

WORKING UP THE RANKS IN THE WATER SYSTEM

RONALD A. MCCOY

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.

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Biographical Notes

Ronald A. McCoy

Born in Los Angeles, California, September 15, 1934.

Parents: Zell W. and Florence L. (Schueddig) McCoy).

Marriage 1: Sandra Steverson

Marriage 2: Terri Clark

Marriage 3: Anne T. Thomas

Children: Three. Robin (McCoy) Moxley; Lisa (McCoy) Black,
and Michael McCoy.

Grandchildren: Five.

Joined DWP in 1954 as a Field Engineering Aide, Field Engineering,
Water System.

Retired April 1990 as Assistant Chief Engineer, Water.

Education: BS Civil Engineering, USC, 1963.
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TAPE NUMBER: 1, SIDE ONE

RONALD A. MCCOY

GIVEN FRIDAY, AUGUST 22, 1991

AT

HIS HOME IN RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA

THE INTERVIEWER IS DICK NELSON

NELSON: Okay Ron, why don't you give us a little breakdown on where you were born, growing up, your family, schooling, etc.

MCCOY: I was born here in Los Angeles and until I was six, I lived off of Western Avenue near Pico Boulevard. At the time my

dad worked for the Texas Oil Company at 9th and Broadway. In early 1940 he went to Colombia, South America working for a subsidiary of Texaco. My mother and I followed him down later in the year.

For the first five years I lived in Cucuta, Colombia which is close to the Venezuela border and then for another four years in Bogota, the capital of Colombia. All my elementary schooling was there. We came back to the States about every two years for a month or two month's vacation. If it happened to be during a school term, I'd be enrolled in the local elementary school for a couple of months and then I'd bail out and go back down to Colombia.

They had a pretty good school system in Colombia for children of the employees of the various oil companies doing work in the area. It was sponsored and paid for by the oil companies. Growing up in a foreign country was really an interesting experience with the opportunity of meeting English-speaking students from all over the world. Essentially all my education until high school was in Colombia.

In 1949 I came back to the United States to go to high school. My mother and I lived in North Hollywood, California. I went to North Hollywood High School and graduated in 1952. Then I started going to Valley Junior College for about a year or year and a half. At the time I thought, I really want to go to work and earn some money. Also, I was tired of school and so I went to work for Lockheed Aircraft Corporation in Burbank, California. I remember I worked in the degreasing section which is probably

where all of the contaminants in the San Fernando Valley Groundwater Basin are coming from now. I was working grave yard shift and this was really my first experience with a full time job. I'd had part time jobs working during school and summers, but this was my first real job. I thought it was a big deal because I had a high school diploma and I was earning money. After awhile I realized some of the people I was working with could barely read or write and it didn't take me too long to figure out that this was not what I wanted to do the rest of my life. At about the same time, I was layed off so I started going back to Valley Junior College. At about that same time I was looking for a summer job. This was 1954. I had taken a couple courses at Valley College in drafting and engineering so I filed for the Civil Service examination for Field Engineering Aide. I had the idea that I'd work during the summer, get some money and go back to school in the fall. As it turned out, I didn't get a job offer until September.

In fact, I had a couple of job offers. One was in the Public Works Department and the other was with the Department of Water and Power. I didn't know one department from the other at that point, but I just happened to get accepted and take the job at the Department of Water and Power. So that's how I got started.

NELSON: Okay, let me back up just a minute. Your dad was an engineer?

MCCOY: No he was an accountant in purchasing. In those days he was involved in warehousing although I don't know in what capacity. He was kind of in charge of the materials warehouses down there and I remember him going out taking inventories at the various warehouses. The oil companies field operations were located in the middle of the jungle and in those days they were having a lot of trouble with the Indians. They had several oil workers and geologists killed by Indians. In fact I still have some pictures of people that had been shot with arrows. My dad tells the story of walking along a trail in the jungle one evening and hearing the Indians go by while he hid in the brush. My dad and most of the oil company employees wore guns while out in the jungle. It was very primitive. The Colombian Army would periodically come in and shoot up the Indian villages to drive them further back into the jungle.

NELSON: There's a kind of Indiana Jones.

MCCOY: Yes, kind of an Indiana Jones thing. It was really interesting. One of the fun things I did as a kid was go hunting with my Dad and a couple of other men in dug out canoes down the Magdalena River, one of the major jungle rivers in Colombia.

NELSON: You were living in a company town?

MCCOY: No, Cucuta was a state capitol. As I recall, it was fairly small. Cobblestone and dirt streets, but we had a nice

house and Bogota, of course, is a metropolitan city. Bogota is the capitol of Colombia and is in the Andes Mountains at 9,000 feet so the air is very thin and it takes a while to get accustomed to it.

NELSON: But you were not sequestered there?

MCCOY: No we were definitely not sequestered. In Bogota there was an area or district where lots of Americans and Europeans lived. We were living there when the Communists tried to take over the country in 1948. They killed one of the presidential candidates and tried to take over the government. The Army remained loyal, however, although there was looting, burning and shooting. At one point my mother had hid all the silver under the coal bin and we were in the bathroom making molitov cocktails because we had heard that the Communists had let all the prisoners out of the jail and they were all coming to the American area to clean everybody out. So the Americans and Europeans were armed and expecting serious trouble. Nothing happened although there were snipers shooting in the area for weeks after that.

I was too young to be scared so it was really exciting. I still have lots of pictures of the damage that was done and of bodies in the streets. The government they have in Colombia now is an outgrowth of that period. It was called La Violencia, the violence. Now the liberal and conservative parties share power back and forth, but they killed something like 50,000 people during the attempted coup. At the time it went on they were

having the Pan American Conference in Bogota and General George C. Marshall, was there as part of the U.S. delegation. I remember he came to our school and visited with us.

Living in a foreign country and associating with people from all over the world was a maturing experience. When I came back to the States, I felt like I was older than the kids around me.

NELSON: So quiet here I bet.

MCCOY: Well, just the experience of traveling back and forth. The first couple of times we went to Colombia by boat. I guess it was the second time, because World War II had started and we were on one of the old Grace Line passenger ships. Somebody spotted a submarine and everybody thought it was German and that we were going to be torpedoed. We all got out on deck with our life jackets and were standing by the life boats when it surfaced and turned out to be a British submarine.

Then coming back and forth after that during the war, we flew. We'd fly over the Panama Canal or the Carribean and they'd block out all the windows so you couldn't look down and see the convoys and military installations. Kind of adventuresome.

NELSON: You said you went to an American school. Was that an English school or just strictly American?

MCCOY: Well, English-speaking is probably the way to put it. The oil companies contracted for teachers to come down and teach the

classes. It was really a pretty good system I thought. And there were maybe 30 or 40 kids in the school.

NELSON: This was totally subsidized by the oil companies?

MCCOY: Yes.

NELSON: Did you learn Spanish while you were there?

MCCOY: Yes, although I don't recall taking Spanish in class, but I'm sure we must have. You certainly learned the language because many of the kids you played with were native Colombians and you picked it up very quickly.

NELSON: How did you learn about the DWP job?

MCCOY: To be honest with you, I don't recall how I found out about filing for a civil service exam. I didn't know it was a DWP job. I didn't know one from the other. I just don't recall how I ever got around to filing for the exam.

NELSON: So you went to work for DWP in 1954.

MCCOY: Yes, two days before my 20th birthday. I started when I was 19, September 13, 1954, my birthday is on the 15th!

NELSON: How much were you going to make there?

MCCOY: I remember earning \$316.00 a month. That's what sticks in my mind, whether that's correct or not.

NELSON: That was better than degreasing?

MCCOY: That was better than degreasing, yes. Degreasing was something like \$2 or \$3 an hour and all the grease you needed. We were working where they were forming wing tanks and about every twenty seconds it seemed like a cannon going off because a big drop hammer would form part of the tank. The whole building would reverberate. You'd go home at night with your ears ringing. It was a wonderful experience. Great for an education.

NELSON: So you came to the Department of Water and Power, where was your first work location?

MCCOY: I remember very distinctly, I was told to report out to Baldwin Hills reservoir. Ed Larson was the party chief and I showed up with a pair of blue suede shoes and I think I probably had slacks or something like that. The first thing Ed said to me was, "You're going to have to get rid of those blue shoes." I hadn't the slightest idea of what I was doing, and Ed Larson was my first supervisor, a really nice guy. He was just a real gentleman, very patient.

NELSON: What was the typical uniform at that time?

MCCOY: You'd just wear Levi's or khaki's
or whatever. Usually some sort of lace work boots.

NELSON: What were you doing out at Baldwin Hills?

MCCOY: We were doing precision measuring to determine movement of
the dam, but at the time I didn't understand it.

NELSON: But you didn't understand it.

MCCOY: Well no, I was holding this....I was kind of the weight on
one end of the chain for a while. But it was fun. I had a good
time and then I wound up working for two or three different...

NELSON: Let's stay on the chain gang for a minute.

MCCOY: That's what I was going to say. I was probably in that
area of field engineering for only about six or nine months, but
during that time I worked for several field supervisors. The
worst job was doing topographic work up in Shoup Canyon. They
were going to build a reservoir up there and God, it was just hot
and miserable. We were cutting and crawling through brush and I
thought I was going to die. Fortunately, I guess, they took pity
on me, because I only had to do that two or three days and they
decided I wasn't cut out for that sort of work.

NELSON: What's the composition of a "chain gang?"

MCCOY: In those days a survey had a party chief and an assistant party chief and then three chainmen or the chain gang.

NELSON: What exactly does the chain gang do?

MCCOY: Well it's essentially a survey party and you're either surveying right-of-ways or in some cases doing topographic work for reservoirs. I worked up at Stone Canyon when they were rebuilding the upper reservoir. So you were working around a lot of construction while the contractor was cleaning out the basin.

NELSON: Do you feel that was a pretty good basic training?

MCCOY: Actually it was kind of a neat job. It was fun if you like to work outside. I soon learned how to play "Hearts." You'd sit in the truck and play cards when it rained, or wait under a tree until it was a decent time to come back into town because you couldn't work in the rain.

NELSON: Why can't you work during the rain?

MCCOY: You could get the instruments wet and it's a problem if moisture gets in them.

NELSON: That was before laser instruments?

MCCOY: Yes, we didn't have lasers in those days.

NELSON: Where did you work out of? What location?

MCCOY: Out of the garage at Second and Hill.

NELSON: You worked about nine months you say at that location?

MCCOY: My recollection was that I was on the field party for about nine or ten months and then I transferred to the Water Distribution Division still as a field engineering aide, but there it was doing as-constructed drawings and measurements of pipelines and large service connections. The construction was by our own forces and I would make the pipe location reports. That was my first introduction to the old Ducommun Street yard.

NELSON: Why did you transfer?

MCCOY: There may have been a little bit more money in it, but the other thing was it just sounded like it would be interesting to do. I really don't recall how I got in line for the job. Somebody may have suggested it after they found out how I suffered doing topo work or something. I don't know.

While I'm on the surveying thing, I remember one time I was working for Joe Cooper, who was a terror in his own right, and we were surveying a pipeline right-of-way. I was on the tail end of the chain gang, I guess, or maybe by that time I had the lead. Part of my job was to write down the measurements. At the end of the day you'd give the measurements to the party chief and he'd

run the calculations. Somehow I was 90 some odd feet short and he chewed me up royal because I'd forgotten to write down one of the measurements. We had wasted a whole day and by the time he was through with me, tears were coming into my eyes. It was just a terrible experience.

I also recall one time we were doing some topo work and I left the hatchet or something up on top of the hill. This was way out in the Chatsworth area before it was developed and I had to go back and crawl up to the top of this huge hill to get the equipment I had forgotten. Maybe by that time they gave up on me and suggested I go to Ducommun or something. I don't remember just how, but anyway I wound up at Ducommun.

NELSON: Was there a beginning of a realization that this was going to be your career at that point?

MCCOY: I don't think so. I'm not sure how I ever decided it was going to be a career, but not at that point. I think what happened is that I decided I'm just going to work another year or so. The interesting thing was though at that time everybody seemed to be studying. In those days you took a written Civil Service exam to be an engineer for the City. They weren't going out recruiting at colleges as far as I know. All you had to do was pass the civil service test to get on the list. So everybody was studying. That was really a good incentive and I wound up spending a lot of time studying for Civil Service exams. I began taking exams for Civil Engineering Drafting Technician and for

Civil Engineering Assistant. I don't suppose I decided on a career until I made the decision that I was going to go back to college at night and get my degree rather than quit. At one point I was going to quit and go to school full time, but Gayle Holman talked me out of it. As it turned out, it was a good thing because by then I was married and we had our first child shortly thereafter. I don't think I ever consciously decided on staying with the Department, it's one of those things that just kind of happened.

NELSON: When it's over you can look back and make a case for the career.

MCCOY: Yes, until then you just go where the money is.

NELSON: In those first years, were there fellows that you admired in the Department that you said consciously or unconsciously that's who I'd like to emulate? Did that come later?

MCCOY: Not that I recall. I think that probably came later, but in those days everybody was God. I walked in as a field engineering aide and there'd be a guy sitting behind a desk in a coat and tie and he, obviously, was running the Department and it turned out to be some civil engineering assistant as you found out later, but at the time everybody impressed you. You had no feeling of where people were in the hierarchy so anybody above you was extremely important or at least that was my perception, but I

I don't know that there was anybody that I emulated. I had a cousin who initially worked for the Public Works Department and ultimately went on to be a City Engineer at Santa Monica. He was kind of my role model.

NELSON: What was his name?

MCCOY: Doug McAteer. He's since retired. He's ten years older than I am, but I was around him growing up. He and his twin brother were in the Navy during World War II and I always looked up to him. So when he worked for the City, I went out and talked to him about being an engineer. I think he was probably an assistant for the Public Works Department at the time, and I thought that was pretty impressive.

NELSON: All right you got down to Ducommun, what were you doing?

MCCOY: I was doing "as constructed" reports on the large service connections which was kind of fun because the Service Superintendent at the time was Carl Johnson. Everybody called him "Shrimp" Johnson. He was the field superintendent and he and one of his foreman took me under their wing. One of my jobs was to come in early and call the gas company and the telephone company and tell them where our crews were working each day.

So he told me, "Come in early and then when you get through at the end of the day, you can take off a little early in the afternoon to make up for the difference." Sometimes the three of

us would take off a little early and go to the local brewery, I forget the name of the brewery, but it may have been Blue Ribbon.

NELSON: Brew 102?

MCCOY: No Brew 102 was right next to Ducommun, but there's one farther down. Things were a lot looser then than they were later on, but he was a nice guy to work for. Part of my job was to go out with the crews and measure the installation and location of the services and make an "as constructed" report.

NELSON: This calling the utilities, this was mainly so they could alert you if they had....

MCCOY: Yes, it was kind of the forerunner of what USA, the underground service alert is now. In those days you called every utility. Now you just call the USA people.

NELSON: How long did you work at that?

MCCOY: For about seven or eight months. The reason I left was because I got a promotion to civil engineering draftsman. I'd taken the exam and passed it and got hired by the Water Engineering Design Division. I worked as a draftsman for a very short period of time, only about eight months because at the same time I had taken the civil service exam for CE Draftsman, I had taken and passed the Civil Service exam for CE Assistant. I think

I was 32nd on the list or something like that. But I eventually got hired as a CE assistant and went back to what is now the Water Operating Division.

NELSON: Where was the drafting room at that time?

MCCOY: It was at Second and Hill on the 7th or 8th floor as I recall. I worked for Bill Rice, I don't know if you remember him, he's since passed away. I worked in the drafting room first. Jack Pohl was running the drafting room at the time. It was interesting because I had not had a lot of drafting experience other than one class in school. Jack Pohl gave me a drafting test as part of the job interview. I forget exactly how it happened, but one of the things you had to do is draw a line with a straight edge or ruler using ink. There is such a thing as a ruling pen which I didn't know about, so I just used a regular pen and as I was drawing a line and all of the ink ran under the ruler and made a mess. I think it was Ken Flittner or somebody like that sitting in front of me who turned to me and whispered that I was supposed to use a ruling pen and I said, "What in Hell is a ruling pen?"

But anyway either Jack liked me or whatever, I was hired and worked in the drafting room for a while.

NELSON: That was pretty much a "bull pen" type of operation?

MCCOY: Yes, and it is today.

NELSON: I imagine was that a little tighter?

MCCOY: Yes, there you had to show up on time and you didn't leave until it was time to go. Every morning you had to practice penmanship and that sort of thing. Jack Pohl was very strict.

NELSON: That was before guides and things like that?

MCCOY: Yes, before all that kind of good stuff. Now they seem to do everything with KROY lettering.

NELSON: Were they still using T-squares and drafting machines?

MCCOY: Yes.

NELSON: And not have the arms?

MCCOY: No, they did have some of those types of drafting machines.

NELSON: Then what happened?

MCCOY: As I said, I passed the exam for civil engineering assistant and I was hired in October, 1956 and went back into what is now the Water Operating Division. It was then called the Water Distribution Division. I got hired, I think, because they knew me since I had worked there as a field engineering aide, I started

working for Gayle Holman who was a Civil Engineering Associate at the time. He was the squad leader.

They were designing force account work for the field crews. Pipelines service and regulator connections and things of that nature. Gayle was really a neat guy to work for and very understanding. I recall one time I was designing a crotch plate for something they were building out at the West Valley yard. I had all these fabrication measurements for its design and had sent it out to the welders who were building it. I got this frantic telephone call, "You'd better come out here and see what you've designed." So I jumped in the car and drove out to the valley. I was about two blocks away when I saw this crotch plate sticking out over the top of the wall. It was a humongous thing. I had inadvertently used the wrong measurements.

NELSON: It was probably that measurement you lost earlier.

MCCOY: Yes, right. I think I found the 90 feet I lost. God, what a disaster so I had to come crawling back to the office and correct that. But you know Gayle was very understanding. They probably should have fired me right then if they had been smart, because I'm sure it cost us a bundle.

NELSON: What is a crotch plate?

MCCOY: It's installed where two large diameter steel pipes join together. If they are the same size or close to the same size a

crotch plate is used to reinforce where the connection is. Essentially you have two wings sticking out then the other pipe sits in the middle. It essentially reinforces the connection. This thing was just huge. I had gotten the measurement wrong. I was designing two of them at the same time and I'd get one going and I'd have to stop and I'd go to the other one and somehow things got mixed up. That's about the time I decided I probably wasn't a very good engineer. I didn't have a college degree at the time.

NELSON: You were attending school at the time?

MCCOY: Well, I was going a little bit and about then I decided that I had to go back and get a college degree. I had about a year and a half in college from the junior college experience. I thought, gee I need to go back, I had just gotten married and it seemed like the right thing to do. There was a guy I had worked with, a draftsman in Water Engineering Design Division that stayed in Design Division when I came back to the Water Operating Division. He was given a leave of absence to return to school. I thought, gee, that's what I should do. I'll just take a leave of absence and go back and finish my college education and no problem.

So I applied to Division management and got turned down. At the time I said, "I know those guys in Design Division are doing this," and they said, "Well we can't do it here because we have a lot of field people and we can't get in a position of letting

people take leaves of absences." I was really unhappy. I was depressed and mad about it and I was going to quit when Gayle Holman talked me into staying and going nights at USC. So that's what I did. I was fortunate because two or three months later my wife got pregnant and if I had quit my job I would have been out there with no job and a child on the way and I'd have really been in deep yogurt.

So as it turned out, I went to school nights and I finally got my degree.

NELSON: You have been kidding about your abilities here, but it's quite an accomplishment to get picked up as an assistant without a degree wasn't it?

MCCOY: Well, in those days it wasn't unusual because all it took was a civil service exam. What you'd do is get copies of the last several exams they'd given. The Personnel Department at City Hall couldn't think of any new questions so after awhile you wound up having the answers to most of the questions or at least a variation of them. The way we did it in those days is that they'd give the exam and then after your grade came out, you could go back and review your answers and the correct answers.

So we would all get together and say, "I'll take the first ten questions, you take the next 10, etc." So you'd go back and review and memorize your assigned questions and answers. Then they would compile these little books of questions with all the answers. You might have a collection of them for the last ten

years. So you wound up studying the questions that had been asked in the past because they tended to ask pretty much the same questions with perhaps minor variations from year to year. So that was how we studied for civil service exams in those days. Instead of going through college and taking the psychology, business and electrical engineering courses and things like that, we concentrated on areas that were needed to pass the exams. There was a lot of tutoring between us and so there was not the incentive to go to school.

NELSON: But there was, what you're saying there was not the advantage to a college grad taking that test particularly.

MCCOY: Not particularly, no. In fact in many respects, it would have been a handicap. Much of the exam was not related to the type of things you tend to learn in college. It was more of a practical test than anything else. I think I took the last written exam for Civil Engineering Assistant they ever gave. From that point on they went to the college degree and recruited directly out of college.

NELSON: That would have been about when?

MCCOY:: Oh it must have been about 1956.

NELSON: You mentioned working under Gayle Holman in a squad. What is a squad?

MCCOY: A squad had the civil engineering associate as supervisor and maybe a couple of CE assistants and one or two draftsmen. So that was a squad and each squad had an area for which they were responsible. At that time they had the city broken up into West Valley, East Valley, Western, Harbor, and Central districts. As I recall, Gayle had the West Valley district. It was our responsibility to do all the drawings and all the engineering that was needed for the field crews in the district.

NELSON: How did you interface with the district?

MCCOY: You mean in terms of the field people? Generally through the district superintendents and in those days, there were some strong personalities. They ran their districts like small kingdoms. They were "all powerful" and they each had their own way of doing things. I remember Bascoum was the district superintendent in West Valley. He was really a strong guy and if he wanted to something a certain way, that's the way it was done. There wasn't a lot of negotiating about it.

NELSON: Even the hierarchy in the water system?

MCCOY: That was my impression, but you have to remember at that time I was relatively new and in a comparatively low position so it seemed like that was the way it was. Dick Hemborg was the head of the Distribution Division at that time and I think Dick Hemborg was probably a pretty strong person in his own right.

NELSON: Well, if something needed to be done out in the district.

MCCOY: If they needed some engineering drawings or something, they came....

NELSON: They came to you or they came to Gayle.

MCCOY: And Gayle would assign it and we'd do it. Gayle was the real engineer of the group.

NELSON: Do you remember any of the other fellows you worked with at that time?

MCCOY: In the squad? Yes, I remember Herb Chapman. I think he's still around although retired. Also Gordon Hatcher.

NELSON: Your squad worked with West Valley. You did not work with any of the other districts?

MCCOY: Not that I recall. Each squad had their own district and I don't recall working for any other squad. At one point Gayle took over the contract inspection group and so I did a lot of inspection work. On the Granada Trunk Line particularly. I spent most of my time doing that until I was promoted to a Civil Engineering Associate position.

NELSON: That was the construction of the Granada Trunk Line?

MCCOY: Yes.

NELSON: How long did you stay in the squad?

MCCOY: I would guess it was about six years or so including the inspection phase before I got promoted to the associate position.

NELSON: Gayle was your boss the entire time?

MCCOY: Gayle was my boss most of that time until he moved, I forget where he went. He may have gone to the Water Engineering Design Division or something or he may have moved up to engineer in the Water Distribution Division and then Bob Bryant took over the inspection squad, so I worked for Bob Bryant.

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RONALD A. MCCOY

MCCOY: So Bob Bryant was in charge of the inspection squad. I worked for him during part of the Granada Trunk Line construction and on some cement lining jobs.

NELSON: Was that the biggest construction job that you worked on?

MCCOY: Yes, because the inspection work I did was with the Water Distribution Division or Water Operating Division. That was the only type of contract inspection work they did. Cement lining and pipeline construction. Other types of projects were inspected by personnel from the Water Engineering Design Division.

NELSON: What did your inspection include?

MCCOY: Proper location of valves and outlets in the pipeline and the alignment of the pipeline. We had a welding inspector and a survey party on the job. My job was to see that the contractor installed the joints properly, cement coated and mortar lined the joints. I was responsible for checking the backfill and bedding of the pipe and that type of thing.

NELSON: Was this primarily done by DWP forces or contract?

MCCOY: No this was contract work.

NELSON: How did you get promoted?

MCCOY: Again it was a Civil Service exam. I took the CE associate exam twice and passed both times, but I was not picked up the first time.

I recall I was doing inspection work on the Granada Trunk Line when I had finally gotten far enough down on the Civil Service list to get interviewed. I got a phone call, I believe it was from Rollo Triay after I had interviewed for a position in the Water Engineering Design Division. I got the message that I was supposed to call Rollo and I was really excited believing I had been selected. So I raced to the phone and called him back and he told me no I wasn't selected that they had hired Art VanOrden. I was crushed, but shortly thereafter I was promoted within the Water Operating Division. So the Water Operating Division has been pretty good to me. I took over the Western District squad replacing Byron Weinstein who had been appointed to a Waterworks Engineer position in the Water Engineering Design Division. During all this time I was still going to school and I guess one thing I should mention, one of the things for which I am really grateful is that the DWP paid for virtually all my college education.

NELSON: This was under a tuition reimbursement program?

MCCOY: Yes, and I was going to USC and it was expensive. With the exception of one or two classes where I couldn't convince my supervisors that there was any benefit, like electrical and sanitary engineering, the DWP paid all of my tuition. Nowadays if a class leads to a degree, they consider it a benefit. In those days they didn't, but I was really grateful for what they did pay for.

NELSON: How long did it take you?

MCCOY: I started going to night school in 1955 and graduated in 1963.

NELSON: That was taking one or two nights a week?

MCCOY: No, I took nine units so that was three classes and then one semester I remember taking three classes plus a lab course, eleven units. I wound up going four nights plus a Saturday. I was walking around like a zombie. It was really tough.

NELSON: It was the hard way to do it.

MCCOY: Actually I got better grades when I was taking three classes than I did towards the end when I was working towards a Masters Degree and taking only one or two classes because I didn't have the work ethic. I've got to have something structured to get going. With three classes, I used to work all day and then go

whole new future for you. Without being a licensed engineer as far as you could go would be the associate position.

NELSON: That was then a requirement for engineer?

MCCOY: It still is. So what I learned in the Design Squad about hydraulics and fire flows, I had not had before and it just happened that some questions on the RE exam were exactly what I was doing at the time in the Design Division. I think that kind of got me over the hump. I was very grateful to Gerry Jones because that move to the Design Division made a difference to me.

NELSON: Is that kind of the "neck in the bottle" promotion?

MCCOY: Yes. There was a lot of really talented people who never were able to go beyond the Associate position because they could not pass the RE. They'd go in and blow the written exam yet they have a world of experience. It's a shame really.

NELSON: Was that about the time then you thought you had a career?

MCCOY: Yes, I think by then, of course, after the kids and everything, you figure you're stuck anyway. So by then, yes, I decided but I think I kind of drifted into it. I never had this sense of wanting to move further. In fact, my wife is always asking when did I decide I wanted to be General Manager. It has

home and study at night and the weekends. At the time I had two little kids so I'd take off to go to the beach and try and study there where it was quiet. That just became a way of life.

NELSON: You then got promoted.

MCCOY: I got promoted in March 1962. I took over Byron Weinstein's job as head of the Western District squad. The same position that Gayle Holman had at West Valley. Byron was promoted and went to the Design Division and so I took his job in Western District. The District Superintendent was Ed Hoag, just a prince of a guy. Really a nice guy and I learned a lot from Ed in terms of recognizing the importance of the field crews and the problems they have and trying to make things easy for them rather than just coming up with engineering solutions.

Those were really good experiences. I enjoyed working with the field people and I liked having the responsibility for the squad. I had some good people working for me.

NELSON: You had your hands on everything.

MCCOY: Yes, you had your hands on everything. You had a little bit more flexibility. I was working for George Adrian who was the office engineer in charge and old George, you know he was a tough guy in many ways, but probably in all the time I was at the Department, he was the only guy I can remember that came over and

made a point of saying, "You're doing a good job," which really made me feel good.

You recognize, obviously that you did well or you wouldn't have been promoted or good things wouldn't happen.

NELSON: You like to hear it once in a while.

MCCOY: Yes and I always remembered that to the extent that I could, I tried to carry that out when I had people working for me because it really did make me feel good. Usually you get chewed out because something goes haywire.

NELSON: To do it right is expected.

MCCOY: And George was a terrible guy to work for really. One of those people that had no feeling for how important his position was in relation to his subordinates. He'd ask some draftsman to come into his office and the draftsman would just get shaky. I really had a good spot in my heart for George because of that one incident. It's interesting how things like that stick in your mind.

NELSON: At that time you got a better look at the relationship of the outlying districts versus downtown? Was it still the autonomy there?

MCCOY: Well this is a little later, of course, but I think probably to some extent it was there. I think Ed Hoag was a little different style. He wasn't the authoritarian that some of the superintendents out in the valley were. But I think even at that time they were very authoritarian type individuals. They had been there for years and years and had the attitude that this is the way it is going to be done.

There wasn't a lot of effort to standardize things in those days. A superintendent may have come up in that particular district and so that district just tended to do things in a given way. If he went to another district, it would be different because that was the way they were brought up and they learned from the foreman in front of them, etc. In later years we tried to make procedures a little more standard. We did a lot more of moving people around.

NELSON: I'd heard that in Water Operating in those days, when it was headquartered at Ducommun, all the brass was at Ducommun.

MCCOY: That's correct.

NELSON: Central District really had an oversupply of brass, the other districts pretty much were on their own.

MCCOY: Yes, that's correct.

NELSON: Central District. A whole lot of people and quite a hierarchy, things were more difficult.

MCCOY: Well, I think the point was that you had the Division Head and the Assistant Division Head right there so they're always looking over Central District's shoulder. In those days they had huge crews and it was just completely different than it is today. They might have a main line crew of 15 or 16 people. Now they're down to five or six.

NELSON: Now they drive in an imported van.

MCCOY: Whole different world. Yes, they used to have a bus so they could take the crew out to the job.

NELSON: Were you in Central District in 1963 when Baldwin Hills failed?

MCCOY: No. By late 1963 I had moved over to the Water Engineering Design Division and I was in charge of the West Valley design squad there.

NELSON: Was that a lateral or a promotion?

MCCOY: It was a lateral move. Gerry Jones called me up one afternoon and asked me to come over after I had been in Water Operating Division Western District. So I said, "Yeah, why not."

I'll go for the change." That was really another key move in my career, I guess.

In those days they had two squads for each district. You had the squad in the Water Operating Division which was related to the construction, field notes and field work and then you had a Design squad in the Water Engineering Design Division sizing the pipelines. The Design squad wouldn't tell them where to install it other than in the street, for instance - install an 8 inch pipeline in Western Avenue from point "A" to point "B." After you'd done the hydraulic design and determined the size you sent a System Construction Order to the Operating Division. The Operating Division would then decide what kind of pipe to install, where it was going to be located and where all the fittings were going to be and that sort of thing.

NELSON: At that point you would need to do the analysis on future growth and the whole....

MCCOY: Yes, we used to do that in the Design Division although a lot of that was done in the Planning Section too. Essentially the Design Squad would determine fire flows if somebody wanted a fire service. You'd have to do a little quick hydraulic analysis to determine whether the existing pipes were the right size and that sort of thing.

So anyway I moved to the Design Division and what I learned there helped me take and pass the Registered Engineer exam. It was a big jump once you passed the RE because that opens up a

always seemed to me that every job I had was such a surprise that I really didn't understand how I had gotten as far as I had.

It wasn't a sense of this is my goal and that's what I'm working for, it was just that I'd take an exam and I'd pass and I would be amazed that here I am, this is probably more than I can ever expect. I think that right up to the end I kind of sat around stunned that I got as far as I did.

NELSON: You never really had greater expectations or dreamt of that next step, it just occurred and you took advantage of it.

MCCOY: Yes, it just occurred and over the years I was very fortunate. I would just be at the right place at the right time, having good people that I was reporting to and for whatever reason good things happened. And I've always felt very....

NELSON: And people helping you?

MCCOY: Yes, and lots of people helping and just being there at the right time when something happened. But it's kind of like the goose waking up in a new world every day. Which is kind of fun because I was never really disappointed. If you have an aspiration to be something and then you don't make it, I think to some extent you feel like you haven't achieved anything.

NELSON: You kind of went with the flow.

MCCOY: I went with the flow and I looked around and say, "Jesus how did I get here?" because there are a lot more talented people around than you.

NELSON: We tend to think that.

MCCOY: Yes, but I mean you look and you say gee this guy knows far more than I do and I'm not saying that to be modest, I guess, it's just the way it was.

NELSON: Had you gotten your degree when you got your registration?

MCCOY: Yes, I got my degree in 1963.

NELSON: That was a joyful moment to get rid of eight years of school or whatever it was?

MCCOY: Oh yes, graduating, yes that was a big step.

NELSON: The children got to see dad graduate?

MCCOY: Yes, everybody came down and I graduated at USC and that was very exciting. You know the thing I missed really was the participation in the university life because when you are going nights you're really not part of the academic community. Even to this day I'm not part of the alumni thing. I always regretted

that because I would have liked to have had that, it seems like something in my life I've missed - the rah, rah, rah, in college.

NELSON: When the horse rolls around the coliseum, you don't get that same feeling that others do.

MCCOY: Right. Like it's my horse. But that's the down side of it and the up side is I started working four years before anybody else my age and it helped at this end of my life.

NELSON: Okay so you pulled a lateral over into Water Design and what were you doing there?

MCCOY: I was in charge of the West Valley engineering squad and there we did the pipeline design as I mentioned, did a lot of the fire flows and that type of thing.

NELSON: Is this the same size squad, basically?

MCCOY: Pretty much so. It had a couple of civil engineering assistants. I was the associate position at the time and a couple of drafting people, so maybe a four or five man squad.

NELSON: You were then associate.

MCCOY: I think Gerry Jones at the time was the Assistant Division Head and the engineer in charge of the section, at least during a

portion of the time, was Wells O. (Bud) Abbott. I don't know if you've talked to him yet, but he was the Waterworks Engineer.

NELSON: Trying to, he's like you.

MCCOY: Well he's up in the Owens Valley.

NELSON: How long did you stay at that job?

MCCOY: From September, 1963 to January, 1965.

NELSON: Going back to Baldwin Hills, you were not involved directly within or out of that?

MCCOY: No, I was out of that. Then I was like everybody else interested in what was going on. I think my wife at that time was on the police department, I remember that and so she got called out. She was a policewoman at that time.

NELSON: Did you get out to see the damage?

MCCOY: Yes, afterwards. This is as a spectator type thing.

NELSON: Okay, then what happened?

MCCOY: I had taken and passed the Civil Service exam for the Waterworks Engineer. In January, 1965 I got hired in the Design

Division working in the Planning Section and was in charge of the master plan group. The senior engineer in charge of the section at the time, I think, was Toshio Mayada. Byron Weinstein, Duane Georgeson, and myself were in the Planning Section at the engineer level.

I worked for a short while in the Planning Section and then in November, 1965 there was a reorganization and I laterally transferred within the Design Division over to Bud Abbott's job which headed the Distribution Design Group. There I had charge of the squads that were doing what I had been doing as West Valley squad leader.

NELSON: What is the, you mentioned master plan?

MCCOY: That was in the Planning Section. They did the water system planning for the overall city. The city was broken into service areas and they were developing master plans for future growth in the serviced areas.

NELSON: The master plan was totally based on future growth, growth of the system?

MCCOY: Pretty much so, based on population census and trends, water consumption and that sort of thing. They take the census tracts and use that and the City's Planning Department updates to predict population growth and future water consumption.

NELSON: Did you develop that analysis yourself or were there outside sources?

MCCOY: That was all done internally. It was pretty much a "cook book" approach and it was just the beginning of more and more computer type studies. But usually they'd go through the meter read books and get consumption data. It was very tedious.

NELSON: Now on your distribution engineering section, you then were in charge of several squads?

MCCOY: Yes, I had five squads that did the design that covered the city. We had the West and East Valley, Central, Western and Harbor Districts. Each district had a squad and so I was responsible for the five squads. Part of my job was as liaison with city hall on the advisory agency where all the subdivisions are reviewed. I was the Water Department representative on that committee. That was a time of a lot of growth, particularly in the San Fernando Valley. There was also a lot of subdivisions in the Santa Monica Mountains and so there was always a lot of controversy generated by those opposing development.

NELSON: Did that job pretty much bind you to your desk from that time?

MCCOY: Yes, pretty much so. There wasn't a lot of field activity. If something came up, I would occasionally go out with the associate and look at things, but most of it was office work.

NELSON: You had the personnel aspects too?

MCCOY: When you say personnel.....

NELSON: Well I'm thinking of mediating problems.

MCCOY: Yes, mediating problems, telling people they were not hacking it and that sort of thing. That was part of it, but it was more administration than engineering. A lot of letter writing and that type of thing.

NELSON: Did you feel more comfortable, kind of, switching into that?

MCCOY: Yes, as soon as I moved out of engineering, I felt a lot better. Engineering was never my forte. And I enjoyed that part of it too. I enjoyed negotiating and dealing with people much more than I did the number crunching. I never felt real good with the number crunching.

NELSON: Okay, so you're in distribution engineering. How long are you there?

MCCOY: Well I was there until I was promoted to Senior Waterworks Engineer. At about the same time I went back to school because I decided I wanted to get a Master's Degree in Public Administration. I had completed the Business Certificate Program at UCLA Extension and then I got involved in Public Administration at USC. I decided I wanted to get a master's degree so I was going to school nights there.

I took the Senior Waterworks Civil Service exam because that was just the next one to take. I passed and was appointed as a Senior Waterworks Engineer in the Water Executive Office as the Executive Engineer. I think I replaced Byron Weinstein. He was there just ahead of me. The Chief Engineer of Water Works was Bob Phillips at the time. This was in August, 1968.

So I worked for Bob for a year and a half or maybe two years, doing special studies for him. One of the studies I remember was a push by the City Council to have the Department take over the City's sewer system. I recall doing a study on acquisition and operation of the sewer system. I had to see whether that was something we wanted to do. We kind of started off with the premise, no we don't, and then came up with all the reasons why we didn't.

Another major study was following the Watts riots. We had an opportunity to get some federal funding for improvements to the Watts area water distribution system which had been an old acquired system with a lot of substandard undersized mains. That was kind of fun because up until that we had resisted getting federal money because of all the red tape and having federal bureaucrats looking over your shoulder. In spite of the problems,

a decision made that the money was available so we ought to take advantage of it.

NELSON: Down in that part of the city there were a bunch of little private companies that we had acquired...

MCCOY: Yes, Southern California Water Company particularly.

NELSON: I imagine a lot of that system was really antiquated and obsolete.

MCCOY: And they're still replacing some of it. The alley mains, and a lot of two inch, and four-inch mains - all substandard. So we got some federal funding. That was a new experience because I had to go to San Francisco and meet with the federal people in the Department of Housing and Urban Development. We received approval and funding from HUD. I had the whole process to myself so it was an interesting project.

NELSON: Was this the first time you had been representing the Department outside the city?

MCCOY: I think that was although I had been out of the city recruiting engineers. So anyway that's how that worked out and then one day Bob Phillips walked into my office and said, "Would you be interested in going to the Owens Valley?" and I said, "Yes." And he said, "Don't you think you want to think about it

and talk to your wife?" and I said, "No, but I'll go home and do it anyway." So that's how I moved up to the Owens Valley in 1970.

NELSON: You were a Senior Engineer?

MCCOY: I was a Senior Engineer in the Water Executive Office.

NELSON: Who did you replace?

MCCOY: I replaced Duane Georgeson who was the Northern District Engineer. Duane came back and I think he went to the Water Operating Division at the time and ultimately to the Water Engineering Design Division.

NELSON: Why did you immediately rush, jump into....

MCCOY: I just thought it would be a great job. I'd been up there on a couple of tours and so I knew a little bit about it. It looked like a challenging job and it looked like it would be fun and I was right on both counts.

TAPE NUMBER: 2, SIDE ONE

RONALD A. MCCOY

MCCOY: So in 1970 I went up to the Owens Valley. I moved the family up. At the time Bob Phillips was head of the Water System and Paul Lane was head of the Aqueduct Division. That was probably one of the best jobs I've ever had. I was there for three and a half years.

In those days the Northern District Engineer had a lot more authority than he does today. With Paul Lane head of the Aqueduct Division, he pretty much let the Northern District Engineer run the Northern District. What he would say is, "If you get in trouble with the local people, say well you have to check with Los Angeles to get an okay." In other words you make your own decision. So it was like running your own little water company.

Then there was involvement with land issues and the cattle grazing for which you had a lot of good training at USC in engineering. I really liked that. Dealing with the Forest Service and the State Fish and Game Department, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Owens Valley Inter Agency Group. So you were dealing with all the land and wildlife agencies. It was just a

fun job. I got to fly. It was the first time I had ever flown in a small plane. I went with a pilot that did our aerial snow surveys. Flying in and out of canyons looking at the snow markers. It was rougher than Hell. I was bouncing around and banging my head on the top of the cabin. It was exciting. I rode in on horseback with Fish and Game personnel to see what they were doing in trout management at some of the smaller lakes. I even went skiing with the Forest Service to check their snow markers. I spent a few days riding up and down the Owens Valley on horseback. It was just a whole different life style.

NELSON: Why did you think Bob Phillips asked you? Were there other candidates?

MCCOY: I frankly don't know and I didn't ask. I just said, "Yes, I'll go." I didn't want any second thoughts.

NELSON: Did you understand at that time that that seemed to be more or less a prerequisite for moving up in the water side?

MCCOY: It didn't occur to me, I think, until afterwards because again it was the same situation. It was there and it looked like it would be a fun job to do, it'd be different and I didn't think of it as any kind of a stepping stone or anything else. In retrospect you look back, but not at the time. I was only the fourth or fifth district engineer in the valley. They had Sid Paratt, Bob Phillips, Paul Lane, and Duane Georgeson and then me.

I'm not sure that Bob Phillips was ever Northern District Engineer. He was up there, but I think he was an engineer. It wasn't until afterwards you look back and say, "Yeah well Phillips moved up and Lane moved up and Georgeson moved up and oh yeah there is a progression." In retrospect, you know, you see a lot. But no, at the time, it just looked like an interesting job and in fact, was.

Again because of the time, at least, for most of that tenure or part of that tenure, Paul Lane was my direct boss. Paul was pretty much of a "hands off" guy. He would let you do your thing, if you got in trouble, if you had questions, he's there, but he delegated a lot more authority and I think that changed a little bit when Duane moved in as head of the Aqueduct Division, Duane tended to be a more high control type individual and so some of that independence, I think, got lost and those that followed me Jim Wickser and then Duane Bucholtz, I think lost some of that independence. Also things got more complicated, so that's not the whole story.

I was up there when the County filed the Inyo versus Yorty lawsuit over drilling the wells for the Second Aqueduct. One of the things I remember occurred right after completion of the Second Aqueduct. The Northern District had a big part of the construction and so they had hired a lot of people. They had completed their work on the Second Aqueduct and I moved up there shortly thereafter replacing Duane. The first thing I had to do was lay off all the extra workers.

Here I am brand new and I'm telling all these men they're going to get bumped back and some would lose their jobs and all this kind of good news. Now why in the Hell didn't Duane do that, I'll never know. He was leaving anyway. So that was my introduction to the Northern District personnel.

NELSON: Sounds like they sent the hatchet man out there. Were you prepared in any way to go up there? Did somebody take you aside and brief you on what was going on?

MCCOY: Not really. I did a little of that. I went over and talked to Horace DeWitt who had had a lot of experience up there. I just tried to get some insights into what was going on and to get some advice. I talked a lot to Paul Lane who lived up there and he gave me some sage advice, but there was no training program or anything like that. Duane Georgeson was there for a short transition period, but it was entirely different from anything I was ever trained for in college.

NELSON: You headed Northern District when the era of good feelings between the City and Inyo ended, pretty much with the advent of the second aqueduct and concerns with pumping immediately arose.

MCCOY: Yes, in fact we had started the expanded well drilling program and that's what kicked it off. The local people in the Owens Valley were concerned about the drilling and the groundwater

pumping and I spent a lot of time trying to assure them that we weren't going to suck the valley dry. There was a lot of animosity and a handful of people were creating problems all the time.

One of the interesting things, though, was that it never, at least it seemed to me, translated into personal feelings. I made a lot of friends up there, still have good friends up there. My kids all still live there. Well, my son doesn't any more, he just came back to Los Angeles. But both my daughters and my grandchildren still live in the Bishop area.

I never felt like I personally was a target. I'd go to a party or bar-b-que or play poker with the people there and I never felt any animosity.

NELSON: The corporate image was the bad thing.

MCCOY: Yes, I suppose it was the corporate image. The City of Los Angeles and DWP, but it never seemed to me to pass on to the individual. I never felt uncomfortable because I was there and I was DWP.

NELSON: Where did you live up there?

MCCOY: I lived in Bishop. The house we lived in was in the west end of Bishop called the "Mummy" house. It was built by a judge whose last name was Mummy. His son was a child movie actor on the television series, "Lost in Space." It was one of the early

space or science fiction shows on television. The house had three stories plus a basement. It had leaded glass windows, two fire places, built-in cabinets and lots of hand-carved wood work. It was located between the west and east forks of Bishop Creek. It was a Department house. I was renting it from the Department and a Department maintenance crew was doing some rennovation on it when I came home. My kids had all been out on the creek fishing by a bridge in front of the house where the Department of Fish and Game planted fish. They must have had 30 or 40 fish lying on the front lawn that they had caught. It was way beyond the limit. The guys on the Department crew were laughing and my kids were just having a wonderful time. Fish and Game must have emptied the truck and my kids caught most of the fish. Anyway it was a neat place. We had horses for the kids and my wife. As I said, a whole different life style.

NELSON: What was your connection, your innerface with downtown at that time?

MCCOY: Again it was not a lot at least initially because things were left pretty much alone. I would call in in the morning and say what was going on or if there was some particular issue that'd come up I'd give them a call, but other than that the day to day stuff was run locally. We pretty much had all the equipment, personnel, and resources we needed.

We had a Field Superintendent running construction and maintenance. At that time we had three districts. We had Lone

Pine, Independence and Bishop Districts and each of them had a construction and maintenance foreman. There was a lot of interfacing with the local people and with the unions. It was probably my first dealings with unions in a position where you had those kind of situations. There was a lot of public relations type things, dealing with people, going to a lot of dinners, meetings and committees. Dealing with the County supervisors in Inyo County and Mono County as well as officials in the City of Bishop.

NELSON: Did you get yourself involved in a number of organizations?

MCCOY: I was on the Bishop Chamber of Commerce, Inyo Associates and in the Bishop Lions Club.

NELSON: The kids went to Bishop schools?

MCCOY: Yes. My two daughters went to Bishop Elementary and Junior High School. My son was only six or seven at the time. One of the first people I met up there happened to be one of the local veterinarians. He and I are still good friends. We used to go camping and fishing in the Sierras. He worked with all the packers so he'd always get a good deal on the horses, the pack animals, and the packer and so we'd take our boys - he had two boys and I had the one boy, and go up into the Sierras. We still do that once in a while now.

NELSON: Did you ski up there at that time?

MCCOY: Yes, that's where I really learned. I had skied once or twice, but then I got really involved in skiing while I was there and the other thing I got involved in was flying. I was involved in a Rural Occupational Program task force for the State Department of Education because we had an ROP program for the local schools at our shops in Independence. The task force meetings were in San Bernardino so I would rent a plane and fly myself down to the meeting.

The veterinarian was a pilot and so he got me interested in flying. I took flying lessons in Bishop so whenever I had an excuse to come down south, I could always rent a plane and fly rather than drive. I used to charge mileage expense to help pay for part of the airplane rental cost.

NELSON: Who was your instructor up there, not Poole?

MCCOY: No, Tom was the warehouse foreman in Independence. I took lessons from Ray Waski.

NELSON: Tom had trained and had been an instructor for many people.

MCCOY: Yes, in fact I think Tom is still involved.

NELSON: Well that was a different life, I suspect, up there to what you had experienced here. I guess you were pretty much on call 24 hours a day. Everyone knew your number.

MCCOY: Yes, everybody knew the number. I've always enjoyed rushing out to the fire so that was always a kick anyway. It was kind of like your own world. I'd drive back from Los Angeles and get to Haiwee Reservoir and say, "Now this is my kingdom." I'd drive from there north, racing from one end to the other. I'd go up to Bridgeport in Mono County to a County Supervisor meeting and then I might have to go down to Haiwee Reservoir. That's a lot of territory to cover and there was always an excuse to go into the field when things were slow in the office. Well I would say to myself, "I think I'll go out and look at something," and then I'd jump in the car and go. I really liked that. There was no one to have to ask.

NELSON: Where was the office located?

MCCOY: The office was located in Independence at the time. I was living in Bishop so I had to commute.

NELSON: Commute every morning?

MCCOY: We had a commercial office in Bishop, so usually once or twice a week I'd stay in Bishop to meet with some of our lessees

or see some of the field crews, so I didn't go down there every day, but most of the time it was in Independence.

NELSON: Do you think the decision was right to move the seat of operations to Bishop?

MCCOY: Oh, I suppose so. I think it kind of detracted from what's going on in Independence because that's the county seat and I think moving to Bishop took a little away. I'm not sure I would have made that decision, but I don't know what...there's a lot of other things that precipitated the move. There were some seismic problems with the building.

NELSON: It appears like the growth is occurring.

MCCOY: Oh yes, no question. That's where the....

NELSON: It's become really, the hub city there. Do you think there's ever a chance that they'd change the county seat?

MCCOY: I don't know. If they did, Independence would die because there is not much else there other than government.

NELSON: DWP retirees. About half of the population.

MCCOY: Well yes, there's a few. So I think the move was kind of unfortunate. Sometimes economics aren't the total driving force.

It might have had some PR value to stay in Independence. I don't know.

NELSON: I guess after you left the Owens Valley then the latest litigation and groups objecting to Department operations up there, we have the Mono Lake....at that time were there identified groups, specific groups opposing....

MCCOY: Yes there was concern about Mono Lake and I remember going out on the DWP boat and taking the Fish and Game people and also representatives of the State Assembly. I think Assemblyman Gene Chappie's office was there and some others. We went out on Mono Lake where Negit Island is joined to the mainland. At the time there was still about eight feet of water to the bottom.

So there was just the beginning of concern about what would happen to the wildlife, particularly the sea gulls. The issue then was solely the sea gulls and I remember one or two of the Fish and Game people saying they weren't too concerned about the sea gulls because they ate the eggs from the sage hens. Fish and Game was more concerned about the sage hen population so sea gulls weren't a big deal at the time.

NELSON: Were you there during the Tule Elk controversy?

MCCOY: Yes, I went through all that. The Tule Elk and Buelah Edmonston's involvement started before I got up there. One of the things we tried to do was develop some things that have become

mitigation measures now. We tried to develop some ponds and attempted to use some of the wells to flow water down to keep trees going and that sort of thing. Both Paul and Duane had worked on similar projects.

NELSON: You were up there three and a half years.

MCCOY: Yes, I came back in 1974. I took the Principal Water Works exam. It was a case where I was really happy where I was and whether I passed or not didn't mean a lot so naturally I came out number one on the Civil Service list. That's always the way it is. Like everybody before me I made the same pitch -- well I think you really need a Principal Waterworks Engineer up here in Independence and, of course, it didn't fly. So I transferred back to Los Angeles in 1974 and came back as the Assistant Engineer of the Aqueduct Division. Duane Georgeson was Aqueduct Engineer and I was his assistant.

We began working on the first of many EIR's for the Owens Valley ground water pumping.

NELSON: Was that one of your principle duties at that time?

MCCOY: At that time yes and, of course, any time you're working for Duane you did whatever Duane was doing. Duane is one of the guys that can keep more balls in the air than any four guys I've ever seen so it was always hard to know which ball was yours.

NELSON: So you work on all of them?

MCCOY: Yes, in fact, and I've told Duane this a number of times, that probably the most miserable job I've ever had was being his assistant just because you never knew what was going on for sure. Fortunately that didn't last too long. I was there for a year and was promoted to Principal Waterworks Engineer and moved over to the Water Engineering Design Division as Assistant Engineer of Design in August, 1974.

NELSON: That was more of a lateral?

MCCOY: That was a lateral move, yes and I'm trying to recall who was in there. I don't recall whether Bill Simons was Engineer of Design at that time or not, but ultimately it turned out to be Rollo Triay and he had two assistants, Le Val Lund and myself. I had the Planning and Distribution Design Sections.

NELSON: Sounds like you're going back to engineering.

MCCOY: Yes, I went back to engineering and kind of the things I had worked on up through the ranks in the past in planning and distribution.

NELSON: So you didn't feel uncomfortable at all?

MCCOY: Oh no, it was an easy step although, I've never been real comfortable with the planning aspects because they can be so esoteric. But in any event, that's where I was and then the next thing that happened is that Rollo retired and Le Val Lund moved up to Engineer of Design and then there was just the two of us. I'm trying to recall whether Toshio Mayada was there as an assistant for a short while before he moved to the Water Operating Division. In any event for a long time it was just Val and me. I liked working with Val because we had a pretty good arrangement. Whoever was there called the shots. If Val wasn't there questions came to me and I made the decision. I didn't have to wait and check with Val first. Val and I had a good working relationship.

NELSON: Working with Duane and then Val were like poles apart.

MCCOY: Oh it's a world of difference. Poles apart. So it really felt kind of good. I liked it and a lot of people asked me afterwards, "You know you spent seven years working with Lund, how did you like that?" I said, "It's neat, I really got along well." And I got involved in things that probably if he had carved out specific areas of responsibility, I wouldn't have. Particularly construction and major design projects.

So I worked there for all those many years and meanwhile Gayle Holman and Toshio Mayeda were managing the Water Operating Division. Gayle retired and Toshio took over the Division and I came over and took Toshio's spot. Shortly before that Lund moved to the Aqueduct Division. There was a major rotation of

personnel. Duane Georgeson was head of the Water System at the time and he moved Walt Hoyer to Engineer of Design. LeVal Lund went over to take charge of the Aqueduct Division and then shortly thereafter, I moved as Assistant Division Head to the Water Operating Division taking Mayeda's former job. I was there for a little over a year and Toshio had a heart attack. He was gone for a while and then ultimately retired. I then moved up and took Mayeda's job as Engineer-in-Charge of the Water Operating Division in August, 1983.

NELSON: Of all those jobs or divisions, what would you say was your preference?

MCCOY: Water Operating. I really, really liked the Water Operating Division. It was fun because again it had a lot of autonomy. Duane didn't exercise a lot of interest in the Water Operating Division because he was tied up on the Owens Valley and Mono Lake problems. So I pretty much could do my own thing and Duane was very good about letting you try something new.

It was a time of a lot of change and reorganization in Water Operating Division and I enjoyed that. We did a lot of things. We absorbed about half of the Water Engineering Design Division. We took all of their Distribution Engineering people along with their New Business Section. It was a challenge to try and coordinate the merger with the ultimate goal of meshing it all into one group and getting it started. I enjoyed that challenge and I think it's worked out pretty well. For years there had been

studies that said that it would never work and that they couldn't do it, but I think it had more to do with personalities than with actual problems. You can always think of a million reasons why not to do something, and they did. They had their million reasons why it wouldn't work. Finally we said, yes I think it will work, and eventually - well let's do it. Almost over night. We were all sitting around in a management development meeting and Walt Hoyer was head of the Water Engineering Design Division and I was head of the Water Operating Division and Walt said, "It's all right with me," and I said let's do it." We did it and it's working very well to this day.

NELSON: How was liaison between the divisions? Pretty good?

MCCOY: In those days, even before that? Oh there was a lot of grouching that the Water Engineering Design Division was not very responsive to the problems of the Water Operating Division. With engineers, that's kind of typical. The engineers don't know how to build anything that will operate and the operating people won't build it the way it was designed. There is always a lot of finger pointing.

When I talk about the coordination I mean in terms of the distribution system, I'm not talking about the major projects. The distribution system coordination really improved, I think, when they combined those groups. And it was hard because you had people who had been in the Water Engineering Design Division for a long time, you had even more people in the Water Operating

Division who had headed squads for thirty years or more years. Getting them to change and to begin looking at some of the planning aspects and doing hydraulic studies and fire flows as well as a little master planning was tough. What we did is have both squads in a district work side by side doing pretty much what they had been doing initially in their own Divisions. Then slowly we began meshing as people changed either through promotion or retirement. Now it is pretty much to the point where you wouldn't know that there had ever been two separate groups.

NELSON: So while the change was done organizationally almost overnight. To really implement it, it took a period of a few years to get to its maximum efficiency.

MCCOY: Yes, and then we started trying to develop some accountability by developing performance standards and trying to measure how people were doing work. That had never been done before. Part of the thing that gives rise to that ability is the personal computer. You can start keeping track of performance and manipulating data. We began printing out what footage of pipe was being installed and what it was costing us. We began having meetings where we asked the superintendents to come in and explain what they're doing, why it's costing them so much - asking a lot of questions. Getting them thinking more in terms of efficiency and productivity and of being more effective. It takes time. You have a superintendent who's been doing something for forty years and you're not going to get him to change very much, but as

the people under him get asked more questions, get more involved, then start doing a lot of training, things begin to change.

NELSON: Felt like you were making a lot of new ground.

MCCOY: Yes, you felt like you were making an impact and I felt like the place was better after I was there, not that the guys ahead of me hadn't done a hell of a job. It was a job where you felt like you were really having an impact and things were changing. You could see the changes. You could see the change in attitude. We started having a lot of management training and development and trying to train the people below. At least from my perception, maybe to some extent, you see only what you want to see, but I felt the morale was better, our safety record was better and a lot of things were happening.

Then one day I got a phone call from Duane Georgeson who said, "How would you and Larry McReynold like to change jobs?" I said, "Well, not really." He said, "Well it's effective Monday." So I moved up to the front office.

NELSON: That was about when?

MCCOY: It was about a year and a half before I retired, January, 1988.

NELSON: So that's when you moved up to become Duane's assistant?

MCCOY: Yes, they had changed the job to make it an Assistant. There's was a lot of debate about that. Originally the job was going to be kind of a rotation type, but then it was decided to give whoever was in the position a little more money. Anyway I was back working with Duane again watching the balls in the air. I did not consider the job a promotion.

NELSON: Wearing your hard hat.

MCCOY: Wearing my hard hat, trying to keep the flak from falling. So I was kind of back to that. Although it was kind of frustrating, it was also nice because you were part of the power structure. I felt like I was part of those making the decisions that impacted the Department as a whole. You were able to see how decisions are made at the top.

I've always liked the analogy about politics and sausage. You never want to see either of them being developed because it's not very good. And I had the same feeling when I went into the staff meetings as Assistant Chief Engineer. You just want to think there's more going in to what's going on, but it was nice being part of it.

NELSON: Your policy's not always made after the deliberation that we all think should go into it.

MCCOY: I can remember one of the funny ones. Of course, by this time I'd already made the decision to bail out. We were all

sitting around talking about the new office space modules and they were saying, "These people don't need this much space. We can make the work stations smaller." And I said, "Now wait a minute." You look around this table, all of us with very large offices and we are not talking about reducing them. This is not a real world we're dealing with here. The guy that has his four module space, that's his world and now you're going to tell him he only needs three." So I was probably more outspoken by the time I made the decision to retire.

NELSON: When did you make that decision to leave?

MCCOY: Pretty much when I knew I had my 35 years in, but I turned 55 in September 1989. That was the key, I had already turned 55. It was a combination of things. Obviously a long commute because I was living out in Riverside. For about eight years I had been commuting back and forth and that makes for a long day. I just felt that I either had to make the decision to retire or stay five more years. I figured Duane Georgeson was probably going to leave fairly soon. If I stay no matter what happens I'm stuck longer than I want to be. Jim Wickser and I were probably the two guys that were front runners for Duane's job. If Jim gets it, then I felt obligated to stay to help him, and if I get it, then I'm obligated to stay. After 35 years, there's got to be something more to life than working.

I loved the job, I like the Department, I liked the people I was working with, the money was good, I just said.... It used to

be that you had heard of the people at the Department who were dying and then it got to the point where you knew the people.

It seemed time to go, power was not my thing and it never has been, I just wanted to do something else. There's a whole world of things to do and with retirement's good benefits, it was time to let it go. Once I made the decision, it was easy. I'm still glad I did it.

NELSON: What have you done since?

MCCOY: Played one hell of a lot of golf. I went up to Alaska for two months and wandered around there. My wife is still working and I knew that ahead of time. We talked about it. There are lots of things I do by myself, but I really keep busy. I'm on the Public Utility Board in Riverside which just kind of keeps my hand in and then I got a consulting job out of the blue. I had no idea of doing consulting. I had no idea of doing that, none at all. Then this temporary job came up with RW Beck and Associates to audit the Operations Division of the Metropolitan Water District. I thought that might be interesting because I know the people and it's some-thing I know about. So I got involved in that. I had to cancel a trip I had planned to go to Nova Scotia and the New England states for two months to do the job.

Now I'm temporarily working as the acting manager of the Gage Canal Company which is like going back to the Owens Valley.

NELSON: What is the Gage Canal?

MCCOY: The Gage Canal is the canal that originally irrigated much of the Riverside area. It used to take it's water from the Santa Ana River, but now it's source is all wells. They still irrigate about 3,500 acres here. In addition they pump water for the City of Riverside. It's potable water in a closed conduit until a portion is taken by Riverside. The balance is used for irrigation. The Gage Canal Company operates and maintains the canal. There's an agreement between the City of Riverside and the Gage Canal Company. The Gage Canal was condemned by the City, but the agreement provides that the Gage Canal will continue to operate it. So they have a budget of about \$1.5 million and about 15 employees. The guy that was running it has cancer and had to pull out and they were looking for somebody to replace him. I was on the Board of the Gage Canal representing the City of Riverside. The City owns about 45% of the shares, so they looked at me and I said, "Well I'll do it for six months and see if we can get something going for you, but I don't want a long committment."

NELSON: Someone's making their nationwide search?

MCCOY: Well, not yet. I've recommended a couple of people to them that I thought could do it, but in the mean time, I'm kind of helping them along.

NELSON: Go out there and turn the valves?

MCCOY: Turn the valves, kind of oversee the maintenance and provide direction and advice. I've been having a good time. Then the more you read in the paper about the problems DWP is having, the happier I am that I retired.

NELSON: You're out.

MCCOY: Yes, I'll leave it to Wickser's good hands.

NELSON: Well Ron, I thank you very much for giving us your time.

MCCOY: My pleasure.