DWP Speaker's Club at some point at that time. When was that?

**RAMSEY:** I guess it was while I was General Superintendent of Transmission. I was only in it a couple years, I think, two or three years.

**NELSON:** So it was right near the end of your career when you came in?

**RAMSEY:** Yes.

**NELSON:** Who was your sponsor? I think every new member had to have a sponsor?

**RAMSEY:** I don't remember.

**NELSON:** Somebody had to sponsor you.

**RAMSEY:** It could have been Carl Osborne or somebody like that because Carl and I were good personal friends.

**NELSON:** You mentioned transmission and street lighting. What did that entail and it seems like transmission, long distance

transmission and street lighting, street lights, what were those sections?

**RAMSEY:** The General Superintendent that was in charge of the Transmission Section, it included all the high voltage transmission lines up to Oregon, to Boulder and Page, Arizona. Then we had the electric trouble section which dealt with all the electric trouble in the downtown area except San Pedro and the San Fernando Valley. Those were separate. Then the street light section had to do with all street lights in the City of Los Angeles within the city limits.

Ours was the maintenance of those street lights section. We took care of the time clocks and the controllers and the transformers regulations, the street light transformers and the trouble on street light circuits.

**NELSON:** You had to change bulbs?

**RAMSEY:** Change the bulbs, wash the glassware, clean it, all that. We had crews that patrolled at night when the lights were on and they replaced the burned out ones. Then we had crews working in the day time, regulating the transformers. The series street lights worked at very high voltage and they had regulated transformers that controlled it so they had the corret line current.

**NELSON:** You mentioned transmission. At what point in voltage or load does it become transmission?

**RAMSEY:** The lowest voltage we had was the aqueduct lines that came down from Power House 1 and 2. They were 115 kv and then we went clear up to the Boulder lines that had been upgraded to 500 kv and then there's the DC transmission line at the time I was there was 800 kv.

**NELSON:** Pacific Intertie?

**RAMSEY:** Yes, now it's upgraded to 1000 kv.

**NELSON:** But you went from 115 up in transmission?

**RAMSEY:** Yes. The other voltage which we used, you might call it a distribution voltage in the City, is 34/5 kv. We had 4.8 kv which was our regular distribution voltage. We have 34/5 kv that feeds all the big buildings and big loads and industrial plants.

**NELSON:** When you were the General Superintendent, how many employees did you have under you at that time?

**RAMSEY:** In the overhead at that time, it was pretty close to 1,200. In the transmission and trouble section, probably around 450, quite a few less.

**NELSON:** When you left in 1976, had women began coming into the field forces at that time?

**RAMSEY:** When I left in the Transmission Trouble Section, we didn't have any. Whether they had any in overhead or underground at that time, I don't know. But in the transmission section, we didn't have any. I'm just curious how many they have now. If any. Once in a while, I've seen an article in the "Intake" where they've mentioned women helpers, but not in the classification of the transmission and trouble section, of course, that's all been split up too. I don't know how it is now.

**NELSON:** As a General Superintendent, as you got up into the ranks, you were working more with the management and I guess you got involved with the board, Water and Power Commissioners, at times and the whole business.

**RAMSEY:** Not so much with the Water and Power Commissioners, but with middle management. We had Lyle Stinson, he was Principal Engineer in our group at one time and Carl Osborne was before he moved on up. At one time with Carl Tamaki, he used to have management seminars. We'd go up to Boulder for some of these. I knew Carl quite well. Even when Carl Tomaki was General Manager, I used to talk with him once in a while. We were always good friends and he was always interested in how things were going with the troops.

**NELSON:** He was always Carl? I don't think anything ever changed him.

**RAMSEY:** Yes. Terrific guy. We had a seminar one time up at Boulder. After the end of the last day they took us out on the boat for a ride up the lake. I guess it was to make it worthwhile for going up there because some of those sessions were pretty hard working days. Carl got me off in the corner of the boat, that was the time when we were having trouble with one of the superintendent's, drinking problem. We really had had it and Carl was wanting to know just how I was handling this. What I intended to do. All the way up the lake and back we were talking about different things like discipline. When we got back and came in, somebody said to me, "Warner you and Carl were sure having it. What the hell were you guys talking about?" I said, "Just about personnel problems. All I saw was Carl all the way up and back. I had to finally force that superintendent to retire, keep from being fired. He was a long-time employee with the Department, his dad before him. We had to get him out of one of those "drying up homes" to take him to his retirement party. It was sad.

**NELSON:** It really is. Well Warner over your years you came in contact with a number of division heads and general managers and chief electrical engineers and things like that, do any stand out in your mind who impressed you? That you might have had personal knowledge of?

**RAMSEY:** Lyle Stinson was one that I had a lot of respect for and also Carl Osborne. Both of those fellows were very fair and always people that you could talk over problems if you had them. As much as possible, I always tried to take care of everything myself as much as I could. In later years some rules were changed. You had to go over disciplinary problems with your superiors. They came up with a lot of rules so you couldn't do it like you used to. I wasn't in favor of that. I was always able to take care of things pretty good and I thought I was always fair with all my employees. Guys that I disciplined. When you give a guy 30 days off without pay and he still likes you, you've got something going for you.

We worked with other divisions like general plant. We were always working with them regarding equipment. Joe Brennan and I were friendly between ourselves, but we had entirely different ideas about how our equipment should be serviced. We were always at loggerheads at meetings and when we got through we'd go to lunch together. Joe, his philosophy was "when it breaks, we'll fix it" and my idea was "we don't want it to break," because whenever it broke you had too many people standing around doing nothing. Of course that doesn't show on their books.

**NELSON:** What about were there people at the beginning of your career or during your career that impressed you, and I won't say role models, but people that you think you may have taken some of their characteristics and used?

**RAMSEY:** Not too much. I don't know.

**NELSON:** A little bit here, a little there?

**RAMSEY:** Could be. I had a lot of respect for McCullough. I appreciated what he did for me over the years. Tom Witt was very good. I really have to thank him for talking me into going back to work for the Department because at that time that he talked me into going back, I had no idea of going back to work for the Department on the reserve list. There were only two or three months left of my five years on the reserve list. I was still eligible as a lineman without taking another examination.

**NELSON:** And you were able to take those five years back in and count?

**RAMSEY:** You go on a reserve list for five years when you are laid off. It was just about to expire and he knew it and brought it to my attention, and talked me into going back. We used to see him up there in the Owens Valley at their little dances they had at the Masonic Hall. We call them square dances now, but they were country dances that they did up there. His wife, Grace, called me her "son." I owe him a lot because I probably would have never gone to work back for the Department. If somebody hadn't asked me to go back, I probably wouldn't have.

**NELSON:** How many years did you end up with officially?

**RAMSEY:** A little over 36.

**NELSON:** Well in summing it all up, would you do it again?

**RAMSEY:** Oh yes, although I don't know whether I'd like it down there now. I would do it again if I started out like I did when the Department was younger, but from what I hear now down there, I don't know.

Did you know Bert Curry? We still trade Christmas cards. My last Christmas card from him said, "Well you know Warner, a very good friend of mine that is very knowledgeable about what goes on downtown, the City Council and everything, tells me he wouldn't even recommend any of his relatives to think about going to work for the City any more." I don't know if it's that bad or not. It's not like it used to be.

**NELSON:** That's probably true. But you don't regret your part in it?

**RAMSEY:** I don't remember a day I didn't like going to work and the rougher it was, the better I liked it. Like the highlights for me were, the 1971 earthquake, when I had to do all the wheeling and dealing and I could tell Ed Moran, "I don't care how you do it, you've got to be able to pay that guy. I've got to have meals." And that was fun. It really was.

I enjoyed that and I could take some big cases of trouble when DS40 or 41 way off in the west part of the City, blew up. We



went out there and boy, it was a mess. Working with the men and getting as much back and working as possible and getting that station back working. Those kind of times I liked. More than the routine. It was great. Underground trouble. That's always interesting. Talking about working puzzles!

**NELSON:** Okay then Warner, I thank you very much for taking this time with us.

**WARNER"** Is that all? I've enjoyed talking with you, really.