

U.S. NATIONAL ARCHIVES AND RECORDS ADMINISTRATION  
Transcript of National Archives History Office Oral History Interview  
Subject: Edward J. McCarter  
Interviewer: Brian Knowles  
Date: April 11, 2014 and April 24, 2014

[START RECORDING]

MR. BRIAN KNOWLES: I am Brian Knowles. I am acting as an oral historian for the National Archives and Records Administration History Office. Today's date is 11 April 2014. I am conducting an Oral History Interview with Mr. Edward J. McCarter, Chief of the Still Picture Branch, Special Media Archives Division at Archives II, College Park, Maryland.

Good morning, sir. Would you please provide a brief overview of your career timeframe at the National Archives?

MR. EDWARD J. MCCARTER: Sure. I began in 1975, I think it was. I think my career date is stated at '76 but I'm not sure that's quite correct. In any event, I started in '75 as a student temp.

I was in graduate school at the University of Maryland working on my Ph.D. and, and I saw this job posted over on the history board about working at the Archives. And then, and I said, oh, that sounds like an interesting job. So, I decided to go ahead and apply.

And somehow, I can't even remember about, sort of Byzantine process of getting into the Federal Government as an outsider. Somehow I wended my way through the process and ended up working at the old General Archives Division out in Suitland, Maryland.

And that, that's sort of the beginning of it. And I plan on retiring on May 31 of this year, 2014.

MR. KNOWLES: Excellent. How did your education influence your decision to work at the Archives?

MR. MCCARTER: Didn't really. As I was saying before you turned on the recording, a lot of people who are my age who came to the Archives in the early seventies, mid-to-early seventies, probably backed into it.

They were all basically history graduates, had little or no knowledge of what the National Archives did or was. And they were graduating, looking for a position, and then they found a position at the Archives. And, obviously it relates to history. So it's sort of a decent fit in terms of your graduate work or your undergraduate work and the kind of work you would do here at the Archives.

My undergraduate degree was actually in American Studies at Maryland, with my major concentration was actually film, not photography. So, it's an interesting story how I ended up in the photo unit rather than the film unit. I guess you could say there is a relationship between the two. You know, you love history. I've always loved it from the time I was in grammar school. I used to read all these books on historical topics and subjects. And it continued through high school and college and graduate school.

MR. KNOWLES: All right. So, it was just school you were doing before you came to the National Archives or did you have other work experience?

MR. MCCARTER: No. Right before I came, I started graduate school, after I graduated from college in '67, '66, '67, I think. I taught for two years in an elementary school, seventh and eighth grade. And because I had a minor in theology, I also prepared the second graders for their first communion. I had more theology than the nuns on the staff at the school. So that was a very interesting experience.

But teaching and seventh and eighth, I taught history. And after two years of teaching I realized I really wanted more of a challenge in terms of working with students. I wanted kids who were more interested in what I was interested in.

I always felt like teaching in elementary school was half acting and half teaching. You know, because you need to figure out ways to keep the kids interested, but yet at the same time provide information about whatever topic you're teaching. So you sort of kind of juggle those two roles when you're teaching in, at an elementary school level.

So I decided to go back to graduate school and applied to a whole bunch of places. And I decided to go to Maryland because I was interested in a program of American Studies. And at that time, the University of Maryland, every faculty member on the staff had a degree in American Studies which is far different from all the other places I applied to.

Most of the places, it was a kind of cooperative program where somebody from the history department and the English department and film or whatever, would come together and sort of cobble together a program on American Studies. But everybody at Maryland had a degree in it. So I thought well, that makes sense, you know. Go someplace where the people who've had their graduate work in the same field I was interested in.

So, after that two years of teaching, then I went to graduate school. And from there, probably about two years into it, that's when I hit on the job at the Archives.

MR. KNOWLES: Alright. So did you finish the Master's degree before—

MR. MCCARTER: I finished the Master's degree. I was in a straight-through program so I didn't have to do a Master's thesis.

But I didn't actually finish my Ph.D. I got to the point where I had a dissertation topic and I had an advisor. And, and then a position opened up, a more permanent position opened up at the Archives, other than the student temporary position that I was in.

And I talked it over with my advisor. And probably the best advice I've ever gotten from an advisor was you're stupid if you don't take the job. So, I took it. I never actually went back and finished the dissertation. I had, you know, I was getting kind of old at that point. So it was time to actually start working for a living.

MR. KNOWLES: So in that temporary student trainee position, what were your typical duties, responsibilities?

MR. MCCARTER: It was pretty wide ranging. At first accessions would come in and you'd just throw the new accessions up on the shelves. You know, this is again, at the General Archives Division. Huge stacks out in Suitland, as you're probably familiar with.

We would climb all the way up to the top and move things up onto the shelves. So we did that for a while and then a few months into it, and I clearly remember this, the Division Director, at the time was Dan Goggin, at the General Archives Division.

And he called me into his office and he said, you know I was looking over your resume. He said, I can see you've got a Master's degree here. He said, maybe we can find something more fitting for you to do. So he put me into the reference section. And I responded to a lot of reference letters from the general public.

Mostly I was working with the Bureau of Land Management Records and the Patent Records at the time. Then I would work also in the research room. Sometimes I'd help researchers with various subjects that they were working on. Again, related pretty much to BLM and Patent Records.

And I continued to put boxes on shelves and whatever else they had to do. I didn't do any project work at all. It was, it was completely reference oriented when I was out at Suitland.

MR. KNOWLES: Great. Now at this time did you do any preparation for microfilming or reproduction? Did you do any of that work out there?

MR. MCCARTER: We did a little bit of that, and I got more involved in the microfilming when I moved from the student temp position to the archivist position on the OMGUS Project. There was a lot of, you know, microfilm and microform related work involved in that.

MR. KNOWLES: Now did you seek out that project, or was that something assigned to you?

MR. MCCARTER: No. I was there. And, again, Dan Goggin—that project was a cooperative project between the Bundesarchiv in Germany and the National Archives, actually funded by Volkswagen. That's who paid the salary. I was in an excepted service position. And, you know, they needed somebody to fill the position. I was there.

Because it was excepted service, you could pick a person without going through the whole civil service process. You know, posting a job and all that sort of thing. Because it was a temporary position. It was going to be lasting for about three to four years.

So, you know, they had liked the work I had done in the reference section. And they thought with my background I could probably fit into this. And I happened to be there. That was the other part of it. I needed a job. So they hired me to work on that project, which is extremely interesting. I don't know if you know anything about OMGUS records?

These are the occupation records in Germany after World War II. And my job was basically to work with historians and archivists who came from various different parts of Germany, to the States, to review all of the records. And there was roughly, I think, 17-18,000 cubic feet total of all the OMGUS records. I might be a little shy on that.

They came over in shipments. And there were 17 separate shipments. You know, each shipment dealt with a specific body of records. There were both the headquarters records that were in Berlin, as well as all of what they called the land records, sort of the regional records that were in the various different locations in the U.S. Zone of Occupation in World War II. So they would come over and they would

review the records. And I had to go through the records, kind of screen them for privacy, get them ready, all sorts of things that you do to prepare things for researchers. And I'd work with them.

I knew something about that post-World War II period. I took a couple of classes in graduate school. And I did a lot of reading on my own about the occupation, which is a very interesting period of time.

But that was a whole area of historiography that the Germans had nothing, which is unusual for Germans. Because if nothing else, they document their history. But during that period, the U.S. Army was running the whole shebang. So, and all the records relating to that were here.

So they would come over at, in various barrages, sometimes two or three at a time from Munich or Wardenburg Baden or Kassel from Berlin, you know, and they'd work here. And they would identify the records that they thought were of historical value for Germany.

We would get the records prepared and take them to the microfilm office at NARA at WNRC. And they would microform, it was all done on microfiche. They would microfiche the records and then we would package it up and ship it to the Bundesarchiv who then would distribute it.

You know, multiple copies were made for the Bundesarchiv and the other archival units that in different parts of Germany that were involved on the project. And it was very interesting because I got to meet some very interesting people, some very knowledgeable people.

Their archival program is worlds away from our archival program. I went through a nine or ten month training program at the Archives. These guys don't get into the archival program until they have their Ph.D. in hand. And then it's about a two or three year process.

So it's a much different thing. So I learned quite a bit about what it was to be an archivist and what you do and what you don't do, just talking to them. Fortunately, they all spoke English.

You know, I didn't have to learn German because, of course, the records were all in English. So I, they all had a very good command of English. It was very easy to talk to them.

They were a very interesting group of people to work with, very nice. I have one funny story. I probably worked with 40 different people. There was one person, Klaus Oldenhage, who was the second in command at the Bundesarchiv, who was sort of shepherding this project from the German end.

And he would come over for longer periods of time. And we got to be pretty good friends. But I remember all the people who came over, they were all pretty young. You know, most of them, obviously, post-World War II, born about the same time I was.

But I remember one time, it was very funny. One of the guys who came over, and I can't remember his last name, but his first name of Adolph. And every one of the other Germans who was there, at the time when he came, apologized to me that his name was Adolph. They just couldn't understand how anyone after World War II would name their child Adolph. So, I thought it was kind of humorous.

They were very funny people. You know, they were very formal in certain situations and then very familiar in other situations. We did a lot of things socially. I took them to baseball games which was hilarious. Because trying to explain baseball, even to some of them who had learned baseball during the occupation. Because some of these guys remembered the U.S. troops there during the occupation, the ones who were a little bit older.

But taking them to a baseball game and trying to explain the rules of baseball. Say, well, this is the case here, but if this happens, then that's the case. And, and they would scratch their head because, for them, the game that they knew was soccer and that's pretty straight forward. Here's a rule. That's the rule. There's no certain exceptions in certain cases.

Whereas, baseball, you know, there are different exceptions depending on what's going on. So, that was a lot of fun, in addition to being a real learning experience for me.

And that went on for about two and a half years. And then, actually went over there and spent two weeks traveling around Germany. And went to a conference in, I'm not going to remember, Hamburg. There was a conference on the OMGUS project in Hamburg. And a lot of historians from Germany were there. And all of the guys who worked on the project were there. And so, that was kind of interesting.

But the other part was when we would travel someplace, when we would go to a particular location, there was always somebody there that I knew. So we'd get off the train and we didn't have to worry about where you were going to stay, what you were going see, what you were going to eat, anything like that. It was all laid out. That's the way they are. You know, boom, boom, boom, boom. They had everything organized. And Klaus traveled with me the whole time I was there, the whole two weeks.

So we travelled all over Germany. It was just interesting. The most interesting part was traveling through East Germany and into East Berlin. Because he said, you've got to take this trip, just to understand what's going on. So we took a train, a West German train. And when we hit the border between East Germany and West Germany, everybody gets off. You got to get onto an East German train.

So, it's like going from a first class train into a cattle car. I mean, wooden seats, wooden cars. I mean, it was, I was worried the whole thing was going to fall apart.

But anyway, so we get in the train. You know, we're going through East Germany. And that was very interesting. There was barbed wire all along the thing. I asked Klaus, what's all this barbed wire for? He said, oh, there's mines there. So that people won't try to jump over the barbed wire and get on the train. And so when we hit, just before we go into West Berlin, you stop on a siding and the East German police come on the train. And they're looking at your passports. And they send the dogs underneath the train because they want to make sure there's nobody hanging on underneath who's going to sneak in from East Germany to West Berlin. And then we stayed in West Berlin.

And went into East Berlin, saw what it was like there. And the difference, and this is back now, '77, '78, the difference between these two parts of the city was just unbelievable. I mean West Berlin was like going to New York City. East Berlin looked like the San Francisco earthquake. I mean, there was still a lot of damage left over from the war and we're talking in the 1970s. Because they didn't bother to repair things. You know, after the unification things changed. Then East Berlin became part of the whole German country.

And I think things, I haven't been there since then. But that was a very stark reality going into, into East Berlin and seeing what it was like over there as opposed to what, and just watching people walking around carrying submachine guns was sort of an experience.

I mean, you don't normally see that in American cities. At least you didn't then. I'm not sure about now. But, at that point in time that was, that was, that was pretty, pretty strange.

MR. KNOWLES: Did you conduct any archival work in East Berlin or...?

MR. MCCARTER: No. It was, it was just basically went over for the conference and then, then we just kind of travelled around to kind—

MR. KNOWLES: [Interposing] Mm.

MR. MCCARTER: —of see Germany. See a lot of the places that I, you know, were in the records that I had worked with. So it was very interesting. I'm sorry if I've wandered off the topic here.

MR. KNOWLES: No. No. This is perfect.

MR. MCCARTER: But it was kind of an interesting thing. And then that, that project was coming to an end so, you know, I was back to Dan Goggin. Said, hey Dan, you got any full-time positions available? And he was able to bring me in for very short period of time as an archives technician.

And then almost immediately I got switched into the CIDS program which back then was much more organized and structured and, and useful, a very useful program which unfortunately, I think, that was discontinued a number of years ago. And I think it was a huge mistake.

Because what's happened is, you don't have, for lack of a better term, classes of new young archivists coming in who learn from the people who are already there. So there's this huge gap in time frame between people like my generation who came in and the people who follow.

And, you know, I think it's really affected the way we get work done. Because I'm going to walk out the door on May 31st. There's a lot of stuff that the two of the archivists who worked for me were extremely good. They just don't know, you know. And that's, kind of institutional knowledge too. I mean, that's pretty important. But it, there's huge gap there and you can't impart that, you know. Because you're working day-to-day and you're trying to get things done. So, anyway, that's quite an editorial comment about the CIDS program.

MR. KNOWLES: Yeah. It's tough to transfer that knowledge. Yeah.

MR. MCCARTER: Well it, and as I said, you're losing new blood coming into the building working in a professional capacity, which is what you need. And now it's being done helter-skelter. You know, oh, well we got one position here. And we got one position there. And blah, blah, blah, blah. You know, and it's, it's just, to me, it's pretty chaotic and I just don't think it works very well.

But anyway, so I was able to get in and I was in the CIDS project for a year when I was out in Suitland at the General Archives Division. I worked in a processing branch so I did a lot of arrangement, description projects, and worked with researchers.

Everybody had to do a microfilm project at that point. That was part of the mandatory training. You know, we did rotations to other units, which was, it was very useful. You know, going into the appraisal unit.

I actually, one of mine was the Motion Picture Unit, which was what I was pretty interested in. I did one to the Exhibits Office and a couple of other offices. I tried to stay away from Admin Offices. And just go to custodial and program unit offices.

So that was very helpful in learning about all the different parts of the Archives. And how they all, all sort of fit together to deal with then entire life cycle of the records. I don't know whether that same thing is happening today. I'm just, I'm not sure.

It's been a long time since we had an archivist trainee. So, they may very well be still going through rotations. If they're not, they really should be. Because it's an extremely valuable experience to see what other people do. And plus, you make a lot of good contacts that become very useful in your work.

MR. KNOWLES: Did you have a mentor when you first came in or somebody who you looked up to as a mentor?

MR. MCCARTER: Not really. You know, the people who supervised me, and this goes back a way, John Mendelsohn, John was German and a very good archivist. He was sort of the Assistant Projects Chief. And Ed Hill, who was Projects Chief out at Suitland, a really, extremely talented and knowledgeable archivist.

For a long time, the only two supervisors that I ever had at the Archives were Ed Hill and Betty Hill. Betty was his wife. When I moved to Still Pictures, she was my supervisor for many years. So, I mean, I kind of looked to them for direction in, you know, in how to do things. And how to handle archival projects if I ran into an issue that I really wasn't familiar with I could go to them.

And then, at the time I was there, when I was a student, there were a lot of new archivists being hired at the time. So people like Bob Coran, Henry Mayer, who now works at the Holocaust Museum, Jack Saunders, John Vernon, all these, Patrice Brown, all these new archivists who came in.

There was a period when they just hired a whole bunch of new people. So they were all going through the program and getting trained ahead of me because I was still a student. And then when I got into the General Archives Division, I kind of, you know, gravitated, Greg Bradsher is another one, kind of gravitated toward them, you know, for help. But having a specific mentor, that, that didn't really happen until I got to Still Pictures. So...

MR. KNOWLES: So did that trainee position give you a good foundation for a career at NARA?

MR. MCCARTER: Yeah. I think it did. I mean, as I said, I think the rotations were among the most useful things. You know, learning about archival work. You know, basic things like, how do you identify a series? And, you know, how do you write a series description that makes sense and is useful to a researcher?

Ed Hill actually wrote the NARA bulletin on preparation of preliminary inventories, I think it was. And in that, he also discussed series descriptions and how to create series titles. All the kinds of things that are really critically important when you're writing a series description, so that when a researcher looks at something, particularly now online, they can say, yeah, I need to look at that. You know, there's enough information there.

And sometimes, my experience is it's in the title. You know, the most important thing, the thing that hooks people and gets them to realize, ah, I need to take a look at that, is how you frame that title. Because sometimes that's all they ever see. They look at that. And if it doesn't seem interesting, they go onto the next thing, you know. You know, they delete that and go on to the next hit.

So I've always felt and when I trained archivists that worked for me, I've always felt, particularly with photography, you really need to focus on that title. And, because it's going to really tell a researcher right off the bat, whether that's something they want to look at.

You know, you don't want to have titles like photographs relating to the Bureau of Land Management or something innocuous like that that nobody can really know what it's about. You want to get some subject content if you can in that title. So they, oh, yeah. You know, that's really going to be interesting. I really need to look at that. And then, of course, in the series descriptions.

MR. KNOWLES: Mm-hmm.

MR. MCCARTER: In Stills, we write much, much longer series descriptions, packed with a lot more information because that's what researchers want. They want to be able to look at a series description and read through it and have it kind of identify the sort of general character of the records.

But also some real specific examples of imagery that's in there that they might be interested in. Things that are, you know, you wouldn't think are there. You kind of pick them out and throw them in the description and say, you know, these kinds of images are located here. And, you know, research are based on the title or even the organization that created the records, the creating organization, you might not expect those kinds of subjects or topics to be located there.

And so you can capture that in the series description. And now we've always done that. I mean that's one of the things that we've done in the Special Media Division as whole that is pretty different from how textual works. You know, textual doesn't work in the same way, very different groups. So, yeah. I'm sorry. I'm kind of rambling.

MR. KNOWLES: No, no, no. It's perfect.

MR. MCCARTER: But, yeah. I think that was a really good foundation, even though it was only a year, working with Ed and John. You know, I learned a tremendous amount about how to be an archivist, what to do. You know, what's important, what isn't important. How to write things.

MR. KNOWLES: Well with that, the position from '77 to '80, as an archivist, the Freedom of Information Act was passed. Did that affect you at all or how do you feel about the Freedom of Information Act?

MR. MCCARTER: Well, I mean, I think it's good in a lot of instances. I think it gets abused because a lot of researchers don't understand that what the act was designed for was records that are restricted from use. Everything we have in Still Pictures is available. Yet we get a hundred FOIAs a year asking for photographs that are already available. So there's no real need to use the FOIA. So it's just a matter of education—

MR. KNOWLES: [Interposing] Mm.

MR. MCCARTER: —that between researchers not understanding what the intent of what the law was. And I believe it's a very good one. As opposed to records that are already open. You know, we don't have anything that's restricted. You know, everything we have we make available. And that's our goal. I mean, that's what we do, is try to make the records available as much as possible.

When we talk to agencies and I just got finished talking to DIA a couple of weeks ago. We've got like 1,100 paintings from the early eighties. And some of them are classified. I said you really need to get

these things declassified before you transfer them. Because, first of all, the information should no longer be classified. I mean they're photographs of jets and ships and bases and, okay, you know, maybe, maybe, you know, 25 years ago that was important and needed to be classified, but it doesn't any more. So we try to get them, as much as possible, if they have any classified records of, to get them declassified so that when we bring things in we can make everything available.

MR. KNOWLES: What's DIA?

MR. MCCARTER: Oh, I'm sorry. Defense Intelligent Agency.

MR. KNOWLES: Thank you.

MR. MCCARTER: They have a storage location over in Landover, which isn't too far from here. So...

MR. KNOWLES: So how did you wind up in Stills?

MR. MCCARTER: Stills. Well that's a winding, I knew from my graduate work at Maryland, I was a teaching assistant for the education, the head of the education office at the American Film Institute.

So, through him, I met Bill Murphy who was the head of the Motion Picture Branch at the time. This is in the '77, '80, period. And, through meeting Bill and him knowing me and the work I did in graduate school, my interest in film.

He came to me at one point and said there's going to be a position available in Motion Pictures. Somebody's going to be moving to a different unit. So I want you to make sure that you know it's available and you make application.

So, I thought, wow, I'm only here for two or three years and already I'm going to, you know, to pig heaven. This is where I really wanted to be, was in Motion Pictures. So that happened. The fellow moved. And they started the process of filling the position. And that's when Ronald Reagan came into office. And good old Ron put the skids on a lot of things. And he kind of stopped government positions moving around, cut the budget dramatically.

MR. KNOWLES: Mm.

MR. MCCARTER: The fellow who was supposed to go to this other position had to move back to Motion, which means that position was no longer available for me. And on top of it, about a year later and after I got to, to Stills, I was there for about six or eight months, the RIFs came, the Reduction in Force came. And it came hard. Mostly, everyone who had been recently hired, archivists, were all going to be RIFed. They were going to lose their jobs.

MR. KNOWLES: Mm.

MR. MCCARTER: That's the way it worked. Fortunately, I had a connection with somebody at the Air Force in the Photography Unit and I could get over and move into that position. But I would be going from like a GS-11 to a GS-5.

So that agony went on for a number of months. You know, we were all prepared for what it was going to be like to get RIFed. We were given help in writing resumes, and things to find new positions in agencies that still had money. And that went on, I think, that was like four or five months. It was really an

agonizing situation 'cause I was just starting into the career. And I said, oh my God, this is the greatest place in the world after I realized what it was all about, you know.

Like I said, when I came in as a student, I had no clue what the Archives was. But the longer I was here, the more I realized this is the neatest place in the world to work if you like history. I mean it's just unbelievable.

So, you know, I thought, oh my gosh. After all this, I'm going to be out on the street in like two or three months. So that whole agony went on. I don't mean to prolong it, but I think this is an important thing to know. There were a lot of people who were caught up in that. You know, a lot of good people, Cindy Fox, for example, who was head of Reference, downtown, she got RIFed. She eventually came back.

MR. KNOWLES: Mm.

MR. MCCARTER: What, what, what ended up happening is, this is the honest to God truth, the Friday before I was going to be terminated, I get a notice from OPM that somehow I was not going to be terminated. Because of all the experience I had in my accepted service position and my student temporary position and the little bit of time I had on as a full-time regular federal employee, it pushed me to the very top of the list of all the people who were going to be RIFed. And only a couple of those people got saved.

MR. KNOWLES: Wow.

MR. MCCARTER: I happened to be one of them. So that weekend was just amazing. I thought, I just can't believe this, you know. I'd been, for months, trying to figure out what the hell I was going to be doing. And then all of a sudden, like that, you're told, oh, we're switching gears. So anyways, that was great. So, then I continued on my career in Stills.

And, you know, I worked at various positions there, just a basic archivist when I started there. And I started to develop a knowledge of photography. I still had interest in Motion Pictures. And I probably, early on, I would have jumped if I had the opportunity. But the more I worked in the Stills unit, and I took courses at the Corcoran in art history. I went to RIT for that, for that training class where I met Connie McCabe. First time I met Connie and Jim Reilly, Debbie Hess Norris.

I started to really develop a real interest in this stuff. So I started to do a lot of heavy duty reading on photography. And as I said, I took, I two classes in the Corcoran, on two different, two classes on history of photography up through modern photography, very interesting, very useful.

MR. KNOWLES: And just, just to get a clear—so by the 11th hour saving of your employment, they placed you within Stills?

MR. MCCARTER: No. I had gotten to Stills at that point.

MR. KNOWLES: Okay.

MR. MCCARTER: There had been a position in Stills that I was able to get to.

MR. KNOWLES: Okay.

MR. MCCARTER: I guess I'm a little murky here on, on the sequence. But I remember specifically, that I was at Stills when the RIF came in. Bill Leary, who for many years was an archivist in Still Pictures, and if

you go back through the records you'll see his name scattered all over the place. And he went to various other positions at NARA and then went on, the last time I knew anything about Bill, he was working in the White House someplace, in records management.

Anyway, he moved from the position he was in. And it opened up a position in Stills. And I was able to get into that position. By that time I had developed a relationship with some of the people who were at Stills and they knew of my work. And, yeah, you still had to go through the competition, you know.

Names had to be forwarded, your resume to be forwarded, they interviewed you, and all that sort of stuff. And then I was fortunate to get selected. But I had a lot of background. So it helped quite a bit. You know, when I was applying, more background probably than anybody else did, who was applying for it. So at that point, shortly after that was when that all, the whole RIF thing came in.

Because I started in Still Pictures in August of 1980. I remember that date, that month clearly, because that was the month I bought my first car, and I met my future wife, all in the same month. I think she decided to marry me because I had a new car. And a full-time position.

Anyway, so Reagan came in '81. And then it was later in that year. So, probably we're talking about '82 when I, all the stuff was behind me and then I could kind of focus on my work. And, and I started to develop a knowledge and a real interest in photography. And I did develop a little knowledge of photographic processes. Sara knows all about that.

The classes I took at RIT, and I took several of these classes where you would spend, particularly at RIT, you spent a lot of time looking at images, trying to identify what they were. Is this an albumen print? Is it a salt paper print? Is it a platinum print? You know, is it a carbon print? Is it a modern gelatin print? You know, is it developing out as opposed to printing out, that sort of thing.

And, and then I continued to work on that on my own after I came back. Just looking at everything in the holdings, trying to figure out, what is this? What is this? I became obsessed with, for about two years, I think. I was obsessed with trying to figure out everything I saw. I said- What is it? What is it, you know?

Same thing with printing processes. But they were a little more difficult to identify. So I began to develop a knowledge of that and preservation. So I kind of got involved in the preservation of photography.

And one of the things I did early on, was I went through the whole damn stack. And I looked at every series we had. And noted some of the issues that needed to be dealt with, preservation problems, you know. Were the prints curling? Were they stuck together? Were there too many in the box? Did the whole box need to be re-boxed, rehoused, new folders? Were the negatives acetate and deteriorating? Were they nitrate? You know, were they polyester? What were there?

You know, kind of looking at each one. And kind of setting up a plan of what we would do about trying to attack these different problems. And then coupled with that, we were very fortunate at the time, there was this confluence of things that came together of a real interest at NARA in preservation, which might sound funny, but, you know, up to that time, the conservation lab was pretty skimpy.

There was nobody on staff who was a photographic conservator. We had nobody to go to, if we any real issues or concerns. There were some chemists on the staff. Mr. Shahani, who eventually went over to the Library of Congress, he was there for a number of years.

But I don't remember, there were no contacts to really get help in terms of real problems with the holdings. But at the time then, it was kind of interesting, because around that time, Jim Moore, who had been my immediate, not my immediate, but my ultimate boss when I came to Stills, he was the head of what at that time was called the Audio Visual Archives Division.

Jim Moore and his deputy was, Dick Meyer. Dick recently passed away about six or eight months ago. And, and then, and then Jim went from that position to, at the time was called NN, which was, I don't even know how to describe it. Were you here when Michael Kurtz was here?

MR. KNOWLES: No.

MR. MCCARTER: No. It was basically, I guess the equivalent might be, Ann Cummings, our DDC.

MR. KNOWLES: Mm.

MR. MCCARTER: You know, in charge of all the Washington area custodial units, Jim Moore. Well Jim had a real interest coming from the AV world in preservation, in film preservation, and also in other non-textual record preservation. So there, as I said, there was this kind of confluence of things coming together that all of a sudden they became really interested in, hey, we need to preserve this stuff. Because we've got some really interesting things and really valuable things that are not in the greatest condition. And we need to do something about it.

So there was this big push. And, at the time, we didn't have a photo conservator. And I knew Jim from when I was in the Audio Visual Archives Division. And he asked me at one point, do you know anybody? We're looking for somebody to do some conservation work here. One of the first people I identified was Kitty Nicholson. Because I knew her from her work at the Library of Congress and Connie McCabe. I knew her from her work at RIT with Jim Reilly, with the Image Permanence Institute.

And Jim and Connie wrote a book together on 19th Century photography, *The Care and Identification of 19th Century Photography*, which was really instrumental and extremely helpful for custodial types. I mean, Sara knows this stuff backward and forward. But for those custodial types it was extremely useful book for helping us to identify the different kinds of photos we had in our holdings.

So we were very lucky to, to, Kitty I think did come on board about that time. And not long after that, Connie came on board. And one of the first things we did was we wrote a contract to get an outside conservator. Because it always seemed like, if we generated this thing internally, upper management would say, "oh, yeah, okay." But if you had somebody from the outside who had a rep and they generated it, then, oh, all of a sudden everybody sits up and they begin to allocate money to do things.

So we wrote this contract. We wrote two contracts. One was for Jim Reilly to come in and look at our negatives, because Jim was very interested in preservation of original negatives at the time. And then the second contract for Debbie Hess Norris, she teaches at Winterthur, doesn't she? You know, she's the head of the photography program at Winterthur.

FEMALE VOICE: She's actually, the Head of Conservation right now, I think, from the student's perspective.

MR. MCCARTER: Mm-hmm. And, also was a private conservator. She worked on the side. And, yeah, one of the most well-known, as far as I knew at the time, people who knew about photography and preservation.

So we were able to get Debbie to come in and spend a week with us. And we just walked around the stack and she looked at stuff. And then she wrote a report telling us what we needed to address. And interestingly enough, it was pretty much what we had done.

But, with that report, we were able to start doing things. And one of the biggest things we did and accomplished at that point was to focus on the Mathew Brady original negatives, the Western Survey Negatives, probably the most valuable things we have in this building. And some of the corresponding albumen prints from the period.

So we were able to get a project to, because when I first came here, believe this or not, they were still printing off the original plates. They went down to the lab. I almost freaked when I heard that. We had copy negatives. But, you know, they're not that good. So, the researchers are looking for good quality images. So we were able to cobble together enough money, because preservation again, all of a sudden became an important thing, to really address what to do about the Brady negatives.

They were sitting up in the 19th tier of Archives I, you know, near the top of the building. They were all in wooden cases. And I can show you an example of the wooden cases. We have one in the stack that when we moved from Archives I to Archives II, we used those somewhat, in moving things from Archives I to Archives II.

Because the design was great. They were little boxes with little slats because the plates should be stored horizontally, not flat. Unfortunately, they were completely made of wood, which was probably among the worst things I guess they could have been in.

The room itself had literally no temperature control or humidity control at all. And, like I said, it was pretty much top of the building. And it was impossible to work, because the ceilings, I had to bend over when I walked in there because the ceilings were so low and these damned pipes were all over the place. It was just crazy.

So we were able to start addressing this problem. What to do with the most valuable things that we have? And, you know, Connie, through her knowledge, we were able to put together a, a duplication contract. And were able to get a guy named Doug Munson, who was head of the Chicago Albumen Works, which is located in Housatonic, Massachusetts. I think at one time, Doug was in Chicago. But he was at Chicago for a period of time and then moved.

So Doug had developed this process of creating what they call, and you, Sara can address this better than I can. To make a duplicate negative from the original Brady plate, he would create an inner positive and what he called the shadow mask. Because the density range of those negatives was so long that modern film, if you just, you know, try to do a direct contact print, contact negative, you couldn't get the full range of the image.

MR. KNOWLES: Mm.

MR. MCCARTER: So he created and I think it was based on an old idea. It wasn't something that was, you know, he read through the literature and found that. You know, there were some hints about some of these things. And so he comes up with this idea.

And so he would make the inner positive and the shadow mask. Those were made direct contact with the original negative. And then from that he would create a duplicate negative from that sandwich. And that duplicate negative then, we could use for printing. And it would provide pretty much the highest quality you're going to get unless you're printing off the original plate, which of course we wanted to stop doing. Because we didn't want them to break, particularly when they would contact print them. That would drive me crazy.

So, once we had those original negatives then, not only did we have a negative to print on modern paper but if somebody did want a print made on albumen paper and Doug made albumen prints, he could take the shadow mask and create another negative that was designed to print on albumen paper.

So this thing was like really cool. So once we got all those negatives printed and that was all, there was about 6,000 Brady plates. And another, I don't know, 2,600 Western Survey negatives, from the Four Great Western Surveys of the American West from about the late 1860s through the late 1870s.

You got photographers like Jackson and O'Sullivan and Dell and the guy I always forget, the Powell survey. I don't know why I always forget his name, but I always do. Anyway, some of the great photographers from the 19th Century.

And, so, and those plates, so we got all those things copied and now we had something we could really provide to researchers that was just great. I mean, they loved it. So what's the next step? We got to do something about the negatives. We can't just leave them sit in these wooden boxes. So, am I rambling too much?

MR. KNOWLES: No. Perfect. Keeping going.

MR. MCCARTER: So we sat down and we looked the wooden cabinets and we said it's a great design. It just sucks in terms of the physical materials that were used to make it. So we started drawing designs of what we wanted to do. And we got in touch with Interior Steel, which if you've ever played a sport or had gym class, they make every damn locker in the United States, I'm pretty sure. Because their name is on it, Interior Steel.

Well it was very funny because at the time Interior Steel was starting to move into a different line of work. And they started thinking about making cabinets for other reasons. And so we contacted them and we got one of their reps down. And we told them what we wanted and they went back scratching their heads.

Connie had all sorts of information about the gasketing and the paint and this and that, you know, that had to be done for preservation purposes. But also if we had a disastrous flood, to protect the plates because the cases would be pretty much tight, solid.

And they scratched their heads and they put together something. And they made a demo and they sent the design and yeah, looks pretty good. You know, so just make sure they are to spec. So, they worked on that for some period of time and then they sent all the cabinets to us. And unfortunately there was a

lot of off gassing. There was a lot of smell. First, they were in a warehouse, a GSA warehouse, that's where they went originally.

Connie walked in there, [sniff] she went like that and she said "Uh-oh. We got a problem." So she contacted the people and they came back. They took all the cases back to Ohio, I think that's where Interior Steel was. And they had to re-bake them. And that solved the problem.

And then we had these wonderful cases which we have in our stack now, which you can go down and look at. And one of the cool things about it is we put windows in it. And why did we put windows in it? So we didn't have to pull the negatives out when people wanted to look at them. We could just point at them say, that's a Brady negative.

You know, because we have all kinds of people contacting us and saying, gee, can we see the original negatives? Why, of course, now it's very hard to get in the stack but when we were downtown it was a little different. So, even upper management would say—"oh, can we see those, you know?" And they'd bring their friends along. Plus there were a lot of important visitors that I dealt with—a lot of statusy people. Anyway, that's why Connie put the windows in because normally you wouldn't put windows in a cabinet like this.

The other cases we have that we bought subsequent to it for storage of photographic materials have no windows at all. They're just solid cases to protect the records. And they're made of top quality material so there's no interaction with the photography. But that's why we put the windows in, so that we could just point to it.

We didn't have to open the door and pull one out. Because we live in deathly fear of dropping one when you're handling them. Because they're just irreplaceable. There are occasions where—I remember when the Archivist first, the new Archivist and practically every Archivist that I've dealt with. When he first came on board—he has a real interest in photography. And he was interested in Timothy O'Sullivan so I showed him some original prints that we have of O'Sullivan, some of the original negatives. And, I pulled out a Brady plate of Lincoln. Because that's just, I mean that's just, I mean, my God, it's just unbelievable, you know. And you put it on a light table and you're looking at Lincoln. And you feel like if I touch that it's like touching a great man. I mean it's just unbelievable to have these things.

So anyway, we ended up being able to preserve those, those plates. And I think we did a pretty good job. And, you know, we rehoused every single plate too. That was the other thing Connie did. She wrote a contract for four flap enclosures so there was no glue anywhere. Went through every single plate, identified the plate, we made a grid of what it was, what the color is. Some of the plates in those periods, the collodion plates, are darker. Some of them are more gray and I'm not exactly sure why; I think it's just in the processing that was used.

FEMALE VOICE: [Interposing] - - processing.

MR. MCCARTER: Yeah. That would change the color. So she was identifying the colors. If there were broken plates, they created these marvelous things, and Sara's done this too, called sink mats.

So we'd have a plate with maybe five or six pieces. They would create a mat that was sunk. It would have edges that were built up. And they'd put the plate in there. And then they'd cut out all these little

pieces of archival board and place them in there so that the stuff wouldn't jiggle around. And it was all stored flat.

And we've got all of the broken plates, and there were a lot of broken plates, unfortunately. There were a lot of broken plates before they came to the Archives because they were used heavily by the War Department. They were printed a number of different times. And a lot of things get broken.

So we, we were able to preserve those. The interesting thing is, Doug had to take everything out of the out of the sink matte, and put it on his printing table. And put it back together so he could make an image out of it. I mean the ones that were broken really badly, there wasn't much you could do. Sometimes you'd only have two-thirds of a plate, you know, he was able to put back together. Because the rest of it, there were so many little pieces, it would be a nightmare to try to do them.

But that was really an important thing. I think of all the things that I've been involved in at the Archives, to me that was the absolute most important thing was to do something about those plates. And without Connie and Jim Moore and support from the upper manager to get the money. One more thing—they also created a special room in Archives I. It was in 3E4. And it had very good environmental controls, temperature, and relative humidity.

It was, I think, the only room in the whole building where they could control temperature and relative humidity. And, the conservation folks set all the parameters and then they got somebody in to build the air conditioning and heating or whatever equipment that would manage the room was actually sitting in, out in one of the stack areas just outside of the room itself. Because they sealed this part of the room off.

And all of the plates were moved from that cruddy old room up there down to 3E4, in the cabinets, in the great environmental conditions. And there were a lot of other records, some of the treasures, that the Archives had were moved into that room because it had those tight controls.

And then once we moved to Archives II, the lab again, working with the conservators that were on staff, they said, this is what the shelving has to be like. This is what the temperature and relative humidity has to be like. So those conditions that they developed when we moved from Archives I, it was like coming to heaven, you know. Everything was the way it was supposed to be.

But that really was the coolest thing I was ever involved in. It was a lot of fun. It was very interesting. I learned a tremendous amount about the plates. Connie has gone on to become pretty well-known in terms of collodion wet plate photography. And she's a conservator at the National Gallery of Art now. She left. So that, you know, that's, that's kind of where I was.

And then, because of that, because of the knowledge I had developed, Betty, the old branch chief who was Joe Doan Thomas. Joe was here for many, many years. We often joked that they built the building around him. Joe was a great old guy and he knew a lot of stuff. And he retired. And then my immediate supervisor who was the Chief of Projects, she went over, she became the Branch Chief. And then I kind of took over the role of the project head.

We had a Project Chief and a Reference Chief at the time. And Barbara Burger who retired, mm, six, seven years ago was the Reference Chief for many years. And, and so I worked in that capacity at Stills,

pretty long, probably '82 or '84, like that, through the time of moving. Oh, I got a great story about moving too. When we moved to Archives II. This is hilarious.

MR. KNOWLES: Sure. Go ahead. Go ahead.

MR. MCCARTER: We had to design the shelving, how it had to be. Because we didn't, everything wasn't standard for us. You know, we have a lot of different sized boxes. So we didn't want to waste a lot of room. So in some compartments we had 10 or 12 shelves. Because we had four by five shoe boxes like that so we wanted to maximize the space.

Another series we had over-sized legal boxes so we needed enough space. So we had to kind of look at the stack, look at it series by series and where it was going to go. And what I did, was I'd draw these, I drew these goofy designs by hand. And what was going to go there, you know. In row one, compartments one through ten or one through three had to be ten shelves each. Because we got three compartments of shoe boxes we want to put in there.

Well we did that for the whole stupid stack, this whole thing by hand. I mean today you would probably, there must be some computer program that does that sort of stuff. But, anyway, you know, it's, it's like this high, the stack of paper. It took me about nine months to a year to finish it.

MR. KNOWLES: Wow.

MR. MCCARTER: You know, I wasn't working on it all the time because there was obviously other stuff going on. And we were trying to prepare the stuff to move. That was a massive role. Because the rule was nothing moved that was not in a container.

So, and we had an awful lot of things that weren't in roller drawers or in folders but sitting on a shelf. But, the folders were flip floppy, you know, who knows what would happen. So working with the conservation lab and I think, I'm trying to remember who, Sarah was down there, Sarah Wagner. And I, was Sarah involved? I guess Sarah was pretty much involved in the move. Connie and Sarah, I don't know. Anyway—

MR. KNOWLES: [Interposing] Did you have to wait for the building to be fully completed before you started moving or as the various sections of the building were completed you were able to start—

MR. MCCARTER: [Interposing] Well, I think the building was pretty much done. I mean it was still a little rough. But we were among the first units to move out there, the special media.

MR. KNOWLES: Mm-hmm.

MR. MCCARTER: I think cartographic may have actually been one of the first or second. And, well, we had, there's all sorts of messes about the move. But anyway, back to this little design that I created. You know, I thought it was a masterpiece. Anyway, so, I had it sitting on my desk. And I needed to do something. So I took it off and I set it on top of my garbage can. And, I went on working and then, you know, you are tugged away doing 20 different things. So, somebody had me and dragged me away.

Come back to my desk. It's gone. Where is it? Oh my God. It's missing. You know, this was our plan for moving. It was also a plan of what was going at what point. Because we were trying to bring things together in the old building, we had part of series over here and the other part of it over there. So we wanted to make sure they all came together so everything was nice and neat.

Plus, because we knew we had the moveable shelving and how active our records were, we didn't want to put things in necessarily record group order. Because some record groups that were close together in number like 111 and 127, the Marine Corps and the Signal Corps, people are in and out of those things all the time. So we were trying to figure out a way to put the major groups at the beginning of each of the rows in the building here, the black, I forget what they call them. They have a term for them.

So we wanted to put the Signal Corps in this one. We wanted to put the Navy over here. And then we wanted put USI over here. And then the Air Force over here because they were among the most active. And we didn't want them all in the same range, that's what they are. We didn't want them all in the same range because then it makes it very difficult for people to go in and pull things as well as doing reference letters or whatever. So that was part of this whole thing that I had written.

Anyway, so I'm looking in the garbage can saying, what the hell happened to this? I sat there for a few minutes and I think, oh my God. You know, the garbage person came by. It was sitting there, picked it up, and took it down in the trash. So, I immediately ran down to the loading dock at Archives I. And there's this big huge bin of junk, trash that everything was fed into. But unfortunately the one I was looking at was empty.

So I asked the guys on the loading dock. Say, did somebody come and just pick this thing up? Oh, yeah, came in about a half an hour ago and they took it off to the Navy, down in Southwest. I said "Where the hell in Southwest? Tell me." So they gave the address of the place where it all went to. I grabbed a couple of people, got in my car, and we drove down to Southwest to this garbage pit basically trying to find this thing. We got in and we talked to some people and we said, we're from the Archives and I think one of our big bins was just delivered by one of your semis. And, you know, went in the trash.

And the guy said, oh, he said, "Gee whiz, it's, it's probably over here." And he took us over to this bin. And there's this massive bin full of garbage. And, believe it or not, when we were kind of far away. When we got up close, I said, there it is.

It was sitting, it must have been the last damn thing that was thrown out. Because it was bound together and I had this cover on it that made it kind of distinctive. It was sitting right there. So I just walked up and I took it, got back in the car, and went back to the building.

Otherwise, a year's worth of work was just down the tubes, and we'd have to start all over again. And the move was coming, like a freight train. So that was kind of a funny story. I can't even imagine what would have happened if I wouldn't have got the thing back. Because it really was very useful in terms of getting the records moved in the right sequence.

So we got out to Archives II and everything worked out fine. The move actually went very well. We had to kind of control the contractors, because they wanted to just pull things off of the shelf and get it out here. That's all they were interested in. We were interested in making sure we didn't have a God damned mess when we actually got out here and things weren't just totally chaotic.

So we had to control them pretty closely. And we, we talked back and forth from somebody supervising downtown. And I was out here making sure, okay, it's time for 111-SC to come. Okay, it's time for 19-NN to come or whatever. So that worked really well and it went very quickly. All of the Brady plates and all the survey plates made it out here and not any damage to any of the plates, because we went through every damn one of them to make sure.

They actually hired a special mover, an art mover to do the plates. And they created specific kinds of cases with all sorts of padding in it to make sure that the plates were protected. The little cases they were on had pneumatic wheels instead of the hard wheels because you wanted the pneumatic wheels to reduce any of the shock. The trucks were specially designed so that they would eliminate hitting a rut and five plates gone forever. So it was amazing that everything got out here. It really was.

I remember we started on March 17, it was St. Patrick's Day in 1994. And within about two and a half to three months, I think we got everything out and here. And, it was just unbelievable. I was thinking- God, there's going to be all kinds of a mess and damage. And it really wasn't. We worked pretty hard in making sure that things were moved properly, so that we could keep integrity of the records together.

And we had a cold vault. That was the really great thing. Now we had something to put our color materials, our camera original color materials in. So we had stored everything in a cold vault. That was designed again, by the conservation folks. And, so we moved all of camera originals over there. And then shortly after that, all of the flap about acetate and what to do with acetate. And, oh my God, acetate has to go in cold storage. Well we hadn't really designed it to go there.

We had about 2 1/2 million negatives that were acetate based. So that was the decision and it had to go down there. So we moved all our black and white acetate negatives that we had in the regular stack down into the cold vault so they're going to be preserved.

And we did another contract to kind of look at them and to see which of the groups of acetate negatives were deteriorating, even though they were in cold storage. Again, we had IPI, the Image Permanence Institute, Jim Reilly's group, came out.

And they did a survey through our cold vault using these things they called their little AD strips that give you information about what's the acetate content in this group of negatives. So they went through the entire negative collection and they kind of identified for us that, even though these are in cold storage, we still think they need to be duplicated for preservation reasons.

Because they have gone fairly long and away in terms of deterioration. So that's been our Bible in terms of what we're trying to duplicate. And for years we were duplicating on 70 millimeter film, roll film. And then the lab stopped doing analog duplication and we had to move to digitization. So that's been a bit of a change for us. I guess I'm not really following your schedule.

MR. KNOWLES: Don't, this, this is all good. It's all good.

MR. MCCARTER: I'll take a break here.

MR. KNOWLES: Going back to the '80, '85 time range, what other agencies or donors did you work with at that time?

MR. MCCARTER: Probably the biggest group, the organization that we worked with the most, turned out to be DOD. In '82 DOD decided to centralize its photography. And, well, their AV materials too, motion picture, sound, and video things. The idea was they wanted to get better control over all of the imagery that was created within the Defense Department. So it could be used by other components of DOD.

And so, at that point, the Marine Corps had its photography in Quantico, the Army in the Pentagon, the Navy at the Navy Yard, the Air Force over on Fern Street in Alexandria. The stuff was all over the place.

So they brought it all together in one place. Still kept it separately by the organizations, the Marine Corps records. And not long after they brought it together, we started discussions about the transfer of the World War II era material.

Because we, at that point when we moved out here, all we had was World War I, while we were still downtown, all the we had was basically the World War I photography from the Army. We had bits and pieces of Marine Corps. We did have a good portion of Navy photography. And we had zippo for the Air Force, nothing.

So we, once they brought it all together then it made it much easier for us to identify what was permanent and what needed to be moved. And at the time, DOD seemed very interested in cooperating with NARA in terms of transferring photography. So one of the things we did is we went over to the old Navy Yard, which is on Bolling Air Force Base down on Anacostia. You can see it when you're going down 295.

MR. KNOWLES: Mm-hmm.

MR. MCCARTER: They created this organization called the Defense Audio Visual Agency where everything was centralized from these main groups. Now, keep in mind, there's a boat load of photography that's in a lot of other components throughout the Navy, ship yards, bases, ships at sea.

So, the theory was, all of the organizations, components of DOD were supposed to transfer everything to this centralized repository. Some of them did, some of them didn't. But by and large they had the right idea about what they needed to do. Particularly, an agency like DOD that is so huge and sprawling.

NASA's another one. It's sometimes almost impossible to be able to identify the permanent records they have. So by bringing, centralizing it like that, that was a huge help.

So all of the World War II Marine Corps photography, Army, Navy, Air Force, in that time period of '82 through '85, it's probably '83 or '84, we brought in all of the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps photography that related to the World War II period and Korea. I don't even know how many we're talking about, at least, close to a million and a half images. But the thing is we had to go there and we had to do it ourselves.

All the stuff was in Lektrievers. The prints were at one place, the negatives were in another place. We had to kind of determine, "Where's the cutoff?" Because most of these things were kept numerically. The negatives were all in numerical order. The prints were all in numerical order. Some of the prints were in albums by subject. So we had to try to find a numerical cutoff like, 1,260,000 was the number, whatever. That was kind of the end point for the Korean War, as best as we could, and we had to work with the services to identify that.

So what we did is we just went into the Lektrievers and we pulled all the negatives. And then the prints that were in numerical order we'd just pull all the negatives up to that point. The albums that were arranged by subject, that was a little dicier. We had to make our best guess. Sometimes we took things that went a little bit longer. But, substantially the albums covered the World War II and Korea period.

The real problem was the index. Because, of course, the index is in order by subject, not by number. So we had to go through every subject and look at the numbers. And pull out the ones that were below the numbers was the cutoff point. And then recreate that index when we brought it downtown.

So it just related to what we pulled out. And then, of course, about five or six years later they said, "Oh, let's transfer another chunk of it." So we brought that in.

So I'd say in that period in particular, the DOD was really the organization that we worked with quite a bit. We worked a lot with NASA too. But we never really got anywhere with NASA. A lot of talking, but not much was actually transferred.

But in terms of really bulking up our holdings the DOD and the other organization that was really important was USIA, RG 306. We were able to bring in a lot of the more recent USIA photography. And that is just a gold mine of imagery on politics, art, culture, every aspect of American life. Because basically what USIA is, was a PR wing of the U.S. government overseas, you know. They would create exhibits in countries, Voice of America, be mean to the Communists to undercut the Soviet Union and the whole conglomerate of countries that were under Communist rule.

And they would do exhibits there. So they would either create the photographs themselves or they would acquire them from commercial sources for a one-time use and create an exhibit, for example. Or they might make a publication. USIA did a lot of publications.

So, those are probably two of the really important agencies that transferred material to us in that time frame that really sort of put kind of put us on the map in terms of research. Because prior to that, we had researchers when we were downtown. But once we got the Army, once we got the military photography through World War II and Korea, and once we got the USIA stuff, man, it just exploded. Because people were writing us asking for photographs of their ships, of the places they served at in, in Germany or England or wherever, you know. This is the tank I was on. I flew a B24 with the name of, you know, Misty Girl. Do you have a picture of that aircraft, you know?

We did the best we could to go through and see if we could find these things, but it literally exploded. And the same thing with the USIA material. That became extremely active because of the content.

And, of course, we had to tell the researchers, "Remember, some of these things are credited to commercial organizations." So when that's the case, and it says it right on the photo, you have to go back to the source to get clearance to make sure you're not violating copyright. We'll make a copy for you, but it's up to you to go back and check with the organization, like *Sports Illustrated* or *Life*, or *Time* or *UPI*, *AP*, you know. All those things were in this file, in addition to agency creative photography.

So, it's very important to get the researcher to understand. And really important to getting NARA staff, particularly the exhibits people to understand there are some things that they really like to tap into because it's great. But there's a lot of stuff in there that was created commercially. So, you can't just throw it up online or publish it or hang it up on a wall without talking to somebody about the rights situations.

So, those two groups in that time period really built up our holdings and also really increased the number of requests we were getting, which just seemed to escalate every year, more reference requests, more people showing up in the research room.

And then we moved out here, it just continued. We got additional accretions to the USIA and some additional accretions to the military. We now have the military photography up to 2007. A good portion of that is born digital photography, which all of its online. You know, we brought it in. That's one of the

things that we have done and been in the forefront of is, accessioning born digital photography from federal agencies, developed a way to process it using computers.

We had to really work hard to get the IT people to understand what we wanted to do and what we needed to do it with. So we had to get special computers with more storage, more RAM, and all that sort of stuff to process, double screens to work with images and captions simultaneously. You know, programs that are not normally available in the NARAnet, to work with the images.

And then the folks who work in the processing, Billy Wade and Nick Natanson, have really developed the procedures for processing born digital photography or scanned photography and getting it then, and putting it up online. We've got, oh, geez, I don't know, 8, 900,000 images up online right now that are all from federal agencies. And some really interesting things. You know, the Mercury and the Gemini, onboard photography from early programs. We're in the middle of bringing in a lot of NASA stuff from Apollo shuttle and post programs.

So, we're working real hard with the Apollo stuff. Because we've got the Apollo 11 photography. We also have the 13, the one that had the problem. And there's lots of interior shots of them working on the little device that they needed to create so that they could get back to earth safely. So it, and again, I'm kind of wandering all over the place.

MR. KNOWLES: No. It's quite all right. Well just, focusing back to the 1980 to '85 section. I'm to do this chronologically.

MR. MCCARTER: I'm sorry.

MR. KNOWLES: Keep it a little bit organized. What were some of the technological developments during that '80 to '85 time range?

MR. MCCARTER: Well I think it was probably around that time that we started looking at computers and how they could help us in our work. And one of the things that the Branch Chief at the time, Betty Hill, was very interested in trying to figure out how to use these things to our advantage.

It was in that time frame that, we had all of our descriptive material on cards, indexed, you know, like five by seven index cards. You can go in our research room now and you can see the whole batch of them. But, of course, they were only available on the cards. We worked, I'm trying to remember what the organization was. Charles Dollar ran the organization. This was downtown. It was one of the first computer support offices. Actually, Charles Dollar, I'm sorry, he ran what we refer to as NUMI, the electronic records office, 25-30 years ago, downtown.

But there was also an IT office downtown that would help us. And, two of the things that we were able to do is, one had to do with the move to Archives II. They gave us these little TRS-80, I don't know whether you've ever seen them. They're little like, they were like little laptops, basically, very, very, early. And one of the guys who was working in the IT shop, his name was Mike Getzy and Mike's still around someplace. He might be in St. Louis, I don't know. Anyway, he developed a program for us that was basically an electronic location register.

And with these very, very early and very limited TRS computers, we could take them in the stack, they were battery operated. We'd take them in the stack and we could, you know, 111-SC is on this location or this location. So we were compiling all that information. This was also going to help us with the move.

And then, when we got it all compiled we were able to print it out on, and I can show you the printouts. We've got them upstairs. We still have them. We used them for our move, on dot matrix printers. I don't know all the technology that was involved. It was really early stuff now.

These TRS-80 things are really hilarious if you look at them today in, you know, in comparison to what we have now. It's like, but, you know, it was the first step. So that, the use of those laptops to create this automated location register was a huge, huge thing for us.

And then, related to that, Betty, again, was very interested in looking at how we can use computers to help us in our work. So, she worked with that organization again and they found a program called Text Bank. It was a, a full text retrieval system. And it was very early. And this is got to be in the '80 to '85, maybe a little bit after '85, but kind of in that ball park.

Text Bank was just a commercial piece of software that they were able to purchase and give to us. And it was stand alone. You couldn't, it wasn't a net, well, of course, we didn't have a network downtown. All you already had was standalones. Anyway, to get the data into Text Bank, what we had to do was, we had to type in, what we did is we tried to scan, this is really early scanning too, all of the inventory cards.

You know, and there's some of these things that go back to like '45 and the fifties so the type is really strange. And we scanned as much as we could. But it ended up we only had about a 60% capture rate.

So one of the technicians on the staff, happened to also be a super-duper typist, Sheila Mayo. She works down at the Carter Library now. She went through and corrected everything and added the rest of the text in electronic form. So then we had all of our cards in electronic form. We were able to put them into the Text Bank system.

And we could type in, obviously whatever was in the card came out. If it wasn't there it didn't come out on the search. You could go in and type in, World War II. And you would get all of the series that we had that related to World War II. Well that was a huge thing. Because that's what we had to do mentally when a researcher walked in the room. They'd say, I'm interested in this topic. And you got to kind of scan through your head and okay 111-SC, 19-NN, blah, blah, blah, blah, you know. And you'd come up with a list of series. And then we would take them over to the cards and they would read through the cards.

And, there might be 15 or 20, or 50 or 60 for the Signal Corps, 'cause there were so many separate series. That they would look at all of these cards and say, "Okay, I want to see that series, I want to see that series." And then from the cards, they'd go to the finding aids that we created. Because generally we would create a box list for pretty much everything we had, when we could. Big files, like the Signal Corps and USIA, they had subject index cards. So, you didn't have to create anything. You just pointed to there, and say, it's over there. Just say, "Go look at the subjects."

But that was kind of the way it worked. You identify the series, then you get down to looking at the actual descriptions. Then you look at the finding aids, and then you put in a slip to get the boxes. That was kind of that process. But now having that computer, that could do that calculation, not calculation, but compilation for us, it made everything that much easier.

And the researcher could do it by his or herself, which is a big deal. Because, if you work with researchers, they have a real skepticism about whether they're getting to see everything we have—"Are

you sure that's all you have?" This way, they can do it themselves. They can go through the Text Bank system, do the search, and find out what series we have that might relate to their topic.

And then sometimes we'd have to fill in the blanks because not every piece of information was on the card. There might be information that we knew in our heads from working with the records for 20 years. And by the way, you cannot replace people who've been working with the records for 20 years. That's not possible.

You know, we'd fill it in and by now we had kind of an automated way to help the researcher get closer to what they really wanted to look at. So we had that system of Text Bank and it was downtown. We had a couple of copies of it. It was on stand-alone computers and they were pretty early things.

And then when we moved out here, all of the sudden, ta dah, we have a network. I mean downtown we were writing our descriptions, and this goes beyond the '82 through '85 up through probably, you know, the early nineties. We moved in '94. We only had one computer. So every time somebody wanted to write a series description, you had to vie for space on the one computer to type in the series description. And we were using the old format.

And then, once we got it in electronic form though, then we could just insert it into Text Bank. We'd have to rebuild the Text Bank system. Every two or three months we'd take all of the new descriptions that were done electronically, and we'd rebuild Text Bank and, and incorporate the new, new series in there, so the researchers would have them. But when we got here, my God, you know, we had this network. And we had, I'm trying to remember what it was called. But basically, what it was, is the audio and visual archives locator. Because most everything that was in there was either from Motion Pictures, Sound, and Video or Still Pictures. Because we had stuff in electronic form.

So they were able to take what we had created in Text Bank and import it into the system, it was the system before ARC actually. And the Archival Research Catalog goes way back.

But right before that there was sort of this period where the rules, regulations, and stipulations that you have in ARC [Archival Research Catalog] were not quite in force. So they had incorporated all of our previous materials into the new system and then when that was switched to ARC, it went to ARC. And when it was switched to OPA [Online Public Access], it went to OPA. So, we have older descriptions in there that don't meet the ARC standards. But, I mean you got to use them because they've got the information.

So that once we were able to put that in there, that even made things even greater. And then the Internet, my God. People could tap into us from California. And they could look at the series descriptions. And they could send us letters based on that or they could start organizing their research so when they got here they could optimize it.

Because, it's expensive to come here and, and stay here and work here for a week. It's not inexpensive. So that was a huge help I think for researchers. And, of course, they wanted more of that. You know, okay, now, are all your images online? Well we got 15 1/2 million, you know. We're working on it. But the first projects we did was the EAP. Again, I think I'm, I'm moving around here.

MR. KNOWLES: Well, that's fine. Go ahead, keep going.

MR. MCCARTER: Yeah. Okay. I'm sorry. The Electronic Access Project which the Archives got a special appropriation from Congress to put images online. Well, who do you think they came to first to populate it? Still Pictures. So we identified a bunch of different records that we thought would be useful to go up online. There ended up being about 160,000 photos.

And they had a contractor who came into the building who scanned the material. And, of course, scanning the images is only, is the easy part of the job. The hard part of the job is all the caption information. So we had a bunch of students and staff and that's what they did.

MR. KNOWLES: What was the time frame for that?

MR. MCCARTER: That was after we moved out here. So that was probably '95, '96, '97, some, somewhere in there. It wasn't long after we got out here that, and we had the network and people started thinking, "Okay, now we got to really do something with this network." And the upper management got additional funds from Congress to hire the contractor to do the work. And so, over a course of probably two and a half years, I think it was, it, it took us to get all the caption information. So we got all of this 165,000 up.

Well, of course, that just feeds the beast. You know, oh my God, 165,000, but, what about this? What about that? So, you know, ever since it's been a continuing push by the researchers to get more and more things online.

You know, getting things scanned is one thing. It's the caption information that takes such a long time and marrying those two things together so that when you pull up an image, you've also got all the metadata so you understand what you're looking at. Or you can search it.

MR. KNOWLES: Well, in your estimation, how many images do you think are available online today?

MR. MCCARTER: Well if I add in the EAP and all of the things that we've accessioned from federal agencies, over a million.

MR. KNOWLES: Wow.

MR. MCCARTER: Which I think is pretty good for an organization that basically only has two people on the processing team. We have a lot of students and they're very good. And they help us tremendously. We've used the students in much more of an archivist capacity than what I did when I was there pushing boxes around. I mean, they're doing archival work.

MR. KNOWLES: Was there any technological flops that you've had?

MR. MCCARTER: Mm. Well we have, but I don't know that I can say what it is, ERA. I don't know that I would, well, I will be honest with you. The ERA is a total failure. The problem with that, and we kept trying to get them to pay attention to us, is that when ERA was designed, they really did not talk to us about what we knew was out at federal agencies. And what the volume was. And what the file sizes were. You know, they worked mostly with NUMI, which is RDE now. And they're dealing with databases and things of that nature. So most of what they had was megabyte sizes, okay.

We're talking about agency images that are 75 megabytes a piece. And we're accessioning 50,000 of them. And how are we going to send those through the pipeline to Rocket Center? It doesn't work. The file sizes are too big and the numbers are too big. You can't just push it. Every time we would push

something of any size, it would get stuck. It just didn't get there. So basically what we've had to do is, for very large bodies of images, we put them on a hard drive and we send them up to Rocket Center and they kick them in through the back door. I have no clue how they do it.

But, the big problem is trying to move it from Archives II to there, because you're FTPing it. And the pipe this stuff has to go through is like that, instead of being like that. Because it was designed that way. And, I always felt there was never enough discussion with the non-texts about what was out there. I mean, we had big file sizes. Ours are dwarfed by what motion picture will receive, dwarfed.

I mean they have individual, electronic films that are two terabytes, one film. So, it's like holy mackerel, you need to know that when you design this thing, so that it can manage and handle the movement of the records from here to there.

So that really kind of backfired I think on everyone. And, they've understood that and I think they're really working toward developing something new. How long that's going to take, I don't know. I mean, one of the things that is going to affect it is Mike Wash left. And Mike Wash, got it. He understood it. He really knew what we were talking about. He came from a Kodak background. So he understood photography. He understood what happens when you digitize an image or you create an image in a digital camera. And, it's not 2 megabytes, but it's 40 megabytes, because it's a high resolution to file.

So he was very instrumental in kind of rethinking how we were going to deal with the accession, not just digital photography, but all electronic records that come in whether it comes in to NUMI or in the regions or at the presidential libraries, wherever. So he was sort of helping us move in a different direction. And I worry about what's going to happen now that he's gone. Because he was pretty much a driving force, I felt, behind it.

But we didn't have any real major flops. I mean, you knew that, you use new technology and you make mistakes and you learn. But, like the old TRS-80's. That's all that was available. But they worked. They did what we had to do. They were cumbersome and you had to download information on it very frequently because they didn't have much storage capacity.

And then we would move on to the next technology and the next technology and so on. When we moved out to Archives II, one of the first things we wanted to do was to get access to NARAnet in the stack, because that was not available. And we proposed getting a big desktop, plopping it in there and running wires through the walls into the computer.

Very early on, one of the guys who was in charge of the network. I'm trying to remember his name now, damn. Anyway, he said, "Oh, that's, that's a crappy idea." He said, what you want to do, is you want to put a wireless connection in your stack so you can bring a laptop in there and connect directly to the NARA net through the wireless connection. So, he helped us get these little stations that were placed in strategic places in the stack. So we could take a laptop in and set it down, open it up, and we'd have a connection to the wireless connection, which would get us to the NARAnet.

Then we could get to our location register. We could get to the series descriptions. All the stuff we needed to do, like when the staff is in the stack and they're trying to find something. Oh, God, you can't find it. Where the heck did it go? Go back to the location register, type it in—boom, it's here. Oh, it's not here. It got moved, t's over there. So that's an extremely useful tool in the stack.

Unfortunately, they took it out. When they started redoing the wireless things in the building, I don't know. Maybe it was old technology, so they thought they could do something better. But I hope they will put wireless access to NARAnet back into the stacks. Because it's incredibly useful. Sorry. Wandering again. Will this thing ever make any sense to anybody?

MR. KNOWLES: It's really good. It's actually going really well. Now with, in '85 with NARA's re-independence—

MR. MCCARTER: [Interposing] '84.

MR. KNOWLES: —was there, was there anything that affected your outlook for the agency or your day-to-day [crosstalk]?

MR. MCCARTER: Well, I mean, I think everybody who was on board and who was in the picture on front of the building downtown on Independence Day, was really looking forward to being independent of GSA and being able to do its work the way we thought it had to be done. Instead of having control from an organization—we just didn't fit in with GSA. I mean you got Federal Supply Service and the Public Building Service, and had National Archives and Records Service. It's like, what do we have to do with toilet paper and pencils and paper, you know? But, that's where it was put.

So once we got independence, I think everybody was really optimistic that, okay, our guys up on top here, they can develop the budget that we need to do the work we need to do, to get the people on board we need to get on board, to move in the direction of technology's going so that we can use technology to do our jobs better.

So I think there was a lot of optimism about what was going to happen, and where we were going to go. And, I think, by and large, it was a very good thing. But I can remember, thinking that, "Wow, this is going to be great." And, of course, there's always restrictions. Budgets are budgets, you know. They put together a budget which looks like it's good and Congress looks at it or OMB looks at it and says, mm, no. Next thing, you got two-thirds of what you had. But, at least you have control over it yourself.

MR. KNOWLES: Yeah.

MR. MCCARTER: We had control. We could set the budget. We didn't have to send something to GSA and have somebody up there who had no clue what we were doing saying, well, you can't do this and you can't do that. You didn't have to argue with them or try to convince them that it was important to do this or to do that, that preservation was important and you needed money to do that.

You needed new technology. I mean they were probably on board with the new technology thing because that's the kind of thing that GSA does. But, with us, it's just that you have control over your destiny, so to speak. And the people at the top of the organization, if they're good, they can move you along. If they're not so good, you kind of flounder until the next one shows up. It is what it is.

MR. KNOWLES: Now in '85 to '89, you were a senior archivist and preservation supervisor. How, how did you feel being a supervisor when you had to direct your staff? How was your leadership?

MR. MCCARTER: Well, that's really interesting because, I think so many, I shouldn't generalize. But I think so many people who gravitate toward working in a place like this, I won't, I don't want to call them introverts, but they'd rather work alone, if you know what I mean. Give me my project and go away and

let me finish it. And I think that's the way a lot of us are. Because we come from history backgrounds and that's kind of the way history is in a way. Unless you're a teacher, you're interacting with students. But if you're doing research all the time, it's very solitary and you become very kind of comfortable with that.

So moving into a supervisor, and at that time I wasn't doing evaluations, I was just asking people to do this and to do that. It wasn't too, too much of a switch for me. Because I kind of likened it, I hate to use sports analogies, but I can't help it, because most of my life's revolved around it. It's kind of like a team. It is a team. You got a group of people who work together. It's either a formalized thing or it's informal. And they all have to pull their weight. And, somebody has to kind of do the coaching. And say this is what we're going to do.

To take it up to a more recent period, I wanted to get involved in electronic and digital photography. I could have not. I could have just let it go and default and maybe NUMI would have ended up with it, but I know they didn't want any part of it. But more importantly, I wanted to get involved in it because I knew that the digital photographs that agencies were creating were simply extensions of the analog things they'd been creating for the past 50 years. So who's better to work with those records than the people who know the past and can deal with the more recent ones?

So that's where I want to go. And then, you've got people around you who are really good. And you just kind of let them go. I mean, you have to kind of pay attention to what's going on. But, you know, if you've got really good people, and in Stills on both reference and the processing side, we've always had very good people. They've stayed because they like the work. They like the records and the stuff they do.

And, like in the processing end, working with digital photography, I mean, I don't know that much about it. I would try to learn as much as I can. But Billy and Nick, you know, they just grabbed that thing and they ran like hell with it. And they created operating procedures and processes and designs and all this stuff on how we were going to bring the stuff in. How we were going to process it. And how we were going to make it available to the public by working with Gary Stern and the OPA staff.

So that's kind of what I did. And then even back in '84 and '85, I just said, "You know, well, here's what we want to do." We want to know what we have and we want to make sure that we can preserve it. So let's go out and do that. And then we figured out how we were going to go about it and go out and do it. But, none of that works unless you've got good people. I mean, I don't care if you're Pat Riley or greatest coach in the world, if you've got a bunch of guys who can't walk and chew gum, you're not going anywhere.

But, you know, I had been very fortunate, the whole time I've been in Still Pictures, there have always been very good people working there. Very dedicated, very interested in what they did. They liked what they were doing. And they were creative. And certainly more creative than I am. But I knew I could trust them. They weren't going to go out and do something bizarre. When you're working with people, some people, you know instinctually that this person I can trust because he's really smart and he's going to figure it out. And this person may have to keep a little bit tighter, reign on them.

When you've always been working kind of in a solitary thing to all of a sudden, the next minute, you got all these people looking at you, like, "Well, what do we do now?" So, for reference, it's not that big a deal because you're getting letters and requests day in and day out. So it's pretty straight forward.

Processing's a different thing altogether. You've got to think about what it is you want to do. Which records really are important? Which ones are we going to focus on first? Which ones are we going to set aside, we'll get to them when we can? We're going to get to them, but these records really need to be addressed first. So like, what we're done now.

We recognized that the digital stuff that's coming in now has to be worked on pretty quick. You can't leave it sit around. It's not like 20 cubic feet of prints that you can basically put on a shelf and three years later go back there. And that 20 cubic feet is still going to be 20. And it's still probably going to be pretty much in the same shape as it was the day you brought it in. Because you got environmental conditions in the stack.

That's not the case with the digital stuff. You've got to address it. Because there are problems that you get when you transfer things from agencies. You get different file formats, connecting the metadata with the, with the images. All that sort of stuff that really that has to be addressed. So, we've kind of pushed our analog to the side because we don't have very many people. And the folks we have are focusing on the digital. We've got two million backlog images of digital photography.

MR. KNOWLES: Wow.

MR. MCCARTER: Over 70 terabytes of data. And it's just going to get worse. And unless they do something about it, like get us some more people, it's just going to grow, because the agencies, there is no agency out there that's using a film-based camera, I can tell you that. They haven't been using film-based cameras since probably 2005 or maybe even earlier. Everything is being shot in digital form.

And the thing about it is, they are more than willing to transfer it. Because they can copy 5,000 images, 20 minutes or an hour, overnight. And so they'll send you another copy of it. And you can accession it. So the accessioning time has gone from sometimes 10 or 15 years to one or two or three years.

Right now, what we're suggesting to agencies, if you're creating digital photography, you should not hang on to it for any more than three years. And they're okay with that because they can just copy the whole damn thing. And then send it to us.

So, it's going to get bigger and bigger and bigger. There's a tidal wave out there that's coming. And if the agency's focus is on electronic records then, okay, folks, let's put your money where your mouth is. And let's build up the areas that are working directly with it.

We don't forget about the records we have. Because we're still going to be accessioning analog records for a long time. But, you have to start thinking a little differently. You have to start thinking right now about how the allocation of resources is based on, pretty much, how many cubic feet of physical records you have sitting on the shelf. You've got to stop thinking that way. I mean it's still a reality. But you've got to think about the other side of it too. You can't just look at what's right in front of you sitting on a shelf. You got to think about the electronic world, the digital photographs, my God, the AV material.

It's just, there is no possible way that NARA can accession AV material right now. There's no place to put it. You can keep it on hard drives and on LTO tape and all that stuff. But that's not managing it, that's just putting it someplace and crossing your fingers and hoping something doesn't go haywire.

Our stuff that we're getting in, we can still download it. We've got souped-up computers with eight terabytes of storage space. And faster processors and all that sort of stuff. We had to get that from the IT people so that we could do our job. So we can still do that now. We can still accession big files from agencies. But where are we going to put them? That's the key. And that's where the problem is. So we're still using ERA, like I said, we're still putting stuff on hard drives and literally mailing it. Have you heard of Bob Spangler?

MR. KNOWLES: Uh-uh.

MR. MCCARTER: Bob Spangler, he's kind of the IT guru for RDDC. Bob will throw in the back of his car and drive up to Rocket Center and deliver it. So that's how it's getting there. And then they are literally putting it in. Because we can't send it. As I said before, we can't FTP it, because it just doesn't work. It just doesn't go. It gets stuck all the time. So that's the key is, where are we going to put this stuff?

Motion Pictures, they can't even bring stuff in and begin to work with it, because they've got no place to put these massive files that they would be getting. You know, I think I wandered away again.

MR. KNOWLES: No. You're all right. You're all right. Well with that supervisory position, did you still have time for reference? Or how did you manage, how did you manage that transition to more of the administrator and less of the reference, I guess?

MR. MCCARTER: You know, when I first came in and worked with the organization, we had a reference chief and we had a processing chief. So, you know, even though I did a lot of reference work early on so I would know what the records were and I worked in the room, the research room for two years downtown, day in, day out. I got to learn the records. Where they were. What they were.

When I went over to processing, I didn't do so much reference any more. It was mostly just doing the processing work. But, inevitably you would get dragged back in to the reference situation, because you just got finished processing something and you knew more about it than anybody else did. So, because of this the reference team didn't have the opportunity to get up to speed on it. So you'd get dragged back into it, which was fine. Because I liked working with researchers. They're, by and large, most of them are pretty interesting people. And have got some interesting ideas and stories. So, I kind of strayed away from, from, from the reference part of it.

But then when we moved out here, first the branch chief retired. And then the processing chief retired. So, the only person left holding the bag was yours truly. So, I had to get involved in everything. I was involved in processing. And I had to deal with reference. Because I was the only supervisor there.

So, I get calls all the time. I got a call yesterday from Al Jazeera's, we want to use these ten photographs that we found online. Are they copyrighted or are they in the public domain? You know, I get that stuff all the time. Then, of course, we get questions from federal agencies about transferring records. So I'm not sure I answered your question, but...

MR. KNOWLES: Oh, you are. You are.

MR. MCCARTER: But I, I've always liked to do reference. I think it is fun. And like I said, you do meet some incredibly interesting people. And I've been very fortunate to meet some pretty interesting people. You know, some relatively well-known people. I gave a tour to Barbra Streisand when she was here years ago. More importantly, I got to meet some really famous photographers like Yousuf Karsh, who's a famous Canadian portrait photographer. He came to see the photographs that we had. We spent some time talking to him.

And I got my story confirmed—have you ever seen the picture Karsh took of Churchill? He's like that, with the cigar in his mouth. He didn't have the cigar in his mouth, that's the key to this story. He's just sort of like that. I mean he looks like he's about ready to bite your nose off. Well, the story that I'd always heard was that what Karsh did—what Karsh was able to do was to capture the essence of somebody in their face.

I mean he was amazing in the way he could do that. Well he was working with Churchill trying, you know, this is during World War II, trying to get that bulldog tenacity type expression on his face. And he couldn't get it. So the story I heard is, what he did is, he had an extension cord so he could press the shutter from walking around. And he walked up close to Churchill and he yanked the cigar out of his mouth. And that's the expression that Churchill had. And he snapped the shutter right then.

I'd always heard that story and I didn't know whether it was true. So when he was here, I said, "Hey, I heard this story and can you confirm it?" And he said, "Yeah, that's exactly what happened." He said, "That's how I got that picture." I thought that was just incredible.

Other photographers, I had this guy call me up on the phone one time, this is bizarre. Morris Engel calls me on the phone and said I was watching this movie. This is about seven or eight years ago, maybe longer. And he said, "I'm watching this movie," what the hell was the name of it, oh, yeah, Saving Private Ryan.

And he said, "You know what, I was on that beach. And I was a cameraman. And I worked for the Navy. Do you think you have any of my photographs there?" So we went back. And he told me the unit that he worked on, the Navy units had special designations and he was the person who worked in this one unit. Sure enough, I found a whole bunch of photographs by Morris Engel.

And I got to talking to him on the phone, I mean just incredible stories. This guy is a very well-known photographer. He's in that International Center for Photography book, he's got a piece in there because he goes back to the thirties where he worked with a lot of the New York photographers that were very prominent at the time.

And he was also movie camera guy. And so we got to talking and I said, "Well, geez, what was it like?" He said, well, you know, it was kind of interesting. He said the story was, the Private Ryan thing, was pretty close to the way it was. And he said, but I didn't have a gun, all I had was a four by five speed graphic, which is this big clunky camera, plus he carried an Emo motion picture camera on his back. And that's all he had.

And he's jumping out of one of these things and running into the beach well where the Germans are just going nuts, killing all these people. And he survived the whole thing. And it was just amazing to talk to him and hear his stories.

And then we've had Vietnam photographers in and we've talked to them. We actually had a group in a couple years, I'm sorry, I'm, I, I do this all the time.

MR. KNOWLES: No. No. No. Keep going.

MR. MCCARTER: I'm wandering all over the place. We had this group of guys who came in. And I had worked with a guy who was in DC who was kind of organizing the group. And they were all photographers in the Army during Vietnam. So, he gave me information about them. And, we were able to find photographs for a lot of the guys. But what I did is, we just pulled out the whole series. It's like 35,000 photos. And there were about 10 or 12 of these guys who were going to come in and look through them.

And, and we just spent the day working with them so that they could go through this stuff. And, their names were on the back of all these photos. But what the cool thing was, one of the guys walks in the door. He's walking over, and up on the wall we have this picture of a cameraman coming out of the swamp in Vietnam, with two cameras hanging around his neck. You've probably seen that. Anyway, he walks in and he turns and he looks at it and he said, "That's me." Sure enough. So, you know, we had the—

MR. KNOWLES: [Interposing] Wow.

MR. MCCARTER: His name was on the caption. And, he told us who he was. And to talk to them and to hear their stories and to hear the dedication these guys had. And some of the harrowing experiences some of them went through to capture this stuff and document what was going on. It's just amazing to really talk to them. And then that goes on, you meet all kinds of other people. But, you know, I don't know. I'm sorry. It's just...

MR. KNOWLES: No, that's great. Well that, that's actually one of my questions I have for you—

MR. MCCARTER: [Interposing] I start thinking back about it and I said, why the hell am I leaving? I can tell you why I'm leaving, I don't like the supervisor. No, I've had enough of that, believe me.

MR. KNOWLES: All right. Let's see here.

MR. MCCARTER: Good God.

MR. KNOWLES: This, this is a good stopping point if we can continue the interview another time. Are you okay with that?

MR. MCCARTER: Up to you.

MR. KNOWLES: Okay. Alright. We'll go ahead and stop.

[END RECORDING]

[START RECORDING; April 24, 2014]

MR. BRIAN KNOWLES: I am Brian Knowles. I'm acting as an oral historian for the National Archives and Records Administration. Today's date is 24 April 2014. I am conducting an oral history interview with Mr. Edward J. McCarter, Chief of the Still Picture Branch, Special Media Archives Division at Archives II, College Park, Maryland. Good morning, sir. If you could, where we left off was beginning with you being

made Assistant Chief, Archival Projects, Supervisory Archivist, Still Picture Branch, Non-Textual Archives Division.

MR. EDWARD J. MCCARTER: That was it.

MR. KNOWLES: That was 1989-1998. There is a lot of ground to cover with this one, so I'll just kick off with my first question. What's involved with being the Assistant Chief? What does that mean for when you took over that position?

MR. MCCARTER: Well, essentially, you're responsible for all of archival project work that's accessioning. For non-text, we pretty much handle the entire lifecycle of the record, so, unlike textual, and similar to electronic records.

We go all the way, beginning with the appraisal process all the way through providing access to the public. So my responsibility was to be able to deal with all those different archival functions from the appraisal scheduling process through the accessioning process, through processing the records, getting them prepared, all the holdings maintenance preservation work that had to be done, to the descriptive work. And then, eventually, turning it over to the reference staff to handle.

And there was a Reference Chief at that time. That person would be responsible for answering the letters, telephone calls, the in-person researchers, basically, you know, all the work that dealt with facing with the public.

Whereas my work was really more focused behind scenes and literally my customer was the federal agencies. That's the way we looked at it. Our responsibility was to work effectively with the agencies so that we could get the records transferred and preserved and made available.

And that was difficult to do because we had a lot of hurdles to get over with, a lot of agencies had this view that NARA was kind of like a black hole. You sent the records here and they were gone forever and nobody ever knew what happened to them. And, God forbid, they were thrown out by mistake. I mean, all sorts of horror stories.

And I remember during that time period with the people we had on staff, as well, working very hard to try to turn that opinion down or around. And you could only do it really agency-by-agency. There's no other way to do it. So we would focus on an agency that we were interested in getting the records transferred and work very hard to get them here.

One of the big successes we had was with DOD. We had the military records up through the end of the World War I period, the Army, Navy, Air Force, and Marine Corps things. Maybe a little bit later than that. Practically nothing from the Marine Corps after the turn of the century. That is the 20th century. And the Air Force, zip. We had nothing from the actual Air Force. So we worked very hard with the DOD to get the records transferred. And we were pretty successful. We got all of the World War II records through Korea.

And probably through that period all the way through 1998, which includes moving from Archives I to Archives II, which was a whole other feat, if you want to put it, getting all of the Army records up through the Vietnam War and getting the Navy records through that period and getting the Marine Corps records through that period.

And then eventually, after much tugging and pulling with the Air Force, because the Air Force had literally turned their photo collection over to the Smithsonian Institution to create a video disk. We were never alerted to what they were doing. But literally the entire body of records was at Smithsonian. So we worked very hard for a number of years convincing the Air Force that this was the place the records needed to go. And we had to jump through a lot of hoops for them. Well, if we need a copy of a photo, can you get us a copy of a photo? Yeah, sure. You know, it's not a problem. We'll do it.

So we did what we had to do. And, eventually, we convinced them. And they directed the Smithsonian Institution, which was not very pleased, to turn over the photo collection, because it really was, you know, for the Air and Space, it was literally at the Air and Space Museum. For the Air and Space Museum, this was like a gem, because it had Army, Air Force and Air Force photography, you know, up, basically, up through the Vietnam War. So, we literally had to go, whenever we got these records, these big chunks like this, we physically went in vans over to the facilities, packed up all the records ourselves, put them in boxes and brought them back to the archives. That's just what we had to do.

And the Army, that was a real complicated one, because there were prints and there were negatives but the real issue was the index. The index was by subject. So while you could determine approximately where a cut-off was for the negatives because they were arranged in numerical order, same with the prints. You couldn't do that with the index. Or in the case of the Army they had the photographs and they had about 6,000 albums by subject.

MR. KNOWLES: Wow.

MR. MCCARTER: So, what we literally did is kind of go in and pick and choose the albums that fit the timeframe and go to the index and literally take it apart by subject and recreate it at the Archives, put it back together, but missing what was there. And then, eventually, after some more tugging and pulling and convincing, and some help from some of the people at DOD, we were able to get the rest of it so we could put the entire index back together. We had all of the albums.

We literally had everything, because in about '82, what happens is DOD decides to centralize its photo collection instead of having the Marines in Quantico and the Army at the Pentagon and the Air Force at Fern Street, and the Navy at Anacostia, they decided to create a central photo file.

So all the Marine Corps photography, all the service photography, including the Coast Guard, was glumped together into this huge series. So that was a great cut point in terms of getting everything else they had up to 1982 transferred to NARA. So we were able to do that during that timeframe.

And that was a big; that was a big deal getting all of that. And it dramatically increased our reference requests because we had all this World War II stuff that people had been dying to get at, and the Korea material. And then eventually Vietnam has become very active, too, for all the Services.

So that's kind of an idea of how we worked with the agencies. And the only way to convince them to transfer it was to literally bring them to the archives and show them what we did and how we kept things and that this was not a black hole and that the public had access.

And what really helped, particularly for the Air Force, was when we moved out here to Archives II, because this building was designed exactly for storage of special media records, motion picture records, cartographic records, and photography and posters. So they were literally blown away when they came

out and saw the facility and the fact that we had a huge cold storage vault at 30-34 degrees. And we could store the color material better than they could.

And I mean at that point we could say, "We can store the records better than anybody else in the federal government," except for the NASA photography, the moon photography, which was at a zero-degree vault in Johnson.

And we're still in a tug of war with them over that. We've gotten all the digital material from the Apollo missions and the Mercury and Gemini and the Shuttle, but we're still working with them to get the original photography transferred.

But that was a big thing to be able to show them the facility and what we did and how we made it available. It just literally took away any reason for them to be hanging on to the things, particularly the preservation aspect of it. When you can tell somebody that we can keep your records for a lot longer than you can and we're going to make sure that these records last as long as possible, they're pretty much up against the wall with that sort of an argument, because there's nothing they can. So that's a good example of how we've kind of big agency by agency at the outset. And then, we've also worked with smaller agencies. We try to go and kind of turn that opinion around about the archives, what we are. and what we do.

And then, of course, once it's here, there's the processing work. I was responsible for making sure the stuff got processed, it was done correctly. When new people came in I basically did the training, teaching them how we went about processing records, the photographic and graphic records.

And the preservation work, I got very involved in preservation. I learned a lot about photographic processes, the different photographic processes that had been in effect from basically the daguerreotype to digital photography.

So that helped me a lot in terms of making decisions when you get a body of records in. What kind of records do you have? What needs to be done? What kinds of holdings, main and actions? What kind of boxes do we buy? What kinds of folders do we buy? Because we didn't necessarily buy the same boxes that you would use for textual records. Sometimes you would buy boxes that were specially designed for photographic records, if they were particularly valuable, had a lot of intrinsic value.

So you have to kind of learn all that stuff. What undergirds everything we do in special media is this media-specific knowledge. You can't do the appraisal work, you can't do the accession, you can't do the preservation, the description or anything, unless you really have a solid grounding in that specific media. So that's really kind of what's important.

We would send people to classes to take classes. RIT was the one that we sent people to most. It was a great, great place for learning about the history of photography, different kinds of photo processes and what kinds of actions you should take to help preserve the records you have. So every new member who came in, annually we would, it's a week-long training class. Unfortunately, it doesn't exist anymore. But so, you know, all those sorts of things.

I kind of hope I've kind of described what it is. But you really have responsibility for basically the entire lifecycle of the records. We worked a lot with appraisal, because most appraisal archivists don't have any idea what photographs are. And they don't exactly know what to look for. You know, they'll go into

an agency and they'll see this huge print file, and they'll say, wow, this is great. This is all we need to schedule. Uh-uh. Where's the negatives? Where's the finding aids, things like that? You know, they don't have the tendency to think about that. So that's the kind of input that we would be able to provide.

And helping them write the schedules, the transfer periods. Sure, textual records, they don't want them for 30 years. That's not the case with non-textual records. You know, with us, ten years from the point of creation and you start looking at deterioration. So we try to push the agencies and the appraisal people to write the schedules that will directly reflect that. And now with digital, it's even shorter, two to three years after the point of creation now.

And that's not so hard to get the agencies to agree to, because digital photos, you just make a copy and you transfer it. With the analog it's a lot different because, making copies of 50,000 or 60,000 prints, that's a big deal. And it's also very expensive and very time consuming. So, you'd never get anywhere telling them to make a copy of that. You have to try to work with them in a different way to get things transferred. But so those kind of issues, those kinds of things that we would deal with the appraisal folks. And like I said, oftentimes in big accessions we just go out and pack it up ourselves.

Because we know what we want. We know what's there. Usually with these big agencies, we've had a fairly long relationship with them. Over the years there have been, there were several, what they call, "gaps projects" that were done. And there was at least one done during this time period, to try to identify the gaps in the records that we had.

You know, we had, for RG 57, we had records up to 1910. Well, where's the rest of it? So we'd have to try to get in touch with the agency to try to figure out where was the rest of the photography that fills in the gaps for what we have. So, that was a real good tool for us to get a good handle on some of the agencies that we traditionally wanted to get more records from. But it gave us a vehicle to actually do that.

In addition, the other thing they used a lot during this time period were the agency evaluations where they would pick an agency like, and we always picked some goodies, like the Park Service or NASA, and a whole staff of NARA employees would go in and evaluate the records management program. How things are being stored, what things needed to be transferred. You know, at the end of these evaluations, we'd always prepare a list of the bodies that should have been transferred based on their schedule.

Not that we were just making this up. I mean, they had a records schedule. They just weren't paying any attention to it. So, that was a really good tool. The gaps projects are a good tool for identifying some of the big agencies we needed to really work with to get the records transferred. So I'm sorry, I think I'm —

MR. KNOWLES: [Interposing] No, that's perfect.

MR. MCCARTER: —just going on and on, but, it's a pretty wide-ranging set of responsibilities. And of course you have your standard personnel stuff that you have got to learn. You've got to learn all the stupid personnel rules and performance evaluations and all that sort of stuff.

MR. KNOWLES: Well, before we move on to that section, I wanted to ask you about the relationships with the Smithsonian. From your perspective and your experience, what has been the relationship with the Smithsonian Institution? Is it a competitive nature or not?

MR. MCCARTER: The only time we really had this sort of competitive nature was with that Air Force collection that was over there. And that was really the Air Force's problem. I mean, they were responsible for the problem. But it was also I'd laid some of the responsibility at the door of the appraisal people. I mean, whoever was responsible for the Air Force, it's like all of a sudden we wake up and find out, oh, by the way, the Air Force has transferred all their stuff over to the Air and Space Museum because they're going to create a video disk. Well, why didn't somebody tell us about this beforehand? That's their job. That's what they're supposed to do. They're supposed to keep their ear to the ground. So we never found out about it until it was after the fact. And, you don't solve problems after the fact. So that's the only real time we had had any kind of issues.

And the same thing with the LC. I mean, we each have our sphere of responsibility. And, at least as long as I've been working here, there really hasn't been any attempts by the LC or the Smithsonian to try to grab archival federal agency records. They understand that that's our responsibility.

MR. KNOWLES: And now are they pretty good customers to NARA? Do the Library of Congress or the Smithsonian for the Museums, do they come to NARA for materials?

MR. MCCARTER: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

MR. KNOWLES: Okay. I mean, they were copies not necessarily originals.

MR. MCCARTER: Sure.

MR. KNOWLES: Yeah.

MR. MCCARTER: You know, the Smithsonian is a sprawling place. So a lot of the museums come to us when they have photo exhibits because we have things that nobody else has. All of the Brady material, all of the Western Survey material. I mean, we have the greatest collection of that material here, World War II, World War I. You know, we have things that nobody else has.

So when parts of the Smithsonian are doing exhibits, like we're in a discussion right now with the National Portrait Gallery over Alexander Gardner prints that they want to use for an exhibit in 2015. So that happens quite frequently. Not so much with the L.C. I mean, they're not really into exhibition.

We refer each other back and forth. And about five years ago, myself and the person over at the LC set up sort of a—we go over there and get kind of a half-day preview of what they have. And they come over here and they get kind of a half-day preview of what we have and what we do, which is kind of so the reference staffs on both sides had some kind of an idea about what they do, what they have, and what we do and what we have, which was very beneficial, because somebody could say over there, oh, well, if you want that, you really need to go over to NARA. And if people come here and they're looking for the, you know, the FSA collection, the Farm Security Administration photos, which were very famous during the thirties, we know we don't have them. They're at the LC. We just refer them over to the LC.

MR. KNOWLES: Cool. All right. Can you explain the process with preparing Deeds of Gift?

MR. MCCARTER: Boy. For a long time we were very involved in Deeds of Gift. We don't do that so much anymore. We've got more than we can possibly deal with from the federal agencies. But really what we would be looking for are things that are unique and that have some connection to federal activity and

that fill in a gap in materials that we don't have. Now, that's a pretty tall order for somebody to have, because we have pretty good coverage of most federal activity.

But, you know, there are these cases where that doesn't occur and somebody has something that we think fits in. And we'll transfer it here.

MR. KNOWLES: Who might be one of these individuals or companies who have [crosstalk]—

MR. MCCARTER: [Interposing] Well, we had, I remember having a discussion, although this was a failed discussion. It never resulted in a transfer, but it's the kind of thing we would be looking for. I don't know, maybe we were at Archives II. It's got to be ten years ago. A woman came into the research room and she was talking to reference staff and said she had some photographs she wanted to know if we were interested in. Her husband fought in World War II.

Well, we've got boat loads of photos from World War II. And, we try to tell people is that what we have is the official photography created by the agency, and that's our job. That's what we focus on. We're not looking for bits and pieces from service guys who served. There are places for that to go and we refer people there. But this isn't it.

But this was pretty unique, because he was at Iwo Jima and he was one of the, I don't know, I guess you'd call them the drivers of the LSTs that they hit the landing beach, the thing drops and everybody runs out. And he had a bunch of color photographs of the landing at Iwo Jima, which was very unique. I mean, I'd never seen any color photographs of that.

So that was the kind of thing that we felt that because of what it was, because of its physical format, color photography, it made it unique. We've got lots of Marine Corps photography of the invasion of Iwo Jima, but we don't have any color photography that documents that. So that was something I felt that really kind of fit the bill or the criteria that we have for accepting donations, whereas you get a lot of things from veterans who say my father served in World War II and fought in Europe someplace.

And usually what we'll do is we'll kind of see if we have any photography that covers the same time period and the same location. And more often than not, we do. So, we'll say, respectfully, you know, this really doesn't fit into our holdings. But here are a couple of places that are really interested in veterans' photography and have veterans' history projects that you might want to take your photographs for and see if they'd be interested in them. Does that kind of answer your question?

MR. KNOWLES: Yes, sir.

MR. MCCARTER: But once you start down that road, it's a very involved process. It's just like accessioning records from a federal agency. You have to do an appraisal report and it has to go through channels and be approved by everyone. The Archivist, of course, has to sign the donation letter and you send it to the donor. They sign the letter. They keep a copy. We get the original back. We get the photographs and everybody's happy. Usually.

MR. KNOWLES: All right. How does it feel knowing you've helped create the standards for accepting digital photography?

MR. MCCARTER: Well, I think that's a real accomplishment, but I'd have to really say that two of the people who are most responsible, at least on our staff, are Billy Wade and Nick Natanson. Yeah, it was

my idea to go after digital photography. I could have said, oh, the heck with it. You know, let NUMI take it, and, I mean, that's the electronic records folks. Let them take it. That's their problem. We don't want to deal with it.

But, the way I looked at it, and I think we may have covered this a little before, is really photography. You have to look at what it is first. Not that it's digital, but that it's photography. It's imagery. And what is it imagery of? It's imagery of the same subject matter as the analog imagery we have here. It's just a different physical form. It's no different than, the way I look at it, an albumen print from a Collodion negative from a salt paper print. It's just a different physical process. In this case it's an electronic process.

But we took the approach that these are photographs first, and secondly they're in electronic form. So because they were photographs and because they're related to the records we already had from federal agencies, it made perfect sense to us that we would take the digital photography as well.

And then we'd learn about the digital part of it. And it took Nick and Billy a couple years to work through when you take in a digital accession, how do you process it? You know, they kind of adapted the procedures that we use for processing analog photography, the same general ideas, but now you're doing it on a computer rather than going through a box. But it's very similar. And so they had to figure out step-by-step how you would go about doing this in electronic form and what kind of tools you needed. That's a big thing. And it's something that we're still working on, we needed file-naming tools.

We needed tools that oftentimes an agency will create the photographs, and they'll put the caption information in the header of the photo. Well, that doesn't help us very well because OPA can't read the header. I mean, another program could read the reader, and you could just dump the images in and do a search. But OPA can't do that.

So we had to find a tool that would extract the captions out of the header and put them into a separate file. And Billy and Nick banged around, looking at programs, trying to figure out what worked. And we had some help from the electronic records people, as much as they could help us, because it was a different kind of record. And it had required some different tools.

And that, what really helped us a lot was when Bob Spangler came in to the agency. He was the head of NUMI for a while and now he's in a kind of a special office that provides support for the custodial units with electronic records. He was very helpful in helping us find tools. Bob has a long background working in electronic records. He got what we were trying to do. He understood it. So, he was very helpful in us getting the tools we needed. And now this little group that he's created that's one of their main jobs is to find tools that would help custodial people working with electronic records do their job every day.

But the initial work really was done by those two guys. They worked very hard at it. They developed processes. They figured out ways, not just to process the records, but also to get them in shape so we could just turn them over to Gary Stern in the OPA office. And then Gary would do a little bit of magic electronically with what he did. And then poof, they're uploaded into OPA.

So we've got close to a million images from federal agencies, over the past two or three years, that we've uploaded into OPA that are available for public use. And that's a credit to what they've done, the hard work they've done every day trying to figure out how to do it.

And, the thing is, too, there's never an accession that's like the last one. Every accession's a little different. So you have to kind of be flexible on how you're doing things. And that's really important, but, yeah. I mean, I feel good about the fact that I didn't just say well, give that to NUMI, you know. And it's going to be a pain in the butt, and I really don't want to have to deal with it. I'm only going to be here for another five years, anyway. So what the hell.

But I really felt like that was our responsibility. We were the people who were most knowledgeable about all the records from an agency that related, like DOD. We have everything from Vietnam back in analog form. Just because the new stuff that's being created, you know, for the Gulf War is in digital form, it's the same. And we're the logical people to handle that.

And, researchers would kind of scratch their head if all of the photographs were over in electronic records, but if they wanted to do some research on, you know, Vietnam, they had to come to us because that's where the analog was. It, to me, that made no sense. The whole thing needed to be together. So, I do feel good about that. But the hard work, again, goes to the staff people and they have to slog through it every day.

MR. KNOWLES: I've been prompted to ask, what is the General Record Schedule Item 21?

MR. MCCARTER: Well, that's, right now, the General Record Schedule is being revised completely. And we're very plugged into that whole process, because what they're doing is, instead of, well, GRS 21 is, basically, the General Record Schedule for audiovisual records: motion pictures, sound recordings, and video materials, still photography photographs, and...I'm not sure is in that. Can't remember.

But, basically, it tells the agencies these are records that you don't even have to come to NARA to pitch. Okay? They're disposable right off the bat. So for us one of the big things is like passport photographs. Every agency, particularly ones that have a lot of overseas activities, they have big collections of passport photography. We're not interested in passport photographs. So if you have passport photography, you can dispose of that without even coming back to the archives. That's what the General Record Schedule does. It provides a vehicle for the agency to look at the records they have, look at the different categories on their General Records Schedule, and if they fit into that category, then they're approved for disposal without the normal procedure, which is you've got to come to NARA and get approval.

So, it covers generic things like that. Training videos, training photography, you know. I'm trying to think of some other things—screen images that were used for printing purposes. They are photographic, but they're really a printing vehicle. They're not a true photographic record. So, you know, those kinds of things are disposable.

I think there's kind of a catchall in there. I haven't looked, I'm sorry, I haven't looked at a General Records Schedule in a while, but I think there's a catchall in there, I mean, that just sort of indicates records that do not document the activities of the agency. They're not critical. But that's what the GRS is.

What they're doing now is, instead of there being a GRS by media, they're now taking it apart and creating a GRS based on subjects. So, we're talking about, what's the last one we were talking about? It was a grant photograph or grant records. You know, an agency who has money for grants. It would now encompass any photography that was part of the grant process. Instead of it being capsulized in a

General Records Schedule, there's now a reference to the photographs that are created as a result of the grant process.

So now it's kind of, the schedule, the old, simple, straightforward General Record Schedule is kind of torn apart and it's all over the place. So every time we get a General Record Schedule to review for this process that we're going through now, we have to look at it in terms of, and of course, they're always big bucket, media-neutral schedules. They don't get into any specifics about whether there actually are photographs related to whatever the subject is.

We always have to look at it with an eye of, well, if they did have photographs, is what they're saying workable? I'll give you a good example. One of the first ones we got was on, I can't remember how they defined it, but sort of output product, something like that. And Nick and I read it over. We had to read it about four or five times until we figured out what they were talking about. And what they were saying was that when an agency scans its records, the originals are disposable. Well, once we realized that, we did, oh, no, that can't be, particularly for special media.

You never throw out the original negatives. I don't care whether everything has been scanned at the highest resolution that God can create. You just don't get rid of the original negatives, because that's the record copy that was made by the agency. And sometimes you can't duplicate what's in that original and in digital form.

And from a physical point of view, if I keep those records in proper storage, and I take care of them, they're going to last 500 years, at least. I have no idea how long these digital photographs are going to last. I mean, I hope they're going to last. And, they'll be transformed over time into new file formats so that in the future they'll continue to exist, but I know those original negatives are going to exist for a long time.

So that, that was an example of where once we figured out what they were saying, and we realized what application it might have for photography, we had to say, oh, no. That's got to come out. Or you have to say something in the General Record Schedule that this does not apply to non-textual records. I hope that's an explanation of the GRS, anyway. It's a pretty simple straightforward deal.

The problem with this new process is they're trying to get into permanent records. You know, the GRS was designed for records that were common across federal agencies that could be disposed of. But now they're trying to add to the GRS permanent records. And one of the things that we feel should not be there. They shouldn't even be talking about permanent records, when you're talking about a General Record Schedule. You should only be focusing on the records that are common to agencies that can be disposed of without prior approval. Do not get into permanent records, because you're just going to confuse the agencies.

MR. KNOWLES: In the overall field of audiovisual records, is there anywhere, any particular section or genre of it that you wish you could have spent more time on, or even worked on at all?

MR. MCCARTER: Probably the Western Survey photography. That was pretty much described when I got here, so there really wasn't much to do, other than ensuring that it was properly preserved and making sure that we got, I think last time we talked, I explained about Doug Munson and how he copied the Brady negatives. Well, he also copied the Western Survey negatives. So we have high-quality duplicate

negatives made of those, just as we do for the originals. And making sure that we preserve those records properly, and they'll always be there.

But, yeah, that would have been something I would have liked to have probably dug into a little bit more. But since it was pretty much described, there could have been some more digging done, but, you know, sometimes you get into these things, and you could spend years just tracking down different things that you think you'd want to know. And some point you just have to draw a line and say, okay, I need to get the basic description written so that I can get these records out to researchers.

But, if I had the opportunity to spend a lot of time, that's probably a group of records I would have really liked to have because it's just fascinating. It's just absolutely unbelievable the things that they took. I mean, they're up on top of mountains with glass negatives and chemicals. All this stuff has to be prepared on site, the Collodion has to be mixed. They have to coat the plate. They have to sensitize the plate. And they're 15,000 feet up in the air, dragging all this stuff around to take these photos. It's just absolutely unbelievable that as many have survived. I just find it's kind of mind-boggling. Yeah.

MR. KNOWLES: You made me just think of a question for you. How many descriptions have you written in your career?

MR. MCCARTER: Oh, gee.

MR. KNOWLES: If you had to give a number, what would you say the number would be?

MR. MCCARTER: Probably not as many as you'd think, because I ended up getting into sort of a semi-supervisory position fairly soon after Stills. But it's got to be over 100 at least, and I know that's not very much, really. But I've done some pretty big record groups. One of the biggest ones I did was RG 77, the Corps of Engineers. That was a biggie. That was a pretty complicated group of records.

RG 306, the U.S. Information Agency, I worked on those a lot. One of the great things I found in there was, it's just amazing, the stuff you get and you don't have information about. They had this big series they called staff and stringer photos. And it's a great, it's a great thing. I mean, it's got a lot of interesting stuff in it, but a lot of it is trash, too. And a lot of it should have been disposed of.

So I'm going through the stuff, and I'm looking at it, and I hit this one thing. And what am I looking at, but the March on Washington? Right smack in the middle of this body of records that wasn't identified. There was nothing on the, on the list that came to us that identified clearly that it was there. And there it is, probably one of the most historic events of the past 50 years, you know, boom, right in the middle of this thing. So, you know, that was, that was fun to write that description.

And we actually probably broke a couple of archival rules because I took that whole series of photos out, and I put it aside and made a separate series so we could describe it. I referred to the fact that it came from staff and stringer photographs, that it's part of the staff and stringer. But, you needed to break a few archival purity rules, because you just had to have that stuff identified so people would know it was there and they could use it.

Those were a couple of, but I, yeah, after I got there, I worked in Stills. I got in Stills in 1980. Probably by '83 or '84 or so I was kind of in a semi-supervisory position, even though there was an Assistant Brief Chief, who was Betty Hill, but she sort of let me be responsible for a lot of the preservation and the descriptive stuff that was going on.

So, I didn't get to write as many as I would have liked, and I have my intent to come back after I retire to work one day a week and help them out with descriptive work, because that's the fun job. It really is. It's a lot of fun to go through records and look at things and just see all the documentation and the people and the events. And, I could do that forever.

MR. KNOWLES: Who are some of the individuals that you worked with as the Assistant Branch Chief?

MR. MCCARTER: Oh, wow. Well, you know, Paul White. Paul was in the reference branch for a long time, and then moved over to processing. I worked with Paul for a number of years. We had a lot of students. You know, we've always had a lot of students. Gosh, I couldn't even begin to remember all the students we've had, but they came in and came out periodically as they get to the point of graduation. And then they'd have to leave and go onto another position.

But other people on the branch, I worked with Barbara Burger a lot. Barbara was a reference chief so we always had a lot of communication. And that was really one of the important things about the way the special media records are handled. A lot of people think you should do things functionally, well, we're going to have a pretty little unit. We're going to have a descriptor's unit, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

One of things that underlies the successes that special media has had, is that it's always managed by one person who's got knowledge of the media and looks at the overall to make sure everything gets kind of integrated. So you don't have a pipe for accessioning. You don't have a pipe for description, which is separate from a pipe for reference. And the supervisor here never talks to the supervisor there. So, some of the things that they do these people can't effectively use.

One of the things we always did is have a close connection between reference and processing so that the stuff that we processed and the finding aids we created made sense to them. They could look at them. They'd review the finding aids before we'd ever finish anything. And I think that was really a very useful tool, and it's helped a lot over the years.

So, as I said, Betty Hill was Branch Chief. Jack Saunders was a Branch Chief for a while. Jack used to be the head of accession and disposal out in the Suitland. Then he came downtown and for a while he was our Branch Chief. That was after the first Branch Chief that I worked with was Joe Thomas. And Joe had been here for eons. And Joe was there for probably another five or six years before he retired. And then we had kind of a gap where we had sort of people cycling in and cycling out, you know. They needed a 14, so if they had a 14 floating around who didn't have a job, so they'd put him in Still Pictures or wherever. And, hopefully, they wouldn't get their fingers involved too much and just kind of let us do our job. And then, eventually Betty took over. And Betty was Branch Chief for a long time, including coming out here. And she retired out here.

I'm trying to remember some of the other actual people I work with. Boy. Well, Nick came on board when we were still downtown, Nick Natanson. Billy didn't come on board until we moved out here.

Ellen Walker. Yeah, Ellen was with us for a long time. Richard Henderson, who had been working in textual, did a cross-training with Stills. And the Branch Chief decided she wanted, if she could finagle it, to get him in. So, we must have had a position open, and he applied for it. And she accepted him, and he came to work for Stills when we were still downtown.

I'm trying to think of some of the students. We had so many, I'm not sure I can remember. It wasn't a real big staff, but it was pretty good. I mean, they worked. Everybody worked pretty hard. They did a lot of good work getting records described because there were a lot of records. Even though the division or the branch had been around since the place was created, there was still a lot of records that were not very well described.

So, one of our focuses was to go back and in some cases re-describe the records, because they were particularly valuable, interesting, and probably had a lot of research value that you really couldn't identify based on the old descriptions, which often were just like two sentences, if that. So we tried to kind of punch those descriptions up.

Gee whiz, I wish I could think of some more of the folks because most of the people I've mentioned were supervisory in nature. That's about all I can think of, though. Other than the students, as I said. We didn't have a big staff, not a really large staff for processing.

MR. KNOWLES: All right. What are some of the major conservation projects that have needed to be sent off to the conservation lab?

MR. MCCARTER: Well, the big one, of course, was the Brady/Western Survey thing that I mentioned before. That was a huge project, multiple, took us probably four or five years to get it all completed, working with the lab to take a look at all of the negatives. The ones that were broken, they had to be set aside. And the lab had to design these sink mattes, I think I explained that before, what the sink mattes were. Well, they had to design those. And we had to take the broken plates and fit them into the, into the sink mattes. Plates that weren't broken, you kind of identified as to what they were, in terms of physical characteristics.

And that process took a fairly long time. And then we went into the stage of getting a contract to get them duplicated. We were successful to get that done. And then the other big that happened along with that was being able to get a room with reasonably decent environmental controls.

The Brady stuff and survey stuff was all the way up in 19, which was pretty near the top of the building. And they were stored in wooden crates, God awful enclosures. I mean, everything that you wouldn't want to do with something valuable, that's the way it was. But, you know, as time goes on you learn more about what to do about records.

So when they first came here, they figured, that's the right kind of storage, vertically on the long side of the piece of glass. You don't store them flat, because they're not even. Most of the plates are warped a little bit, because they were 19th Century glass. So, you know, they had basically what they knew at that time is what they did. And as more advanced knowledge comes on, you look at it and say, okay, we need to do something different.

So we were able to get that room. It was 3E4 in the old building. And they had a special environmental unit that was put in the stack outside of it. They sort of carved this little room out that pumped in cooler air, a lot less humidity. I mean, it was very tightly controlled. It wasn't as good as we have out here, but it was still very, very good, particularly with humidity.

And that's the key. Control the humidity, because it is water that creates all the problems with photography. Anything that can go wrong with photographs is exacerbated by the high role of humidity. High temperatures not great, but of the two, the humidity is the key.

So that, that's what Connie McCabe, who was the photo conservator at the time, she focused really closely on getting environmental conditions in there that were pretty, pretty tightly controlled. You don't have all these wild swings. You know, one day it's 34%, then the next day it's 60%. It's pretty constant. So that was a big thing.

The next big preservation thing was really related to the move. I'm not sure if I mentioned this before, but we sort of had an unwritten rule that nothing left the building that wasn't in an enclosure. It had to be physically protected to move it from AI to AII. We had hundreds of things that were stored in roller drawers, like long panoramas that were not in separate containers. They were in roller drawers. We had posters that were in large map case drawers, which is fine. But we had to figure out a way to move those without destroying them in the process.

And, these oversized materials that we had, like albums that we had that we didn't really have enclosures for, they were just kind of sitting on the shelf. And they were protected, but to move them, we had to do something. So we spent, must have been at least two years, with working the lab, going through each body we had, pulling it off the shelf, taking it down. They constructed special containers. If you go into our stack now, in 532, if you look at the top, you'll see all these containers that they created for the move. And basically everything that was not in a container was containerized so that it would be safe in the move process. And it, that was a huge project, and it took us a long time to do that. But it was very worthwhile.

And, as I said, the containers are still very useful. So, it's sort of served a double purpose. We were able to move them safely, but also had something to keep them in and protect them in once we got out here. So those were the probably two biggest things downtown.

Out here, because of the temperature controls and humidity controls, things are pretty good. Basically, what we have been doing is, in terms of preservation, is not so much sending things down to the lab, but identifying different series where the boxes are older. The folders the older, and they really needed to be re-boxed and re-housed.

So we spent a lot of time, that's what, students do a lot of that work, is just helping us get series that have been here for a long time re-boxed, re-folded, negatives re-jacketed, things of that nature, so that they're in the kinds of storage materials that are really going to protect them over time.

But, periodically, we'll work with the lab. One of the big things that Sarah Wagner, she was one of the subsequent photo conservators, did, is we had a beautiful set of prints that Alexander Gardner did called "The Sketchbook." He did this at the end of the war, 1865 or '66, right in there.

And originally it was in albums because I actually saw the albums at a gallery that were selling. And they're, I think there's only one or two of these albums in existence. We actually had, that the War Department obtained, we had all of the prints that were in those albums, but they had taken them out of the albums and mounted them on these crummy old Signal Corps mount cards. And they were deteriorating. The cards were tearing, and I was starting to worry that they might start tearing the photos that were mounted on the cards. So Sarah spent a fair amount of time going through and pulling

every single image off the mount card and remounting it onto acid-free board, and doing all the things necessary to make sure long-term preservation was going to place. So that was one of the bigger things we did out here.

And then the other thing, I'm sorry, I keep going on, is panoramas. We had so many panoramas that were rolled. They were in letterboxes. I remember we got an internal transfer from textual, and it was like 40 legal size boxes. And I said, "What the hell is this?" You open the boxes, and all of these rolled panoramas. And they're all rolled together, you know. There's like 40 panoramas in a box, because they're all tightly wound. Well, we couldn't do anything with them. I mean, you couldn't open them because you'd just destroy them. So we got involved in a long-term process with the lab, and they flattened every single one of them.

Put them in a Mylar enclosure designed just for the panoramas, and gave them back to us. And now we have them. We can actually serve them to researchers. They can, and some of them are just amazing, because in the early 20th Century panorama photography was really in its heydays. And so you get these long images. Some of them, literally, are ten or 12 feet long of units, military units. A lot of stuff was done overseas during World War I and just before World War I, and they'd do these long panoramas where you get everybody in the unit would be in the photo. And you had to have, I mean, the only way you could do it was with a panoramic camera.

There's an exhibit outside of the lecture rooms that talks about panorama photography. And some of the images up there are examples of the ones or copies of ones that we have. But it was special camera designed, literally, it was on a timing mechanism that panned. And as it panned, the negatives were in rolls. They would, they would pass through the lens this way so they would make this pan of the entire group. Now, you couldn't have any movement, because if you did, everything got blurry. It was sort of like the photography from the Western Survey and Brady period where they used a lens cap. And they'd pull a lens cap off and you'd make a two- or three-second exposure. Well, nobody could move when you made that exposure otherwise, you'd just blurs.

But so that was a big, significant effort we made to get all of those things. And we found some just absolutely amazing images in there. And researchers now have access to the images, which are things they didn't have before. That was a big, big project. It went on for a number years.

MR. KNOWLES: Was that the roll film project, or—

MR. MCCARTER: [Interposing] No, the roll film project is really a, it's good you brought that up. How could I forget that? The roll film project began with the identification of acetate-based negatives in our holdings that were deteriorating. Years ago I did a survey. I went through every different series, and I noted physical problems with the records, what needed to be re-boxed, what needed to be re-housed. One of the other things that I identified was physical deterioration of negatives in a series. So we kind of made a priority list of things that we wanted to have duplicated, because they were deteriorating.

This began when we were in downtown. It's become a little bit less of an issue when we're out here, because we now have put all of the acetate negatives in cold storage. So it buys a lot of time preservation-wise. But when we were downtown, this is when the project, that's when the project began. And I mean, there were series that were in just terrible condition. You know, 35-40% of the negatives had deteriorated to the point where you just couldn't use them.

What happens is the emulsion starts to delaminate from the base. You've got a plastic base. It's an acid, cellulose acetate base. You've got the emulsion on top of that. Well, over time, the acetic acid, in poor storage conditions, begins to shrink. And when that shrinks, then the emulsion on top of it starts to pucker up, and you get these sort of rivulets that run through it. And, literally, if you tried to print it, you'd crack it, because the emulsion is so fragile.

You know, normally, you think of a negative as pretty flexible. And, it seems it'd be pretty indestructible, but it sure isn't. It doesn't take much for that thing to start because it's literally coated onto that acetate base. It doesn't take much for that to begin to delaminate. So we had to address that problem.

And one of the things that we did was the roll film project. When we first started, we were using sheet film, Kodak direct duplicating film. And that worked fine. There were some problems with direct duplicating, mostly because it took a long time to do it. But, also, because direct duplicating was a little quirky, I don't want to get into this. It's complicated, but if you hand somebody a duplicate, direct duplicate negative, and you don't tell them, they have no clue which side that they're supposed to print from, so that they can end up, you know, reversing the negative. And, of course, when you print it, unless there's writing in it, there's no way to tell like you've got everything reversed.

You know, that the guy who was over here is actually supposed to be over there. So we decided to go to a roll project, and we figured it would automate better. We could do many more images a year. And we started using 70 mm roll film, instead of 4x5 inch direct duplicating film or 8x10 direct duplicating film, if we're duplicating original negatives, 8x10 negatives.

And it did. It dramatically increased it. I think, the best we ever did when we were contract printing using sheet film was maybe 35,000 40,000 images a year. And with the roll film, we got as high as 80,000 images a year. So it was a huge, a huge jump. So that project had been ongoing from the time we were downtown until we moved out here. There were just sort of changes in the cameras that were used over time, but basically it was all 70 mm roll film. And that has kind of stopped now, because the lab doesn't do photography anymore. Everything they do is digital.

So we're continuing to try to preserve negatives that have been identified as potentially having deterioration problems if we didn't duplicate them. We're doing that in digital form now, instead of, you know, analog. And all of those images will end up in ERA or whatever the vehicle is where these electronic images will be permanently preserved.

So that's, that was a big project. And that, like I said, that started downtown and continued out here, and continues on today. Not quite as systematic as it had been, but we're still doing it because we still have a lot of negatives that had been identified as potentially having problems, even though they were in cold storage, so...

MR. KNOWLES: Is the new collections coming in, are those still, do they still have the non-digital format, that—

MR. MCCARTER: [Interposing] Oh, yeah.

MR. KNOWLES: —they contribute?

MR. MCCARTER: Absolutely. There are a lot of agencies that still have tons of analog materials. So, there's still a lot of acetate material that some agencies are sitting on that they haven't transferred. You

know, they're always reluctant to, oh, I can't turn it over. We're going to need it for this, or we're going to need it for that.

NASA is a big problem. They've got a lot of, like I said, all this moon photography they've got. There's a lot of it out there. USGS, a huge body of photography out in Denver. It's the USGS photo library. We've been trying for years to get them to transfer things. We've had some successes, some not so successful. But, yeah, I mean, we're a long way from an only digital world. There's still a tremendous amount of analog stuff that's out there.

And that's important for upper management to understand, which I'm not quite sure they get, that we aren't in an all-digital world yet, that there's a lot of analog material out there that needs to be preserved, needs to be brought in. And we have a lot of analog material in the stack that we have to be concerned about that, too. We can't just close our eyes to the fact that we've got all this stuff here, and there's all the stuff that's still out there.

MR. KNOWLES: All right. Getting back to your staff. Once you became Assistant Branch Chief, and this also leads into when you took over as Branch Chief, with the increased responsibility, how did you maintain your relationships with your staff? Did you, did you have to delegate more to take on the administrative side? Can you elaborate?

MR. MCCARTER: Not so much when I was the Assistant Chief, because, as I said, the unit, the number of people I worked with was pretty small. So, I had a very personal relationship with each person. I knew what they were working on. I reviewed what they did, all that sort of traditional stuff that supervisors have to do.

Where it really turned was when we moved out to Archives II. One of things that was the management idea du jour was teams. We're all going to be teams. So they kind of crammed us into this team structure, where we had a processing team and we had a reference team. And the teams took over a lot of responsibility for the day-to-day work, and they still do.

And that, even at that point, we still had a processing head, which was me. And there was a reference head. It was Fred Pernell. And the Branch Chief, who was Betty Hill, when we got out here. They retired. So I'm left with taking over the entire place. Well, I couldn't have done this job, and we couldn't have been as successful as we have been, I believe, if there weren't really good people in both of those teams. And there are. There are people who will kind of takeover, unofficially, the kind of supervisory role. More advisory, you know?

When new people come in, I can't train them. When you're in a position like a Branch Chief, you're being dragged all over the place. Every day there's some other problem that somebody wants you to deal with. So, those day-to-day issues that I used to address personally by training and talking to people and, whatever, there are people there now, Billy, pretty much Billy and Nick, who I know I can trust to make sure the processing team does what it's supposed to.

And the same thing is true in reference. There are a lot of people on the reference team who've been there for many years. A lot of the people we have, they have a tendency to stay. They don't wander off other places, because they like working with our kinds of records. So, the reference team does the same thing. Before I came here we had our monthly meeting. At monthly meeting, we sit, the reference team

sits down and I'll impart any information I have that came from upper management that I think they need to know.

But, generally, what they do is they set the work plan for the month. Who's going to work in the research room? Who's going to do the letters? Who's going to pull? Who's going to do that? So they pretty much do that on their own. So I know, again, that that group can pretty much work by itself.

When new members come in, they're immediately assigned to a mentor. And that's the person that's their umbilical; they're literally stuck to them like an umbilical cord. Everything they need to learn, they're going to learn from that person. And it's always somebody who's been around for a long time, is very experienced, and knows the holdings.

It's a way for us to get those people up-to-speed quickly because we need the help working on whatever it is: working in the research room, working on letters, pulling, and refiling for the researchers or the vendors. So that's a very good process.

And the same sort of thing kind of unofficially goes on in the processing. If a new member comes in, Billy and Nick will kind of take them under their wing, kind of show them the ropes and move along. And, you know, I'm plugged into both, so I know what's going on.

But you can't have the same direct supervisory connection that I had when I was only supervising five or six people. And now I've got 25. Well, you know, it's ridiculous. You can't keep track of what 25 people are doing. You have a general sense of what's going on. And the same thing in processing. But, you really depend, and I've been lucky that way.

I'm sure there are lot of supervisors who haven't had that much luck, that the people they have working for them were that good and were that dependable and thought the same way I did. And that's, really, that's certainly a part of it. I mean, the kinds of decisions they make kind of reflect the way I think, because we've been working together for a lot of years. And they sort of know how I think. And the same thing is true in the processing side, so I hope that answers your question.

MR. KNOWLES: It does.

MR. MCCARTER: So, vastly different approach to how you're supervising. With that little group, you really, I mean, I was really tied in tight. I knew everything everybody was doing every day. We talked about it, what was going on.

When you get to the bigger thing, you sort of unofficially delegate to the teams responsibility for a lot of things that formerly you had probably done. And, again, you can only do that if you've got responsible people and people you trust. And, you know, like I said, I've been fortunate that way, so.

MR. KNOWLES: That's good. That's good. Could you speak about the NW design review?

MR. MCCARTER: Oh, geez.

MR. KNOWLES: Well, what is it, to begin with?

MR. MCCARTER: I'm trying to think. I mean, we went through so many of these things when we moved out to Archives II. The design review didn't have anything to do with the—I don't think it had anything to

do with setting up of the teams, because that sort of came in just as we were moving out from Archives I to Archives II.

But basically, ah, geez. I may be at a loss here. If I remember right, basically, we just kind of, and it was kind of reviewing all of the work within NW and trying to figure out a different structure to handle the work. You know, I'm really, I'm stretching here. Mostly, I remember the special media unit going through a design review, reviewing all of the different work that went on in the media and kind of coming up with an idea of how we thought things should be structured. And, essentially, we said, well, let's pretty much leave it the way it is. You know, don't start mucking around.

There's a reason you've got a Cartographic unit and a Motion Picture unit and a Stills unit. The people in it have been there for a long time, and they know the records. So, be careful what you do because you're going to end up creating problems when you start redesigning things and changing activities and moving people around. You know, it sounds like a great idea. You know, oh, well, I've got a problem over here. I'll just move people over there.

Well, the only problem with that is the work that these people are doing is complicated. And it's not something you can just take people from one place and put them in another place and have them immediately have an impact. If you're going to leave them there for two or three years, that's one thing. But that's not how these things generally work.

It's like hit teams. You know, let's run over there and fix a problem. Well, the problem that these people have here is more complicated than something you can do in two or three or four months. You know, it's a much larger problem and, generally, it has to do with lack of staffing. You don't have enough people to do what you're supposed to do.

So, it's like answering letters. You can't just pull somebody from Cartographic and stick them in Stills and have them begin to answer letters. It doesn't work that way. First of all, they know nothing about the records, have no clue where to look. They have no idea about the finding aids. They don't know anything. So, what you end up doing is somebody who is answering letters then has to take the time to train the person who is there to help, which takes away from their ability—it's a like a dog chasing his tail. I don't think it ever accomplished anything.

But I have to beg off on characterizing the design du jour anymore. But the only thing I can say is that I just remember that there were all these different management ideas that were brought in to help NW or, what it used to be before that was NN, work better. You know, become more functional, become more efficient. And I don't know whether any of those things ever really accomplished exactly what they thought they were going to do. But I'm sorry. I shouldn't really get into that. So, I'm sorry I can't answer that.

MR. KNOWLES: All right. From 1998 to 2005, you were the Supervisory Archivist, Still Picture Branch, Special Media Archive Division. Why did it take so long for you to officially become the Branch Chief?

MR. MCCARTER: Got me.

MR. KNOWLES: I asked a couple questions to others, trying to figure out why no—

MR. MCCARTER: [Interposing] Well, for one thing, it meant a promotion.

MR. KNOWLES: Well, yeah.

MR. MCCARTER: You know, and they were pretty chintzy about it. You know, we were essentially, the people who were in charge of Cartographic, Motion Pictures, and myself, we were all GS-13s. But we were doing the same job that all the GS-14s in textual were doing.

You know, the Branch Chiefs in textual were all 14s. And, unfortunately, we were all 13s, which was okay. We just went along and did our job, and it didn't make any difference to us. But because of that we never actually officially got titled as the Branch Chief of motion or the Branch Chief. And they were always fooling around with what they called us. You know, we were a LICON and we were a unit, and we were this, and we were that. But, you know, we were branches. That's what we were.

But, yeah, it took a very long time to do that. And I have to credit Bob Richardson. Bob was the Division Director at the time when that all took place. He pushed very hard to get each of the units, not the people necessarily, but each of the units to be recognized as having the same status on the organizational line as the branches in other parts of NARA.

And Bob worked very hard at that. He had to convince a lot of people, and yak, yak, yak, talk about it at all kinds of meetings and write all sorts of papers. And, we discussed it ad nauseam with upper management. But, eventually, he was able to accomplish that and got the recognition that the division itself had to have a division head, and it had to have separate branch chiefs. And that they needed to be on an equal footing with the units in what they were called and what their GS grades were in textual.

And, yeah, it did take a long time. And, but, as I said, Bob was very instrumental in that. He worked very hard at that. And I think, from our perspective, that was one of the major accomplishments was that we finally got the status. And that's something, it's kind of funny. We've always had, how do we say this? We're always kind of looked at as poor sisters, you know, the non-textual division. Like there was something weird about us, you know? So, that's why they are the way they were. And now, of course, textual was always the king of the block.

But so, and I can always remember with other people who were in, like, upper management positions, not archivists, but like NW and WNW and places like that, when they came in and they didn't really know that much about it, we always had to convince them that, yeah, this is the special media archives division. We do a lot of cool things. And, we really need to be recognized as a separate entity. We're not part of textual. We do things pretty different than textual does. And the reason we do that is because of the records we have. That's what drives everything we do, is the kinds of records that we accession and process. It drives everything.

But you have to kind of re-explain that, every time. And we had to do it again this time with Ann Cummings. We had to start from scratch and try to convince them that no, you really don't want to put us under NUMI. And, no, you really don't want to put us under textual, because we're not going to fit there. We're just not going to work.

But so I, you know, why it took them so long, who knows? But, you know, it did take a long time. And like I said, Bob Richardson gets the lion's share of the credit for accomplishing that, which I think was significant.

MR. KNOWLES: Yes. From 2005 to 2014 to you retire May 31?

MR. MCCARTER: My last day will be the 30th. It's a Friday. But the 31st, I guess, is the official day, yeah.

MR. KNOWLES: You have been the Chief, Still Picture Branch, Special Media Archives Division. Was there any change from Assistant to being the Chief?

MR. MCCARTER: Not really.

MR. KNOWLES: Just the title?

MR. MCCARTER: Yeah, because I had been doing the work for five or six years before that. When Fred and Betty left I had the whole ball of wax. So, I literally moved my desk—I had been sitting on the processing side, which I was supervising those folks in 5350. So, I literally moved my desk from there over to the reference side.

I didn't use the office, because, first of all, I don't like offices. But, secondly, I felt like I needed to be out among the people who were doing the work, because you just hear a lot of stuff. And people will talk to you that when you're in an office, doesn't always work that way. It's kind of formal when they knock on your door and come in. But when you're sitting in cubicle, they just come by your cubicle, and they start talking, you know? And you understand what's going on. You understand the inter-relationships between the people. What's working. What isn't working. Who gets along. Who doesn't get along. Who do you put on the same pull team because they get along, or you don't necessarily put another person it.

It's just all the sort of interplay between people because the one thing you have to keep in mind is when you're doing a job like this, is you're dealing with people. And they have feelings. They have personalities. They have good points. They have bad points. And, as a supervisor, you have to deal with all that stuff.

I've often, I joke with my wife that probably 40% of what I do is kind of therapy, don't put that in there, you're just listening to people. You know, you're listening to them talk about their lives and the problems they have. And they may not have anything to do with work, but they do have something to do with work because people don't leave their home lives at home and show up to work. Whatever is going on there, it comes into work. So there's a lot of that that's involved.

And I just, I've always felt that when you're sitting out there, sort of like one of the hoi polloi, you know, people are more apt to talk to you and communicate with you. And so you get a better sense of who people are and what they can do and what they can't do. And, you don't put them in a place where you know they're not going to function, because you're just setting them up for a failure. And that makes no sense. There's probably somebody else who can do that, so you figure out who it is.

So that didn't really change much, because I, like I said, I'd already been doing it, but I guess the big change was I pulled myself from sitting over on the processing side to moving over to reference.

And, that I just felt like I needed to do that. Because I didn't really know the reference people that well, and what they did, because that wasn't my job. That was Fred's job. My job was working with the processing people. So, I really felt like I had to get over there and know who they were and what they were about and what was happening to them. What was killing them that prevented them from maybe focusing on what they were doing, you know? Something going on someplace.

MR. KNOWLES: So, does a pro-active leadership style, did that help you develop the NWCS roadmap, the pathways career that you developed?

MR. MCCARTER: Yeah. It was all, it was all plugged into that. I mean, each of us kind of looked at our units and looked at the people we had working there. And, realizing how under-graded everyone was, in comparison to the work that they were doing, and it was terribly under-graded. We had reference people who were providing, honestly, archival quality reference consultation and research who were GS-7s, you know, GS-6s. It just wasn't fair.

So this was another one of Bob's ideas, Bob Richardson. We sort of put this thing together, because what we wanted to do was create a vehicle for upward mobility. And so we the managers and Bob got together, and we sort of talked about what we were going to do. And we kind of set up these things.

Each of us went back to our units and kind of wrote a little sort of path, roadmap, for our specific units, talking about what grade levels we thought people should be. And the key to that whole thing was not partially getting the promotions for the people who deserved it, which we were able to accomplish, but it was creating a vehicle that if somebody at the GS-11 level happened to leave, that that job didn't revert back to a GS-5. That job stayed at a GS-11. And if we had a GS-9 who we thought could do that job, we could then move them to that position. I mean, I have to post it and everything. You have to go through the same rules. But you kept that position.

That's why we called it a roadmap. It literally was. If somebody was a 7, and there was a 9 above them and an 11 above them, if one of these people left, duh. It was there was a possible promotion involved there, which is how it was designed. And it worked for a while. And then upper management kind of lost interest in it. And then it just kind of disappeared. But at the time, we thought it was a really good idea. It was a way to provide upward mobility for people who really deserved it.

And, the key, again, was not losing those graded positions because what generally happens in NARA is if somebody's at a grade 11 and they leave that position, they'll take that position and they'll stick it back to the GS-4, 5, 6 technician and start all over again.

No, we didn't want to do that. We wanted to keep that GS-11 there. And if we had somebody who could do that job, then we'd put the job out and the vacancy announcement out. And people would compete for it, and that person would have a real shot at getting the job.

It's certainly possible that somebody from another unit could apply and that's what happens when you put the vacancy announcements out. But the way they were crafted, they were designed for people who actually worked in the unit, because they always focused back on the work, on the media. You know, what we expected out of the person who was going to take the position. So, it created this little kind of a roadmap for people to move from one grade level to another. And like I said, it worked for a while. And then it just kind of disappeared, you know.

MR. KNOWLES: Why do you think the interest waned on that?

MR. MCCARTER: Well, at some point, NW started this pool. And I think that may have been a result of, even above them, that there was some sort of a pool. You know, now we have this freeze board thing. You're familiar with that?

MR. KNOWLES: No.

MR. MCCARTER: It's kind of like the pool. No longer if you had a vacancy, like, let's say a GS-7 on the staff took a job someplace else. Well, that position was not necessarily available for us to fill. It went into the pool. And up here they then decided, well, do they really need that GS-7 position, or do we need to put it over here in someplace else?

So, the way I saw it, and, again, this is just my point of view, that literally, destroyed the roadmap because now these positions that you hoped you were going to have available for people to move if you had a vacancy, that disappeared. And if you were lucky, maybe the pool gave you the position back. But more often than not, it went someplace else.

Then there were other things going on. And that's basically, the pool thing, is since we were out here at Archives II. That was not downtown. And it came really into effect sometime after we finished with the roadmap. And that was approved all the way up the line. But that whole pool thing just really kind of, and, you know, again, we don't have enough money. We only have so many positions we can fill, blah, blah, blah, blah. And to me, that's the job of the Archivist. You go out and get us money. That's your job.

That's the only thing you have to do, is you get the money to fill the seats in the desks. That's what you do. If you can't do that, you shouldn't be there. That's just my simple-minded position from where I sit. But that's his job. That's who I look at it. Go get us the people to do what we need to do. And I don't know. That has not been happening.

MR. KNOWLES: Let's see.

MR. MCCARTER: So, that's kind of what happened to the roadmap, the pool. And now we have the freeze board, which is just as bad. They're not going to listen to any of this, are they?

MR. KNOWLES: No. Never. All right. Going to jump around a little bit.

MR. MCCARTER: Yeah, I'm all rambling.

MR. KNOWLES: You've mentioned LICON before.

MR. MCCARTER: Yeah.

MR. KNOWLES: Can you explain what that is? It's not an acronym, it's a—

MR. MCCARTER: [Interposing] Yeah, actually it is.

MR. KNOWLES: —abbreviation. Yeah.

MR. MCCARTER: Yes, I guess. I guess, yes. Well, what it stands for is lifecycle control unit, and they just shortened it to LICON. And, essentially, it kind of replaced the branch structure, because they weren't talking about branches anymore. They were LICONs. And we were the still picture LICON. And there was a motion picture LICON. And there was a cartographic LICON. And there was textual records LICON.

So that, you know, that came in, I'm trying to remember. I think that came in when Jim Hastings was head of the textual division. And he always had a very close relationship with Mike Kurtz. So, like the design review you were talking about, I think Jim was heavily involved in that. And Kurtz, of course, was heavily involved in that. And then, this concept of the LICON came in, which, as best as I could tell, was basically just they didn't want to call us branches, so they called us LICONs. And, at one point, they were calling us units, the Still Picture unit. Well, okay. So now we're back to where it probably ought to be.

MR. KNOWLES: Now, do you still provide tours of your section, of your unit? Do you still conduct those? I've heard that you do those yourself.

MR. MCCARTER: Yeah, I do. I do a fair amount of tours. Nick does a lot of tours. I used to do all of the talky things, like the Modern Archives Institute and gobs of other things where you do presentations to agencies. And if the appraisal people wanted a tour for a particular agency, I would do that. And then as I kind of moved and had more administrative responsibilities, I couldn't really do that anymore. So some of those went off to Nick. Nick does the Modern Archives Institute and does a fabulous job. He does a lot of tours with agencies.

But for a long time, I did that a lot. I did them for special visitors, too. You know, there were people who had, buddies of somebody or other, who would come in. You know, I think I mentioned before, Barbara Streisand came in one time. And that was kind of hilarious, because when they had identified the people who were going to give her the tours, when they were passing the information around, they never used her name, because, apparently, she didn't want people to know she was there. I don't know why. They kept on calling her "the visitor." So it was kind of funny. "The visitor would like to see Still Pictures." So, when she came up, I gave her the tour. I showed her some pictures we had of her in the holdings.

And but a lot of the tours I did were really focused at federal agencies, because, again, going back to what I felt was what we needed to do was to turn their opinion of us around, was to give them first-hand knowledge and understanding of what we did. And as I said, it became particularly convincing when we moved to Archives II because of the character of the building.

But, yeah, I did a lot of tours. And, somebody would call and say they had a friend in town, and can I give them a brief tour. Yeah, sure. So, you know, I did a lot of tours.

MR. KNOWLES: Can you comment on some of the famous, other famous individuals, that you've had visit Still Pictures, Ansel Adams and Annie Leibovitz?

MR. MCCARTER: Ansel came in right before I got to Still Pictures, about a month before I got to Still Pictures, so I missed that. I've been unhappy about that ever since. I actually did spend a lot of time working with his assistant. He had an assistant who came in. After he came in and looked at things, he, you know, he sort of, oh, gee, I don't remember that. You know, one of those things.

And so he sent his assistant back to review the entire collection of photographs that we had. So, I worked with her and brought all the original prints out. And we looked at them, and she was talking about she was going to do blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And I mean, she wasn't really a famous person. But, I mean, she was very knowledgeable and, obviously, she must have been competent if she was Adams' assistant.

One of the other ones, including Barbara Streisand, Bob Hope was here and we showed him around. Yousef Karsh, I think I mentioned this before about that Churchill photo, where he pulled his cigar out. That was a real treat to be able to talk to him, because he was such a great photographer. And the Annie Leibovitz thing, that's pretty recent. I guess that was about three years ago. She just contacted personnel, or Miriam Kleiman in public affairs, and said she was really interested in Abraham Lincoln. She would like to see some of the photographs that we have of Lincoln.

So she, Miriam, contacted me. And we started a conversation with Leibovitz about it. And then she decided she wanted to actually come out and take photographs, not just of prints, but of the original plates. Well, then we started to get a little nervous about it, you know. So Miriam said, "Well, do you think you can do that?" And I said, "Yeah, I think." You know, I brought in Sara Shpargel and Warren Barga. They were two, well, Sara's a photo conservator. Warren has a good background in photography. So I brought them into this and we figured out how we were going to show her what she wanted to see.

Because one of those plates that she wanted to see was pretty big and another one was broken in half. So, we had to be very careful with the whole thing. But, yeah, she came out here and spent at least two days photographing. And it was kind of interesting to watch her work, because she had these two assistants who did all the work. And then when it was time to take the pictures, she got up and looked in the lens, yeah, that's right, and clicked the shutter.

But she was very, very nice to work with. You know, you never kind of know how these people are going to be. You know, some of them have big heads and they expect you to yes, yes, you know, tug your forelock and everything. But she was very friendly. I found her a very pleasant person to work with, very nice. But she took these photographs, and they're in her book. She did a book on things that, I can't remember the exact title of it now, but things that affected her life personally. And one of them was Lincoln.

She also had an exhibit at the, over at, I think it was, I think it was at the American Art Institute over in the Portrait Gallery. And she invited us to come to the exhibit, and we went over and saw it. It was very nice. But she's a very nice person to work with.

MR. KNOWLES: Have you recommended any of your staff for awards, such as the, any of the archivist awards?

MR. MCCARTER: Oh, boy. That's a hobby horse of mine. I have put in for archivist awards numerous times and never once, never once, was it even acknowledged. I never even got a note back that we got it, and it stinks, and we're not going to give them an award. Zippo. Nothing. Zero. From anybody. And that is one of the things that makes me very angry, because I've got a lot of people, I think, who deserve the awards.

I mean, I look at some of the awards they're giving out, and I say, "Are you joking me?" I mean, that's what they're supposed to be doing. That's their job. And I've seen people who work for me do some really significant things that are well beyond the confines of what their actual job is. But I'm sorry. I just, when I hear the archivist award thing, I just, I want to throw something because it just really rubs me the wrong way.

You know, I don't care if somebody reads something I write and says this is garbage. I mean these people have no business getting an award. Well, that's fine. Just tell me that. Come on, do a better of this. But zippo. Nothing. I mean, I don't even know whether it got up the chain of command. I don't remember how these things even go. I mean, there's a procedure for filling out the award and writing a lengthy justification for the award. And then it goes on.

But it just like goes into the black hole. So, I did a lot of awards, cash awards, for specific things, like when we did the move of the military stuff from, from DOD way back in the '80s, and when we moved

the Air Force stuff from the Air and Space Museum. You know, things that were really extraordinary activities. I did some big cash awards for those, for those groups of people who were involved in that.

And then of the things that we designed, which I thought was a great idea, and actually the reference team was pretty responsible for designing it, was we designed a procedure for getting a day off, the time off awards.

MR. KNOWLES: Yeah.

MR. MCCARTER: Yeah. By dramatically exceeding all of our strategic plan goals, like I don't know what the goal is for letters. Let's say it's, you know, 92%. Our goal was we had to make 98%. The goal for pulling and refile for the research room was, you know, 85%. Our goal was 100%. Pulls and refiles for vendors, our goal was 100%.

So we designed this, and if every quarter if the team met those goals, and this was approved up the line. We didn't just institute it by ourselves. Every quarter, if the team met the goal, everybody on the team got a day off for it. And, they really looked forward to that. And they, they liked it. They felt like it was a motivational kind of thing.

And it told them that somebody appreciated what the heck they were doing every single day to accomplish that kind of work, given the workload that they have. And it's a pretty big workload for the number of people who are doing it, to be able to accomplish that.

So that award was a great motivator. And disappeared for, I don't know, a year or two, and now it's back again, which is great. Unfortunately, we've lost so many people that the team can't meet the goals that they were making consistently every quarter. So it's like, oh thanks.

MR. KNOWLES: Are there any non-NARA awards or recognitions that your section has been given?

MR. MCCARTER: I can't think of anything, you know, specific, like somebody getting an award from DOD for doing something specific for them. I can't really think of anything like that. Not for myself. I can't remember any of the other managers or the unit. Nope, I can't think of anything like that.

I might be missing something, but I just don't remember anything around that. Now, individual people get a lot of letters. I get a lot of letters from customers about what a great job they do, that sort of thing. And that's important, but nothing officially like, well, like the DOD move. There was never anything from DOD commending our team for moving the records from Anacostia to downtown Washington, DC, and getting them up and ready for use in a fairly short period of time. Nothing like that. They just said, "Great job. Good. We're glad you did that for us."

MR. KNOWLES: Hmm. Well, is there any person or your whole unit, anything in particular that you want to do a special mention now for?

MR. MCCARTER: Well, I think I've mentioned Billy and Nick multiple times. They just do an amazing job given the amount of work that's involved. And it's going to get even harder after I leave, because that's one less person to deflect a lot of things that somebody's going to have to deal with. I'm not even sure who.

But, I mean on the reference team everybody really does a very good job. I mean, Holly Reed, for example, she works in the research room three quarters of the time, 75% of the time, and 25% of the

time other people cycle through. And you've worked in the room, so you've seen, in addition to her, there's always somebody else on the staff who's in there as well. But Holly does a really remarkable job. She's learned all this on her own. Holly has a high school education. That's it. But she is one sharp kid, let me tell you. She is very smart. And she's picked up the work. She has just a really huge knowledge of all the holdings and how to direct people. And I think she has a pretty good manner with people, too, when working in the room, which is really important. You walk in there and somebody's looking at you like what do you want? You know, it's kind of intimidating for a researcher. And I don't think that happens in our room.

And there are other people. Sharon Culley is very knowledgeable about the records. Sharon does a lot of the really complicated letters behind the scenes, because she's been here for a long time and has done great work.

You know, Rutha Beamon does an excellent job with the vendors. She's in charge of the vendor coordination. She does it for both Stills, as well as Cartographic. She does that plus she does a gazillion other things to help the team because, again, we're really down in terms of staffing. So she'll jump in and pull records for the researcher for a week. She'll answer the telephone for a week, or she'll do this, or she'll do that. In addition to doing her regular vendor activities.

Those guys are really the kind of the three leaders of the reference team. I mean, and as I said, Nick and Billy on the other side. So, the five of them are really class people.

MR. KNOWLES: Well, what are your plans for retirement?

MR. MCCARTER: Well, I think I alluded to, at one point that I was hoping to come back and work one day a week here. In fact, I talked to Judy Lewis Watson yesterday about it, and she gave me all the forms to fill out to be a NARA volunteer. Probably will do that come fall. Not during the summer.

Also, when we were on the extended vacation from Congress, because they couldn't figure out a budget, I spend some time poking around in different places. And I live very close to the Howard County Historical Society. It's just a bike ride away from where I live. So, I talked to them about volunteering there, helping out. I asked them if they had any photographs, and they were, "Oh, yeah. We've got a lot of photographs." I said, "Well, I've been working with those for a while. You know, I might be able to be some help."

So that, I think, is going to take up some time. I've also gone back to the high school where my kids went. This is completely off topic, but I ran into the cross country coach, who is a good friend and worked with my daughter for years and turned her into really a very fine runner, but mostly because of his psychological ability to deal with her because she's an unusual person. But he said, "Hey, you really ought to come back and help me out next fall. I could use some help on the cross country team." I'm, "Hey, Paul, I don't know beans about running. I mean, if you want me to help out with hockey or football, I could do that. But I don't know anything about running."

He said, "Oh, yeah, I got all kinds of things for you to do." So I think I might help him out. You know, carry cones around and stand there with times. And at the meets, at the cross country meets, sometimes you have to stand there and point kids to go, no, this way, not way, you know, stay on the track. That sort of thing. I then I might help him out with track, too, because my daughter ran track.

And I've also thought about contacting the hockey team. And I played hockey in high school and college. So I thought, well, yeah, maybe I'd help out with that, if I could. So I was thinking about doing some work around the high school. And then that's pretty much it.

MR. KNOWLES: Great. So looking back over your entire career, how much did you enjoy the work?

MR. MCCARTER: It's been amazing. It absolutely has been amazing. I think back to when I was in graduate school at Maryland, and I didn't have a clue what was going to happen to myself.

My goal when I finished graduate school was to go back and teach in a small college back in Illinois, hopefully, the one I graduated from. I had a good friend, he's the one that got me interested in American Studies to begin with, he went to Bowling Green and got his Ph.D. and came back and was teaching in the English Department. And he said, "Hey, you know you really get into this American Studies thing." He said, "Maybe, I could help get you on board after you get out of graduate school."

So that was my intent, but then I backed into the job at the Archives. They needed somebody to move boxes from the records center to someplace else. And one thing led to another, and the next thing you know, like almost 40 years later, you've had just an incredible experience. The records you've worked with, I mean, that's really the neatest part of the job. Everybody who stays here for any length of time will always tell you the records are just so interesting and so neat to work with.

The researchers are fun to work with, too. You meet some really interesting people. You learn a lot of things from researchers, too. They have a lot of good ideas. Sometimes they're kind of way out there, but, you know, other times, they're really good and you need to listen to them.

The photographers I've met over the years, learned so much from different photographers that I've talked with federal agencies, and even some of the more well-known photographers, you learn things from them.

I've just been incredibly fortunate. Somebody with a history degree, you're lucky if you can find a job. When I was graduating, I was thinking, "This is going to be kind of hard to find a job." But most of the people I knew who were in the same graduate program that I was at Maryland, they were looking at maybe, one-year positions here and another one-year position someplace else. And, nothing long-term that they could count on.

I did just kind of back into it. But once I got here, I realized what a place this was. And I really threw myself into it and learned as much as I could, particularly when I got to Stills, learning about photography, because I didn't know anything about photography. And I'm not going to pretend that I'm a photographer. I'm not. But I've learned a lot about the history of photography and the different kinds of physical pieces of photographic materials that have been created, and learned how fascinating they are. And, printed materials and how interesting that is. And how do you make an etching? My God, you're doing everything backwards, because when you print it, it's got to come out right reading. But when you're etching it or you're engraving, you're doing it backwards. It's just mind-boggling.

So, it, I'm sorry. I'm rambling, but it just, it really has been pretty amazing. I'm extremely fortunate. I wish every history major had the same opportunity when they got out of school. Not everybody can gravitate toward this kind of work, too, because it is, it's different. It's not the same. You're not a historian. You're an archivist, and that's the not the same.

There was a period of time there where they were trying to hire people, and they would kind of sell this place as a great historian's place to come and do research. And when they got here, they found out that isn't quite what the job means. An archivist is an archivist and a historian is a historian. We've got two different tacks going on here. So, in many ways, I guess I sort of like it because it was, I guess I'm kind of an introvert, basically. And I like working by myself. And I like starting something and finishing something. I don't like to start something and it not get done. So, there's a real sense of satisfaction when you start working with a series of records, and you go through it, and you look at, and you find things. Oh, my God, you find some interesting things, just incredible.

And then you finish it. You write the description. You put it out there, and people start using it. And, there's a real sense of satisfaction that you've done something. Maybe it's not a car or a tank, but you've done something that people can actually use and will want to use and have an interest in.

And I guess you don't think about it that way when you're doing it, but when you start looking back on it, you say, wow, that you did something. You contributed. You've done something that contributes to society. And particularly for our kind of work, contributes to people learning about their government and what it does, what it doesn't do. That's been pretty amazing.

MR. KNOWLES: What has been your involvement, your level of involvement, excuse me, with the National Archives Assembly?

MR. MCCARTER: Well, you know, it's funny. I really haven't had much involvement with the Assembly at all. But when the Assembly was first started, years and years and years ago, I remember I was at a restaurant with a bunch of archivists, one of which was Gerry Haines. And I don't know whether, Gerry Haines was there, Mike McReynolds was there, John Butler. These are all old-time guys. You know, I'm talking about 70s. The guys I played softball with on the archive softball team. We had a pretty good softball team, by the way.

But and I remember that the idea for an Assembly, a group of professionals who were interested in the organization and what was happening to it at the time, I'm pretty sure that's where it started. And then Gerry and Mike went on to kind of create, I'm pretty sure you'd have to go back into the history of the organization, but I'm pretty sure they were very heavily involved at the beginning with the creation of the organization.

And I have to say, I'm not much of a joiner. I don't do that too much. So, I don't think I've ever actually been a member of the Assembly. I never went through that archivist hoopla that they used to have with the Society of American Archivists, so you could become certified. I never bothered with that. I'm just not much of a joiner.

MR. KNOWLES: That's actually my next question, about the SAA. If you'd, if you had involvement with them, but...

MR. MCCARTER: No. I mean, I've done some presentations on photography at different SAA things and MARAC, and a couple of other odds and ends. But other than that, I've never really joined the organization. And I guess I was particularly offended when they came up with that whole archivist certification thing. I thought something's squirrely about this. And they were going to grandfather everybody in, if you did something or other. And I just said, "I'm sorry, but I've got more important

things to do than that.” But, no, I’m not in the SAA. I’ve never joined it. And like I said, I’m just not a joiner by nature.

MR. KNOWLES: All right. You’ve served under a number of Archivists of the U.S. Do you feel there’s a trend that each new Archivist has to make their imprint on the agency, that they have to change something?

MR. MCCARTER: Oh, yeah. Yeah, it seems like every other one wants a reorganization, to kind of reshape the organization to fit some view they have, like the one we’ve got now with all these pillars and all that stuff.

Yeah, I mean, I think it’s kind of a natural thing for somebody at that level to want to come in and kind of put their stamp on the organization. And I don’t have a problem with it, just as long as it doesn’t affect what we do. Once you start mucking around with how we get our work done or, worse, if you don’t even understand how we get our work done, then I’ve got a problem with it. Then it becomes an issue.

But, otherwise, I mean, I think I told you what I think the role of the Archivist is. The role of the Archivist for the United States is to get us bodies. I’m sure they don’t think of it that way, but that’s how I look at it. It’s sort of like a general manager of a sports team. Go out and get the people you need to do the job to get it done. And, I’m not sure they’ve been all that successful at doing that. There’s a lot of emphasis on trying to figure out what to do with what you’ve already got.

And, yes, sometimes you can shift things around. But, sometimes it’s just a matter of how many people there are and how much work there is to be done, and that’s just the way it is. It’s the reality. But, yes, they all do, pretty much.

MR. KNOWLES: How about presidential administrations? Has that affected the agency at all?

MR. MCCARTER: Oh, well, yeah. I mean, take Reagan, for example. When he came into the office and then we had those huge RIFs. I mean that really dramatically affected the agency, as well as the individuals. I mean, it made it very difficult for, I think, NARA to really do its job.

So, not very far down the road after all that went through and, he came in and sort of dropped all these little bombs, they had to hire a lot of those people back, because they couldn’t really get the work done with the staffing they had. So, they needed the people that had, a lot of the people who had been RIFed. So many of them, I think, pretty sure came back to the building within a year or so of that.

So that had a real, yeah, when he came in, that had a real dramatic effect on the budget. But, I mean, on others, not really. You know, there, sometimes they’ll create something that they think is a great idea to affect some something or other. And, it really doesn’t turn out to be such a hot idea after all, once they’ve put it in place and once you see how it starts working. You know, it creates problems.

I think the biggest example I have of that is this Pathways thing with the students. It’s just crazy, I mean, the way it works. It’s like hiring a full-time employee, and these aren’t full-time employees, they’re students. And I understand the intent of what it is, but it’s not being implemented that way here. I think the ultimate idea is that some of these students would eventually come on to be full-time employees. And we’ve got some really good students that have been working here for a number of years who cannot get into the agency, and that is a crime, because they’ve been trained. They’ve been taught. They could make valuable contributions, and they are dead in the water. And that’s a shame.

There's no way to move, I mean there are some positions that, if they were identified that way, like before that there's a possibility to move them up, but, generally once they finish their college or graduate programs and they graduate, they're gone. And if you've had somebody for a long period of time, and we've got, we had two people like that who've been here for some quite some time and have done some really excellent work. One of them left last December, because he graduated, and another one's going to leave this May, because she's graduating. And it's a shame. It really is.

So, I don't think the thing kind of worked the way they thought it was going to work. And it has been kind of big administrative pain in the neck to deal with. Anyway, I'm looking at it from a very low level. So but that's just my opinion, as somebody who has to deal with it, day in and day out.

MR. KNOWLES: All right. I just have two questions left for you. With the Still Pictures unit, what strikes you most about how it has changed from when you first got there?

MR. MCCARTER: Well, obviously, use of technology. I mean, it's dramatically different than it was before. In reference, for example, when I first came to the unit, they threw me in the research room. You know, that's kind of how you learn. They just throw you in the research room and it is trial by fire. And everything we did was you either had to remember it, or you had to go what we called the inventory cards. They were the series descriptions on these little 5x7 cards. And, you had a general idea. Like if somebody comes in and they said they're interested in a topic if you've worked at the archives before you have a kind of an idea of, okay, well, that's probably this agency.

But then you have to go to the cards and kind of read through the cards and try to figure out, oh, it's this series, or, well, maybe it's that series. And then you have to go to the finding aid and pull that out and provide it to the researcher.

Well, all of that can be done on a computer now. All of the things that used to go on in your head. I mean, I think the staff still does that, because of their knowledge of the records. But because all this information now is in electronic form, it's much easier to just point to the, you know, PACP, the public access computers for the research and say, "Take a look at OPA. Do some searches, and it'll start telling you the kinds of record groups you want to look at. Once you start to identify those, then we'll take a look at the finding aid."

So, it takes away the possibility that whosoever in the room might forget, because people have different levels of knowledge. But if you've got it all there, and it's in the computer, and somebody can go in and do a search then that reduces that. And, obviously, if what's in the computer when you're doing a search, if the terms you want to use aren't there, they don't come out. That's where the staff comes in handy, because they can say, oh, well, yeah, in addition to this, you also want to look at that. And that's based on years of knowledge.

And then on processing, it's the same way. I mean we're dealing now more and more with digital photography and all the work we do is being done using computers. We got specially-designed computers that are different from the baseline computers, because we needed them to work with the volume of records we're getting. We needed double screens, so we could be looking at a set of captions, while we're simultaneously looking at the image. So you're not having to click in one file, close it, and go to another, you know, back and forth. You can open two files or three files simultaneously on multiple screens and do your work much more efficiently.

So, if I would say any one thing that really changed. And, I'm not saying anything that's earth shattering. I'm sure everybody would probably say the same thing. But we have jumped into that electronic world, I think, a little faster than some of the other units. I mean, textual, I don't think, is anywhere near this.

Cartographic doesn't go anywhere near it. Motion is starting to move there, but they've got the limitations that they've got no place put stuff. They get such huge, massive files that even the processing computers that we got from the IT department, we work with Mike Wash to get these, I call them souped-up computers. They've got two four-terabyte hard-drives in them. The processing speed is triple anything that the baseline is. So, they really do function well. But even for Motion Pictures, it's still inadequate, because the size of the files they deal with are so big.

So, yeah, for us, I think that's been the big thing. We kind of jumped into that with two feet as early on in the process as we could, because I think we all realized that this the direction we wanted to go. We wanted to be able to work with those records, because, as I said before, it made sense for us even from a reference point of view. Well, from a reference point of view that the images that were in electronic form created by DOD are closely related to the ones that were created in analog form before that, so.

Yeah, that's the, the technology thing is really, and it's happening more and more. We're getting into more and more technology. Cloud computing, cloud storage, all this kind of stuff that we're going to have to go to, because there just ain't no place that you can put a lot of the stuff that's being generated between accessioning and the volume of things at the lab, the preservation labs are doing. And they've got huge, a huge volume of material that they have no place to store it.

MR. KNOWLES: What's your favorite image or group collection from Stills?

MR. MCCARTER: Oh, boy. Well, I'm not very original. I would probably say the Ansel Adams. Nah, I go back to the Western Survey. Ansel Adams stuff is really great. It really is. It was really interesting because that was right about the time that he was developing his own theory of photography. So, a lot of the images in there kind of reflect this sort of technique that he was trying to create. They're wonderful to look at. They're amazing. And black, you know, a lot of people don't like to look at black and white because they think it's boring. But, gosh, black and white is just, it's more than black and white. It's just, it's something else.

And the Western Survey, there is some just amazing images in there. And that, again, I think not only they're amazing from an artistic perspective, but the fact that they were able to do it with all the limitations and problems and stuff they had to lug around, gee, to get these images. Very interesting. Very amazing thing.

So those are probably, that's not very original, probably a lot of people say the same thing. But there are so many. I mean, there are so many groups of records that have such interest and interesting things you find in them that it's hard to say just one or two. But I guess those two are probably the two that I have most interest in.

MR. KNOWLES: Is there anything else you want to add? To speak about?

MR. MCCARTER: No, I just, I appreciate the opportunity. You know, I hope it'll be useful. I know I ramble a lot, and I'm all over the place. And I'm not a very logical thinker. I jump from place to place. So, hopefully, somebody can listen to this and it'll make some sense and provide a little context.

I mean, I've been around for a while. So I've seen a lot of different things. We haven't talked very much organizational structure, as it has gone from way back when it was Mabel Dietrich was forming NN and to the time we have now. But, hopefully I've given you some kind of idea about what's going on in Stills from when I showed up in 1980 to when I leave in 2014.

MR. KNOWLES: Well, thank you for time, sir.

MR. MCCARTER: Okay.

[END RECORDING]



NATIONAL  
ARCHIVES

National Archives History Office  
700 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington DC 20408  
Tel: (202) 357-5243  
Email: [archives.historian@nara.gov](mailto:archives.historian@nara.gov)

**DEED OF GIFT TO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN**

I, Ed McCarter, do hereby give to the National Archives History Office the recordings and transcripts of my interviews conducted on 24 April 2014.

I authorize the National Archives History Office to use the recordings and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the historical objectives of their oral history program.

In making this gift I voluntarily convey ownership of the recording and transcripts to the public domain.

Brian Knowles  
Agent of Receiving Organization

Ed McCarter  
Donor

24 April 2014  
Date



NATIONAL  
ARCHIVES

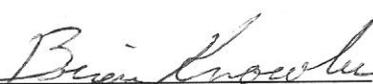
National Archives History Office  
700 Pennsylvania Ave. NW  
Washington DC 20408  
Tel: (202) 357-5243  
Email: [archives.historian@nara.gov](mailto:archives.historian@nara.gov)

**DEED OF GIFT TO THE PUBLIC DOMAIN**

I, Ed McCarter, do hereby give to the National Archives History Office the recordings and transcripts of my interviews conducted on 11 April 2014.

I authorize the National Archives History Office to use the recordings and transcripts in such a manner as may best serve the historical objectives of their oral history program.

In making this gift I voluntarily convey ownership of the recording and transcripts to the public domain.

Brian Knowles    
Agent of Receiving Organization Donor

11 April 2014  
Date

