

U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION  
Transcript of National Archives History Office Oral History Interview  
Subject: Charlie Pellegrini  
Interviewer: Jessie Kratz  
May 16, 2023

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**Jessie Kratz:** Thank you for participating in the National Archives Oral History Project documenting the 1973 National Personnel Records Center Fire, its impact on the National Archives, and what it was like to work at NPRC. My name is Jessie Kratz, and I am the Historian of the National Archives. Today is May 16, 2023, and I'm speaking with Charlie Pellegrini. Thank you, Charlie, for joining me today.

**Charlie Pellegrini:** Okay.

**Jessie:** I was hoping you could start by providing a brief overview of your career at the National Archives.

**Charlie:** Okay. I began at the National Archives at the Civilian Personnel Records Center in March of 1974. Well, April of '74, actually, which was like eight months after the fire at the other building. I was located in the civilian personnel records building. And in just a few months, in August of 1974, I accepted the position of management analyst. And most of my career of 30 years was either as a management analyst or a supervisory management analyst. I did have a couple of periods of time when I was a supervisory archives specialist, when I was the acting chief of the Navy Reference Branch and also chief of the General Reference Branch. The Navy Reference Branch was at 9700 Page Avenue and serviced requests for a variety of records relating to Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard personnel. The General Reference Branch was at 111 Winnebago Street and serviced a variety of non-personnel records such as IRS tax returns, USPS money orders, and records of depression-era agencies. So we had two locations in St. Louis, basically one that housed civilian records and then one that housed military records. But I spent most of my career at the one that housed military records.

As I said, I was a management analyst, then eventually became the supervisory management analyst, and then the chief of the management system staff, where we had a staff of about 20 people that were management analysts, management assistants, a budget analyst, trainees, and also people that did the training for the center. So I retired in April of 2004, and during my 30 years I spent a lot of time on a lot of different projects with a lot of different people. But my main responsibilities always included coordinating the release of information from personnel and medical records, coordinating actions for problematic legal demands and complaints, and

doing non-routine FOIA and Privacy Act requests. I was also the Information Security Manager and Top Secret Control Manager. I had a staff of about 13 to 15 people, management analysts, management assistants, and budget analysts. So in a nutshell, that's my career.

**Jessie:** Okay, great. What brought you to the National Archives?

**Charlie:** I was discharged from the Air Force in 1969, and from '69 to '74, I attended college and also worked a number of part-time jobs. But I was looking for something more permanent. I had gotten married, we had a child, and I was looking for something where I could make a career. And I was familiar with the National Personnel Records Center. I've seen the building hundreds of times driving by, and I knew in general what kind of work they did there. So that led me to apply for a job. And as I said, I got the job and I started at the Civilian Personnel Records Center.

**Jessie:** Okay. So you were already in the area in St. Louis—I know you weren't working for the National Archives, but were you around when the fire happened?

**Charlie:** I was certainly aware of the fire. It was the biggest news going. So, I was certainly aware of the fire. And I don't know, maybe it even attracted my attention more as far as applying for a job there. But yes, I lived in the area, and I was certainly aware of the fire. Yes.

**Jessie:** Okay. So you came to the Military Personnel Records Center about a year after the fire?

**Charlie:** Well, about eight months. Yeah.

**Jessie:** Okay. Eight months after the fire. Can you talk about what it was like in the building?

**Charlie:** Well, as I said, I started at the Civilian Personnel Records Center and we were more or less drying out records for the military center at that point. So you always had the odor of the records, the burnt records, and also some of the chemicals they put on the records. So that was ever-present. And then the other thing that was, I guess, something that I knew right away from working at the Civilian Personnel Records Center was we were anxiously looking through all of our holdings to see what might be available and useful to people who had lost their records.

When I transferred out to the Military Personnel Records Center, it was still a building that was in, well, construction. I mean, there was still a lot of very visible damage, and there was the smell of the records, and the smell of the building. A lot of people who had done a lot of work right after the fire itself had many stories to tell about what they had to go through to move records and get records down to safety, more or less, after the fire. So, yeah, it was just something that was ever-present. I had a friend that did key punching of records, and she had

to hold the records while she did that and said she would just go home and say, "I just want to get cleaned up, take a shower, get my clothes off. Just because it's everywhere, all over me."

**Jessie:** Wow. So before you moved to the military building, were you involved with the fire or recovery documents when you were at the Civilian Personnel Records Center?

**Charlie:** Not the actual military records that were destroyed. Just a few months after I came on board I was involved in a project where we processed military pay records, basically final pay documents, pertaining to veterans that were getting discharged, and this is a record of their final pay. So just a few months after I came on board, I got involved in running a project where we would start screening those records. And since they had a name and service number on the pay records, they would be extremely useful as far as verifying a person had military service, in addition to the other information available on those pay records, like the date they were discharged, and if they had an honorable discharge or not. Or, how much mustering-out pay they were entitled to, which would indicate if they served overseas or not overseas, or how long they served. Also information about their home address, things like that. So anyway, I was involved in the initial setup of that project and the final pay vouchers got to be one of the biggest collections of records we had initially that we were able to use to verify military service.

**Jessie:** Yeah. Then you moved over to the building in Overland? Right?

**Charlie:** Yes, that's correct. Yes.

**Jessie:** What were your duties when you got there?

**Charlie:** My duties were a management analyst and I was still involved with the payroll project. That kind of moved with me or I moved with it. But this time I had somebody that was actually on the floor doing it. I didn't do that every day, but I had somebody that was doing that, a guy named Eric Voelz, and he had a group of what we call summer hires. So mainly college students. And he had that project. He was running that, and I was actually in charge of that. But that was one of my major duties.

And then my other duties were just what management analysts do or did at that time. We researched the procedures and then made sure we were processing the work in the most efficient way and then produced a written document that was a directive for our people to follow.

Also, I did time and motion studies for standards when we were trying to set up standards for how many cases an individual employee should do every day. I was on a group of people who

did the standards project. So, it was a lot of different management analyst type stuff, you know, mainly researching and then writing, but also running that payroll project until we finally got it not done, but pretty much automatic. It just ran by itself.

**Jessie:** Great. When you mentioned the payroll project, what other sorts of records would you consult?

**Charlie:** Well, as far as verifying military information, we had microfilmed morning reports. Morning reports were quite valuable. Morning reports for a unit show if something happened to a person. In other words, it wouldn't show every person in a unit every day but if a person was wounded or killed in action or went on leave or was promoted or anything like that. When something happens to that person, that would usually go on the morning report. So they were extremely helpful to verify things.

And then also we had X-rays when an individual went into the military. There was an X-ray taken, a chest X-ray, and when they were discharged, a chest X-ray was taken. So these X-rays were also in our holdings, and we used those to come up with some information where we could verify maybe a date of entrance or a date of separation, things like that.

We also eventually came up with something called the SGO file, which was the Surgeon General's Office file. And these records were statistics—there was no name, but there were service numbers for most of them. But statistics based on hospitalizations, injuries, things like that. So eventually we had one of the management analysts, a woman by the name of Diane Rademacher, work on a project where she took the data that was in this file and made it useful to us as far as searching. And it gave us the service number and then we could cross match the service number to a name and the Surgeon General's office files were extremely useful for providing proof to veterans that they were actually wounded or injured, you know, things like that that would provide veterans benefits to them eventually.

So things like that were extremely useful to the veteran, and to us for that matter. But we had oh, gee, there's no shortage of things we came up with. We had cards that showed awards that individuals earned during their military service, so you could search these cards and come up with a name and then more or less verify something that the veteran was trying to prove. We got VA [Veterans Administration] records that were extremely useful, obviously, since the VA had many records for individuals who had military service and related records for individuals. And then we went to the state Adjutant General offices to see if some individuals registered with the state for some sort of benefit or just registered because they thought they should. So we could go to states and get information from them. So there's a great many different types of records that we called "alternate records." They weren't the actual military service records, but they were records that we came up with or that we found or that somebody told us, "Hey, we

have this.” And eventually you can verify military service, you can verify injuries, wounds, things like that. You can verify training. So if somebody's record was destroyed, nobody ever thought, “well, there's no hope for you.” You know, there were a lot of options out there, I'll put it that way.

**Jessie:** Right. So can you talk about some of the challenges you faced with working with a particular set of records?

**Charlie:** Well, the biggest challenge is, of course, how much information is somebody giving you in order to find the record you're looking for or the records you're looking for. So many times, especially when you're dealing with next of kin or maybe some sort of agency that's trying to work on behalf of the veteran, they may not know the information you need. I worked on a project maybe in the last 10 or so years of my career where we were dealing with people that were in a group called “War Babes.” They were children who were fathered by American servicemen, primarily in Great Britain during World War II. And they obviously realized that the aging population of World War II veterans was going away, and if possible they would try to contact them or just get verification of who their father was. But in many cases the information they had was something like, “Tom Smith who was in the Air Force,” which just was a challenge. You know, we'd need to know maybe the full name, a service number, maybe the place where the person came from. In other words, where they lived before they were in the military. So that's one example where we tried to work with those people. But a lot of times even the veteran himself, if he was aged or infirmed or something, maybe the information provided to us just wasn't enough to locate a record. So I think the biggest challenge was how much information you got from the requester so that you could satisfy the request.

**Jessie:** Okay. So I know this is very hard to do but could you describe a typical day for you in the early years and then maybe towards the end of your career?

**Charlie:** Well, yeah, I worked with a group of other management analysts in my early career, and we were all, I guess, about the same age, about the same education level. So in other words, it was an environment where you were working with people who had the same interest in it. If they needed help, you'd give it to them, of course. And vice-versa. So I thought maybe the biggest thing that I would say about the beginning of my career is I thought, well, this is the right place to work. This is the place where I could get something done and do something that's valued and means something. And I think I always had the feeling that everybody thought pretty much the same—you're there doing the job and you tried to do the job as well as you can. So as far as that working arrangement in the office, I thought that was a good one. And then when you went out and tried to get some information from the operations, the people that were actually searching for the records or writing responses, things like that, you tried to

explain what you were doing and they understood that everybody was going to be helpful and trying to help you.

So that was the feeling I had when I started up. And then when I got later in my career, and I truthfully have to say that it was pretty much the same way—I had a staff of management analysts and management assistants, and they were all trying to do the right thing as far as I was concerned. And you know, every time I gave somebody an assignment, I said, “if somebody comes back at you and says, no, we don’t want to do this, or you just can’t move past an obstacle, let me know.” And I can’t remember very many times when anybody ever had to come back and go, “oh, no, I can’t do this because somebody is saying this doesn’t need to be done or they won’t give me what I need.” Things like that. So I think in general, at both the beginning and ending of my career where I thought I could get something done. And I thought the people I worked with wanted to get something done, too.

**Jessie:** That's great. I saw this nice photo of you and John Carver when you retired in the staff newsletter.

**Charlie:** Yes, that’s my partner in crime there. We’ve been together for a lot of years, and I still talk to him a lot during the week. And so anyway, so it was the same way with several other people that I work with, yes.

**Jessie:** Yeah. It sounds like you had good rapport with a lot of staff there.

**Charlie:** Yeah, and that makes for a happy day when you go to work. Yes.

**Jessie:** Right. Well, because you are working in a unique building and circumstances as compared to the rest of the National Archives, did the Archives or GSA, I guess, at that time, provide any special training for staff?

**Charlie:** I don’t recall that. I do recall that GSA—we were then a part of GSA until about ‘85. Anyway, I do recall the GSA was just as dedicated, you might say, to get it done and to get things moved and to get things fixed. And so I think that as far as the National Archives, again, I don’t recall anything in specific because these records were still not part of the National Archives. They were still owned by the military services. So we had liaison officers for all the military services. So if we had questions or problems or stuff like that, many times we would go to the liaison office just because, as I said, those records didn’t belong to us.

**Jessie:** Right. I’m glad you brought that up. So the records belonged to DoD, and we were basically taking care of them in the records center there. When did discussions begin about making these permanent records, and were you involved with that at all?

**Charlie:** You know, those discussions started well before I retired. So I'd say in the 1990s, that I recall, where we would have staff meetings with people that came from our central office and were talking about that. And I remember even being asked a question, "what do you think? How many years after somebody is discharged?" That type of thing. So I think that was a given because obviously the earlier military records were already in the National Archives and were accessible because they were in the National Archives. I think it was a natural thing to assume. And I remember conversations came up about it a few times. But anyway, at least in the 1990s, I remember those conversations and you knew it was going to go that way.

**Jessie:** Right. Did you notice any changes on how the NPRC was managed after the National Archives got independence from GSA in 1985?

**Charlie:** That's a hard one. I think we always had a lot of contact with our central office and I always had a lot of contact with the General Counsel's office, things like that. But people that actually worked in the Archives in Washington, some of the people on our staff certainly had contact with them, discussing specific records. So we did have a fair amount of contact before and after. I think it was just a continuation, or at least what I recall was just a continuation of that. We always had pretty good rapport with everybody in our central office. And as I said, I had pretty good rapport with people in the General Counsel's office. And I know we had people on our staff that dealt with archivists quite a bit. So, I don't think it was a huge change, but it was, I don't know, maybe we just felt a little bit more like we can call up people and ask them rather than have to worry about not calling them up or something.

**Jessie:** All right. So, what role did technology play over the course of your career with regard to the problems of these records?

**Charlie:** Yeah. Right. Yeah. We didn't have a lot of things available in the 1970s. But then as technology opened up, then all of a sudden you had a computer on your desk and you could query the registry system right where you were sitting. The registry system, which held record location information for our records, would show if we had something for a certain individual. So if you're talking on the phone and you're asked if a record was available, you could look it up immediately and see what type of record or records we held. It could be an actual record or maybe it was a payroll record or some other kind of record. So the technology certainly made it a lot easier for people to locate information and then answer questions. At least it certainly did for me, that's for sure. But for everyone else, too. But then we just got more of the records that we used to have to search manually, and if we could get them into a computer system we could just put in a name or service number or whatever and come up with an answer right there. So

yeah, technology made a difference, especially through the 2000s or the '70s through the '90s. Yes, it made a huge difference in everybody's job.

**Jessie:** Great. So you mentioned that you had to work with other federal agencies quite a bit. So when there were changes within those agencies when there was change in the Presidential administration? Did that have any impact or was it pretty much seamless?

**Charlie:** You know. I mean, obviously we dealt with the Veterans Administration and they had a vested interest in us coming up with answers. And as administrations changed and as people in charge in the central office, every once in a while you would say, "Oh, well, we used to deal with somebody and now we have somebody else that's not as helpful." But overall, the federal agencies that we dealt with, no matter when we were talking about during these 30 years I worked, they understood that you were trying to help somebody. It was a veteran. And they tried to come up with what you needed. So I found that in state agencies and I found that in federal agencies. So I know things change. And as I said, sometimes it wasn't as easy to get an answer as it used to be. But again, that's just normal, I think.

**Jessie:** Yes. So what policies and procedures were put in place after the fire? And then how did those change over the years and evolve?

**Charlie:** Yeah. You know, after the fire, we came up with a lot of procedures that were for an emergency—this is how we're going to do this right now. And as time went by and things smoothed out, those procedures changed. It wasn't an emergency type of situation anymore. So yeah, there were quite a few things that changed as far as how we handled records. How much work we had to do on a particular case until we just couldn't find anything at all. How people actually went to work every day and in their office, their surroundings. I don't know how clean they were, how efficient they were, things like that. So things change, but again that fire was a huge disaster at any time, but we couldn't leave that building. Everything that we had and dealt with was in that building. So the procedures that we had at first as far as personnel and as far as procedures, things like that, may have accommodated the emergency situation. But as time went on, everything kind of smoothed out and I don't know how long you would say that would take. I mean, at least maybe 10 years longer until everything was running pretty smoothly, and we knew what we're doing. The place was cleaned up. The building was the way it was supposed to be. So it may have taken that long.

**Jessie:** So I would like to give a visual on the building since it was very large and you lost the whole top floor of it. Can you describe the building where the fire occurred, and where your offices were, and then maybe some of the other organizations that were also in the building?



**Charlie:** Well, the building is huge. I can't remember, it's 720 or 730 feet long or something. And it is a big imposing building. And really it's a kind of a box. That's the way it was built, as far as I know. Was built like a box. And it's just glass windows and aluminum and there's a portico or entrance, things like that. But basically it's just a huge box. It's not exactly square, but a huge, tall box. And when that top floor burned and eventually had to be torn down it's still a large box, there's no doubt about it.

And for staff offices we had people ranging throughout the building searching for records, but most of the office space was on one side of the building. Most of the offices or at least the management offices and also the different branches were in one area of the building there. And then there was a separate, attached building where a cafeteria was. And some of the liaison officers also had their offices in the other area. I mean, it was attached; it wasn't detached. By the way, we also had an officers' club in the other separate part of the building, which was always amazing.

So, anyway, after the fire and after—I don't remember how long it took to take down the entire sixth floor, but after that, the building was still just a big building. And we had escalators going up to different floors and elevators going up to different floors for people hauling records up and down and obviously stairways, too. But anyway, it was quite an imposing building. There's no doubt about that.

Eventually the Army Reserve Personnel Center was co-located with us, and they eventually built a new building right next to the original building, which again, was a pretty imposing building too. But that building is, I think, now used by the Department of Agriculture, I'm not sure. But anyway when the Army Reserve Personnel Center moved into their own building, we got more room for staff and for other things. So that was welcome, to say the least.

**Jessie:** You might not know this, but do you have a sense of how many staff members we had working in the building when you started?

**Charlie:** Oh, I think there's a couple thousand.

**Jessie:** And those were not just National Archives or GSA, but other agencies as well, or just GSA and the National Archives.

**Charlie:** Yeah, it probably was the other people included, too, I think. Liaison officers and some of the people from the Army Reserve Personnel Center. But I think I think, yeah, it was at least a couple thousand people working there.

**Jessie:** And what was the culture like working there?

**Charlie:** Well, there was, you know, it was a military culture, I think, because in the 1970s, many individuals who worked there had been in the military, and then you were co-located there with the Army Reserve. So I think it was that kind of situation. I know we went to military retirement ceremonies and when we had some kind of event, maybe our people would have a fashion show for something, and the military officers would come in their dress uniforms. So to me, it seemed that way. It seemed more military. And of course, it was the Military Personnel Records Center, but it seemed more military than civilian. And officers and enlisted men were in uniform. And you dealt with those people most days and you saw them in the parking lot and you saw them in the cafeteria. So, yeah, I think that's what I would say.

**Jessie:** Okay. Can you talk a little bit about the aspects of your work that you enjoyed the most?

**Charlie:** Yeah, I think the aspect I enjoyed the most was being able to get something done to help somebody out. I think a lot of times you go through with jobs and you just you go, well, I'm toiling away here, but I don't know what good it does. But I think almost every day when I went to work, even if some attorney was yelling at me on the phone or somebody was irate about our procedures or our results and, you know, things like that, the bottom line was, every day I kind of thought, well, I could help somebody out. I could straighten this out for him or somebody on our staff wrote a letter that took care of that situation. So, I think that's basically what I felt. I always thought if you're a federal employee and you're in a job where your job is to help people, then you should help people.

**Jessie:** Sure. My favorite part of the job is also helping people. Good. Good. Hopefully all of us feel that way.

**Charlie:** Yeah, no, it's an important thing. And truthfully, when you talk to other people and certainly not everybody feels that way. You know, it's just I think it's a good feeling. Yes.

**Jessie:** So, do you have any experiences that were particularly memorable during your time?

**Charlie:** Oh, gee. You know, as I told you I had worked on this project trying to help people locate their fathers. That War Babe thing. And by the way, the War Babes sued the National Archives and they said we weren't giving the information that we should under the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). And in many cases we weren't giving the FOIA information that we should have. So eventually the attorney who was handling the case came and talked to me and the director and a couple of other people, and I was given the job of coordinating and getting it done. And because of that responsibility, I was subsequently invited to attend conferences in the Netherlands. So I made a couple trips to the Netherlands and helped people out with their

searches, anything that you could do under the Freedom of Information Act, anyway. I made a couple trips there, and then I also went on a couple trips to Germany and Italy because one of my staff was a retired sergeant major and he had gone on a trip to Italy and Germany for a Retiree Appreciation Day for many of the veterans that were living overseas. And he sort of said, “well, why don’t you go next year?” So I did. But that was on 9/11.

So, talk about a memorable experience. So I was in Vicenza, Italy, and I tried to get into the airborne infantry base there in Vicenza, Italy. And they had us open our bags and unpack our bags there on the ground more or less, to show them we weren’t carrying anything. After eventually getting onto the base, there were no flights going back to the United States, no aircraft flying. So we ended up spending over a week there. But the people were very good and treated us well. And it was a memorable experience. But as I said, planning a trip and then 9/11 occurs wasn’t the best plan. So that didn’t turn out too good. But yeah, through the years, many people thank my staff, thank the Center, thank me personally for things that we had helped them with. And I think that just more or less solidifies in your mind that, well, I did the best I could and people were helped and that’s what we’re supposed to do.

**Jessie:** So you mentioned that the War Babes sued the National Archives. How was that resolved?

**Charlie:** Well, it was resolved, basically, when their attorney who was the lead in the case, came here to the Center and spoke to us and basically said you’re supposed to be providing at least information under the Freedom of Information Act. And there wasn’t anything I could argue about on that. And that’s when I was more or less put in charge of receiving all of those requests and then making sure that when we send back an answer, we either had a legitimate reason for not finding a record or we provided everything that we could provide.

**Jessie:** So you mentioned working with some FOIA requests. Did people or organizations make FOIA requests for information about the fire itself?

**Charlie:** You know, I don’t recall those, to tell you the truth. You know, they certainly sent us Freedom of Information Act requests about individual veterans. Those are the kind we get. But as far as a fire, not that I recall. I mean, it was covered extensively in newspapers. And I guess if there would have been an internet, then there would have been—I know there were theories about how it started and who started it, things like that. But I guess if there would have been an internet, there would have been a lot more of that type of traffic, you know? Yeah. But anyway, none that I recall answering. I’m not saying somebody didn’t get that type of request, but not the type of thing that I remembered answering or getting involved with.

**Jessie:** Sure. Yeah. I'm very interested in the kinds of FOIA requests that the National Archives get because we get lots, and they are varied.

**Charlie:** Yes, right. But most of ours obviously relate to military personnel, sometimes just to try to locate them. Other times to try to find out if the story they're telling is actually the true story. You know, things like that. So, yeah, we get a lot of Freedom of Information Act requests. Obviously we had a list of things that we could give out of a record, and that's what we stuck with: name, serial number, date of birth, dates of service, rank, when they got discharged, assignments, education, place of separation, and place of entry. So it was standard information that we had a listing and if it was available, we had to give it. If it wasn't available because the record was destroyed, we would just say, "no, not available."

**Jessie:** And at this time, were you dealing mostly with letter requests through the mail or phone requests or both?

**Charlie:** Yes, mainly letter requests, yeah. Right. If somebody called us up, the first thing we would say was, did you send in a request? So, yes, we certainly depended on the mail and the mail coming in and the response going out was in the mail. Sometimes people would come personally and want to search their own record possibly, or a record of somebody who had given them permission. But then we had what we called a research room, and the research room attendant would handle that. But yeah, I'd say 90 percent would be mailed-in requests, certainly.

**Jessie:** And there was a research room in the same building?

**Charlie:** Yes, there was. And basically it related to people who were either given, in other words, they ran a business or else somebody had given them permission to review their record. And there were people who wanted to come in themselves and review their record. So it wasn't like immediate service. In other words, it might take some time to locate a record. So many of them would phone in and go, "how do I do this or that type of thing?" And then we'd have a research room where they could come when the record was actually available for them.

**Jessie:** What do you think is the most important impact that this fire had on the National Archives?

**Charlie:** I think one of the most important impacts is first you had to have sprinklers in the record center. That'd be a biggie. But secondly, I think, the records that were destroyed—and there's been other destruction of records throughout the history of the United States and also other places in the world—but I think the lesson learned was you don't just throw up your hands and walk away and say, well, that's all gone. In this case, we had many, many, many

options and everybody immediately thought of the options and located those options, and it was a success. So I think the lesson would be when you have a disaster then what next? Well, what next is what really counts because you have to go find out what happened. How do we prevent it? How do we take care of the people who were affected? So I think the National Archives and GSA and other federal agencies did a good job with that.

**Jessie:** Great. So looking back at the totality of your career, though, how do you view your time at the National Archives?

**Charlie:** I had an enjoyable 30 years in the federal government, and I think I did more good than harm.

**Jessie:** Do you remember your last day at the Archives?

**Charlie:** Yes, I do. Yes, I do.

**Jessie:** How did you feel?

**Charlie:** Oh, it was just, you know, a real change in life because, as I said, I had lots of friends there and we were always close. And one of my closest friends, John Carver and I, we were both retiring on the same day. And we had a big blowout party. But anyway, I remember I cleaned out my desk and they had a bag and a few things that people had given me, little souvenirs and stuff. And every time I left work, I always told one of the secretaries there by the door where I left, I always said, "I'm off." And every time she just laughed and went, "yeah," or something like that. So this time I said that and I think she may have started crying. So, she wasn't laughing that time.

**Jessie:** Have you been to the new building?

**Charlie:** Oh, yes, I've been there for retirement parties, things like that. And I've also been over to the cave where they moved civilian records over in Illinois. So yeah, I've been to both locations. Scott Levins at the military building and Kim Gentile at the cave location were always kind enough to invite me and other retired people to go to ceremonies and things like that, you know, the official opening of the building, and as I said, retirements. So yes, I've certainly been to both new locations.

**Jessie:** What do you think about the caves?

**Charlie:** You know, it's a fascinating place, really. Tell you the truth, I know it's a proven technology if you want to use the word technology. But I just think it's amazing. And every time I go over there, I'm amazed.

**Jessie:** Very impressive.

**Charlie:** Both buildings are, both locations now are impressive as far as where the old places used to be. The Civilian Personnel Records Center is now sort of like a warehouse transfer point for trucks. And it's still there. And for the Military Personnel Records Center, I don't if that building is even occupied by many people. There was talk about taking it down and things like that. But I don't know what the plan is.

**Jessie:** Yeah, I think that there was a reporter trying to ask some questions, and I know GSA still owns it, so they wanted to take the elevator that goes to nowhere, I guess.

**Charlie:** I don't think it goes that far anymore. But yes, that's interesting. Yeah, I think there were some problems with asbestos in that building. So I don't know what's going to end up there eventually. Taking that huge building down will be problematic. I'll put it that way.

**Jessie:** Is there anything about the fire that we didn't cover that you wanted to share? Or the aftermath?

**Charlie:** No, not really. As I said, I came on board about eight months after the fire. So people who worked there before, during, and after, especially right there at 9700 Page might obviously have different memories, different feelings about things. You know, when I finally got out there after the fire, things were just different. And I talked to people, guys who were there during and after. And yeah, my experiences weren't exactly the same.

**Jessie:** Right. We're trying to interview a wide range of people who worked there after the fire in various positions. So, we're talking to some of your former colleagues.

**Charlie:** Yeah, hopefully that list I gave you would give you some people to talk to.

**Jessie:** It's very helpful. We've reached out to many of them and almost everyone is going to participate.

**Charlie:** That's good. And as I said, they'll have different experiences than I did.

**Jessie:** Yeah. But it was an important event, a big event. And lots of people at the National Archives have played quite a major role in helping these veterans. So it's an important story to tell. And we have been telling it, but now it's the 50th anniversary.

**Charlie:** My worry was there was so much done about the fire itself and it was my feeling that, yes, that was obviously a disaster and a significant disaster in the history of the United States. But I think it's also very significant what happened afterwards and how things went so that we

could verify military service. Now, I know that World War II veterans are few and far between anymore and the same way is going with Korea. So I don't know how many requests they receive for those types of records anymore, but that's a dwindling number, I'm sure. But still, it's still there. The history is still there. Those people's stories are still there. I think that's all important.

**Jessie:** Right. I really appreciate our staff's commitment to the veterans. You're right. We could have just washed our hands of it. But we've made this commitment to make sure the veterans are getting their records, and we're still being impacted by the fire today, which is amazing.

**Charlie:** Certainly. Yes.

**Jessie:** Great. Well, are there any other stories or anecdotes you want to share? It doesn't have to be fire related; it can be about your time at the National Archives.

**Charlie:** None that I could tell where somebody would record it, though. [laughter]

**Jessie:** Well, I'll stop the recording now.

[END RECORDING]