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Berkeley, California

Sydney Santos:
Oakland Army Base Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Lisa Rubens
in 2008

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Interview #1: November 21, 2008
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Rubens: Would you tell me your name and—

01-00:00:03

Santos: My name is Sydney Santos. A lot of the time that I worked at the army base, though, it was under Sydney Buchanan. I got married shortly before I left there.

Rubens: Santos is your maiden name?

01-00:00:13

Santos: No. No, Santos is my new married name., I was Sydney Buchanan when I worked there most of the time.

Rubens: And where you were born and raised?

01-00:00:23

Santos: I was born in Oakland, California, and raised pretty much in Castro Valley, California, which is where I still reside.

Rubens: And before you came to work for the army base, had you—

01-00:00:34

Santos: That was pretty much my first job. I worked at the IRS for like three days or something, [laughs] before I got the interview at the army base. It was a temporary job over at the IRS in San Francisco.

Rubens: So tell me about that. How did you know that they were hiring and how did you get the job.

01-00:00:50

Santos: I took the civil service exam.

Rubens: What year is this?

01-00:00:54

Santos: I took the test probably in 1965. And I got called to work in 1966. I started in January of 1966. I was nineteen years old.

Rubens: Fresh out of high school?

01-00:01:09

Santos: Yes. Well, I'd graduated when I was— just turned seventeen. But I was married and had my son when I was eighteen. And of course, by the time I was nineteen, we were already split up. [laughs] So needless to say, I had to go look for a job. My mother worked for the government, so she said, "Take the civil service test." So that's what I did, and got hired. I started out as a GS-2 clerk typist.

Rubens: In what department?

01-00:01:33

Santos: It just was the luck of the Irish; I started out in civilian personnel. And that's where I remained, and worked my way up.

Rubens: Why don't you tell us what you did in the beginning. What was, literally, the work like? When did you start? Who did you work for?

01-00:01:51

Santos: Well, I couldn't believe it. Looking back now, I'm thinking what a nerve I had. The lady that interviewed me was telling me about the job, and I said, "Well, I certainly hope there's not too much filing because I don't like filing." Now, here I'm trying to get a job and I'm telling her I don't want to do filing? [laughs] I think back now, I think, boy, what an idiot. But they hired me anyway. [laughs] And I started out just, like I said, as a GS-2 clerk typist, and filing in the personnel folders, the official personnel folders, and typing and answering the phones. Actually, at that time, I think it was called records and reports. And I was employed by the military traffic management command. And we had a subordinate command, {inaudible} Military Ocean Terminal, Bay Area. And I stayed there for twenty years. But like I said, in the beginning, I started out doing the clerical duties. And part of my assignment was to file the regulations when they came in, all of the personnel regulations. So of course, I loved to read, so I had to read them all as I was filing them. And now, that served me very well because as time went on, I became quite a regulatory expert. Because I knew where everything was, so people started coming to me and asking me, well, where do you find this? Or where do you find that? Or what's the rule on this? And as I made my way through the ranks and moved my way up, I was pretty quick on the regulations, and that helped me a lot. So that simple little task that they assigned me served me very well.

Rubens: Which you at first said you weren't going to do.

01-00:03:38

Santos: Right. I don't want to file the—I really did enjoy filing those, because I read them. [laughs]

Rubens: What was the base like in 1966?

01-00:03:48

Santos: Oh, it was growing. It was growing by leaps and bounds. They hired a lot of people, of course, in personnel because they were hiring a lot of people.

Rubens: How big was your department? It must've grown, but in those days.

01-00:04:02

Santos: Oh, let's see. There were about five branches. There was the recruitment branch, the classification branch, training, labor, employee relations branch. And a subordinate of the recruitment branch was the technical services, or the

records and reports branch. And I was in the recruitment branch, in the records part. And my desire when I first started there—I was a GS-2—is I wanted to be a GS-5 appointment clerk. I thought, oh, if I could just make it to that, I would just be so thrilled. [laughs]

Rubens: And you ended up being—?

01-00:04:44

Santos: I ended up as a GS-12 supervisory personnel management specialist, before I left. And I could've gone higher. I was actually asked to apply for a job at the Navy headquarters. But I didn't want to. I wanted to take early retirement. I knew they were going to move to San Diego and I didn't want to go there. [laughs]

Rubens: Who was the head of personnel? Was that a military person or a civilian?

01-00:05:11

Santos: No, it was a civilian. It was a civilian personnel officer. At the time I started, was Warren F. Nickel. And in fact, it was kind of a sad thing. Mr. Nickel was the personnel officer, and this was during the Vietnam build up. And while he was the personnel officer, his son was drafted into the army. And he came through the Oakland Army Base when he was deployed overseas. And so we all, the whole office, went to the officers club to have a send off for the boss's son. And we all had a drink. And I don't think I was even twenty-one then. [chuckles] And we went to the Officers' Club. And unfortunately, he was killed in Vietnam. So that was quite a sad time for the office. But like I say, the office got bigger and bigger, the base got bigger and bigger. When I started, if you needed to go someplace— We started out, Building One was the main headquarters building.

Rubens: Is that where your office was?

01-00:06:11

Santos: Well, we started there. But then shortly after I started, they moved us over to Building 1101. it was over by— Not by the piers and stuff but the other direction, by where the entrance was, by the freeway. And so if we needed to go to the main building, to building one or anyplace else on the base, we just picked up the phone and called the motor pool. Motor pool sent a car over, picked you up. If you had to go to a class in San Francisco and the Office of Personnel Management, you just called up the motor pool and they provided a car. There might be two or three people going. In fact, one time I called up the motor pool to get a car to go to the Office of Personnel Management in San Francisco. And what did they send but a hearse. It was the only car available that was going that way. So I rode over there, got out at the Office of Personnel Management, in this hearse. Everybody's looking at me. [laughs] But as time went on, and of course, after Vietnam was over and they started to draw down, that all went away. And then, of course, you were on your own if you needed to go someplace. You could drive your own car or take public

transportation, but you didn't call the motor pool anymore. [laughs] That was over. So it was big differences between the time when we were huge and the time when we were in the normal peacetime situation.

Rubens: I'm trying to get a sense of just even your office. Five branches. How many people, about?

01-00:07:38

Santos: Let's see. There was probably about four to five—

Rubens: In each—

01-00:07:43

Santos: In each one. I think the recruitment was a little bit bigger, maybe nine to ten.

Rubens: And what did recruitment actually mean? What did that—

01-00:07:54

Santos: Well, that's where they brought in the new hires. Managers would put in a request to personnel saying they needed to fill a vacancy. And then that would come in, the classification people would look at it to see— If it was a new job, it had to be classified. And they had to go down there, write a job description, find out what the duties were, classify, decide what the pay level was going to be. Then it would come over to recruitment, and then they would advertise the job. Either advertise it internally for someone to apply for and be promoted into, or sometimes they would have to go outside, get a civil service register or— Later on, I guess, actually recruited right out in the papers and that to fill it. Then they would set up the interviews with the supervisors. And before they would refer people, they had a process they went through to determine who was best qualified. It was quite a lengthy process. Then later, as things evolved and they got more sophisticated as time went on, they wrote plans where they had different levels, where they had panels and everything, and you would screen the applicants' applications and all their resumes and the questions and answers that they had to, to determine the best qualified and that type of thing. So it got more sophisticated as time went on. Then you had your employee relations branch, who dealt with the union and also dealt with disciplinary problems, that type of thing. And then as a part, like I said, of the recruitment branch, there was the records and reports that maintained all the personnel folders and did all the reports, kept track of the strength. They called it the strength report, the number of civilians that worked at the base. And that was one of my jobs for many, many years, was doing the strength report. [laughs] Which I thoroughly enjoyed.

Rubens: This was the days before computers.

01-00:10:01

Santos: Oh, yes. I had a book. It was a bit like a spreadsheet, a yellow spreadsheet. And we would write down— Of course, we had a starting point; we knew

what the strength was yesterday. And you'd put in all the new hires and all the resignations, separations and that, and add it up. Subtract and add. That was as simple as that. But we kept it by division, by directorate, by various things. And of course, later on, then we did come out with the army computer program. It wasn't in the personnel office yet, but it was— You had to do IBM cards, send them in, that type of thing. So then you had to make sure that your strength report, your manual one, matched the army's database and that kind of thing. So it was quite interesting. Like I said, as we went along, then of course, eventually, we got automated. [laughs]

Rubens: So sometimes the Army's known for its prolific paperwork and regulations, as you were saying. What was your sense of all that? Was there a sense sometimes that there was more—

01-00:11:12

Santos: Oh, the government itself has tons of regulations, tons of rules. Army had them, on top of theirs, they had their own rules on top of that. But I thought it was rather good, especially after I left the Army and went to the Navy, who did not have near as many rules as the Army did. And I preferred the Army's way, method, because the Navy, they were always reinventing the wheel. The Army, it had already been decided, this is the way you're going to do it. And this is the easiest, this is the best way, this is the most efficient way. If you follow these procedures, you're going to come out at the right end. At the Navy, it's like you were more free, yes, but you were starting from scratch every time, it was like. You're wasting a lot of time, is what I felt.

Rubens: You'd said earlier that there were constantly new regulations coming in; were procedures changing?

01-00:12:16

Santos: No, the ones I'm talking about were mostly the government, from the Office of Personnel Management. There would be new— Federal Personnel Manual, we called it, the FPM. And there would be FPM letters that would come out that would be talking about new changes, before they actually did a new installment. And when we're talking about the Federal Personnel Manual, it was quite large. And it had all these supplements that went into much more detail.

Rubens: Just give me an example of what kind of regulations.

01-00:12:49

Santos: On every single aspect of government. Every single thing on the personnel field. Recruitment, there were the regulations [that] covered all your classification, your discipline, how you could do it, how could not do it. It included your retirement. And when I started working and started getting into the retirement area, the regulations were not very clear, and they were very obscure, and it was sometimes difficult to interpret. So I became responsible for retirements and I had to do a lot of calling, calling Office of Personnel

Management and actually calling the place where they did the retirements, to find out exactly how things went. So I became quite an expert on that. And later on, they did come out with much clearer, much better regulations. But initially, it was very difficult. And at the time that I worked there, they had cost of living increases that would come like every six months. And you would have to figure out, when you went to tell someone— they would come to you, say, “Well, what will I get? How much money will I get when I retire?” And that was up to us to give them an idea. We could make or break them. We give them the wrong idea, and they could retire and find out they didn’t have enough to live on. So you had to be careful, make sure that you knew what you were doing. And these cost of living things, it would make a difference if you went before or after because they had to look back and— It got quite complicated. So we would do all this figuring and say, “Yeah, yeah, you would be better off to go now, before the next one,” or, “No, wait.” And so it was quite interesting.

Rubens: Nobody’s instructing you to cut them off sooner than later, so there’ll be—

01-00:14:40

Santos: No. No, no. When we had reduction in forces, of course, after the build up, when we had the draw down, then of course, we went into the period where you had reductions in forces, where you had to lay people off. And then of course, part of that would be early retirement, also. And we would counsel people on that and offer that option. And I’ll never forget—I’m not sure if it was before the draw down or not, of Vietnam—but they decided finally to let the longshoremen go. They had a number of longshoremen that worked in MOTBA, and they decided that they didn’t need that anymore; they could contract that function out. And so they brought all these people in and we had to— We had tons of these guys there. Most of them were old enough to retire. And we had tons of them. They were coming, bringing their wives in. And some of them could not read or write because they were old time people that had been here for a long time. And like I say, they were eligible to retire. And I was just a young person then and it was quite interesting, never having met people who had to sign with an X and that type of thing.

Rubens: Would you comment on what the atmosphere was like at the base? You gave the poignant story of your boss’s son, the news coming in that he had died. What was the tenor of the place during the Vietnam War? Were you aware of people who were protesting the troop trains, for example?

01-00:16:24

Santos: Yes. We didn’t have too much protest at the base itself; they mainly focused on the— I can’t think of the name right now, but where they inducted the— The recruitment.

Rubens: Yes, the induction office.

01-00:16:37

Santos:

Yes, right. They mainly focused the protesting there, so we didn't have that. Every once in a while the security would tighten up and they'd say, "Well, we might be getting protesters," but there really wasn't too much of that. And we were real busy, building up and— Unfortunately, one of the biggest areas that built up during that time was the mortuary. We had to hire more embalmers and more— That was always sad. But you get caught up in your job and you're just doing your job, you're not thinking how it translated to the— what it actually means. And especially when you're young and you're starting out. So it didn't make as much of an impact, except when it hit home. Some of the young girls in the office had boyfriends that went to Vietnam and were injured or killed. And naturally, then you would think about it.

Rubens:

Touching, indeed.

01-00:17:30

Santos:

Yes, yes, brought home to roost.

Rubens:

Some of our interviewees have mentioned that there were body bags that you could see that on the pier-

01-00:17:43

Santos:

There probably were. We didn't see it in the personnel office, of course. But I'm sure that there was, yes.

Rubens:

And then your fellow employees. Was it generally a young crowd, or was it—

01-00:17:56

Santos:

Well, the clerks—which naturally, I was a clerk in the beginning—they were all fairly young. They were all like me, around my age. In fact, I'm still friends with some of them. And then the staffing specialists and that, they were the older group. We thought they were terribly old; of course, they were probably about thirty-five or forty. [laughs] But at the time, we were young kids; we thought they were old. And I remained friends with many of those for many years.

Rubens:

There was a good esprit de corps? What were your hours of work?

01-00:18:33

Santos:

We started at 7:30 and got off at 4:00. It was 7:30 to 4:00, the whole time I worked there.

Rubens:

And you were coming from Castro Valley?

01-00:18:39

Santos:

Yes.

Rubens:

Who took care of your children?

01-00:18:41

Santos:

I had a babysitter and I dropped my son off there. And my daughter is from my more recent marriage. [laughs] But yes, those were wonderful days. Now, I'll tell you an interesting thing. I had a deaf employee for a while. This was after I had been there for years and I became a supervisor, and I was over the technical services branch. And one of my employees was a deaf girl. *Beautiful* girl. Oh, I'm telling you, she was absolutely beautiful. In fact, she taught us sign language. We became very friendly with her and she taught us sign language and we would sign with her. We weren't real good at it, but enough to communicate.

Rubens:

She was able to read lips?

01-00:19:23

Santos:

Yes, yes. But one time we started talking about Vietnam and about— Because it was drawing down then and everything. Or maybe it was over and I think we were talking about maybe there was going to be another war or something, similar to Vietnam. I forget just exactly. And she says, "Oh, I hope there is!" And we said, "Well, why would you— We didn't want that. We don't want to see your young men get killed and our brothers and husbands and boyfriends going over there." And she says, "Well, I don't care." She says, "Deaf men don't have to go." [laughs] And I said, "Well, that is so selfish!" And she says, "Well, that's the way I feel." She says, "It's more jobs for us." So this gives you a different perspective on other people's outlooks. [laughs]

Rubens:

Now, the government was known for opening up employment, there was an office of equal opportunity on the base. Do you remember when that came in? Was it there when you started, or—

01-00:20:27

Santos:

Gosh, it seems like it was always there. I can't remember if it was there in the very beginning; I think it was.

Rubens:

But you were under a lens as well as mandate to have a diversified staff

01-00:20:40

Santos:

Oh yes..

Rubens:

And do you think that was reflected in the job force there?

01-00:20:46

Santos:

Oh, absolutely. Absolutely. And in fact, one of my employees, one of the women that worked for me, applied for an intern. That was where you started out as a GS-5 and you were sent to all the various training for all of the aspects of the human resources, and you ended up as a GS-11 when you got through. And a lot of the people in our office applied for that and went through that program and became specialists. And she applied for that and she wasn't picked. Another lady from the office was picked, who she didn't feel

was as well qualified, but who was a black lady, and she was white. So she filed an equal opportunity complaint, saying that she was discriminated against. And I testified in her case. And I had the figures, because we had the statistics in that, and I presented them and everything. And she won her case. So she became an intern and went through that. So yeah, it worked both ways. But I think for the most part, everything was pretty fair. Most of the supervisors there and most of the military all selected people on the basis of who was the best qualified. There was rarely a time when it was based on race or religion or whatever.

Rubens: So that wasn't such a sticking point or a bone of contention, then, amongst the staff.

01-00:22:19

Santos: Not really. But we did have the equal opportunity employment office there, and they were very visible. So that might've been a help, too, [chuckles] to make sure that everybody minded their P's and Q's.

Rubens: Oakland was such a center of political upheaval, but they never had a riot. It prided itself on that. When Martin Luther King was killed, there was no rioting. But the Black Panther Party was there, and—

01-00:22:49

Santos: Oh, yes. We had Angela Davis come and talk at the Base.

Rubens: I've never heard about that. Tell me about that.

01-00:22:55

Santos: Yes. I can't remember the details too much, but there was always—Ever since I worked there, there was talk about they were going to close the Oakland Army Base.

Rubens: After Vietnam? After the draw down?

01-00:23:07

Santos: Yes, after Vietnam. And we'd say, "Oh, we have a rally. Save our base. Save our base." [laughs] And in fact, I was out there interpreting one time, for the deaf person that worked for me, at one of those things. Because really, as being management, I shouldn't have been [laughs] at a save our base rally. But I said, "Well, I'm interpreting for my employee." [laughs]

Rubens: Did you actually see Angela Davis there?

01-00:23:30

Santos: Yes. She was—

Rubens: Do you remember what she talked about?

01-00:23:32

Santos: I don't. [laughs] It was so long ago. But she was there.

Rubens:

It was a good turnout for her?

01-00:23:37

Santos: Oh, yes, because it was at this save our base rally. I think that might've been the one where they hung the general in effigy or something, I don't even remember. But anyway, I know it was pretty frowned upon. But yeah, it was quite interesting. [laughs] And of course, being in the personnel office, too, we would get calls occasionally from the congressman's office because employees, if they felt they were wronged or there was a problem or something, they'd call their congressman. And they'd be calling us to find out the details and everything and we'd have to— If you got a call from the congressman's office, you dropped everything and you got to work on that, found out what was going on, got right back to them. So like Congressman Dellums and various other ones. But that was the main one that we dealt with.

Rubens:

Yes. Most of the employees at that time must've been local people.

01-00:24:30

Santos: Yes.

Rubens:

I was going to ask if you had much community/base interaction. I know later on there was Humanity Week. There was Christmas caroling and—

01-00:24:46

Santos: Yes, they had the day on the green, where you'd go out and they have all the different ethnic groups represented and that type of thing. And they'd have contests where— Yes, like you said, and Humanities Week and all that.

Rubens:

But in terms of what you were aware of, what was asked of you in your job or—

01-00:25:06

Santos: Yes, no, I just strictly did my job and didn't really get out into the community at all in my line of work.

Rubens:

I know later on, also, I think they had interns coming from some of the Oakland high schools, who worked as support staff.

01-00:25:21

Santos: Oh, we did that. Absolutely. One of my best employees was a little underprivileged girl that came to work for us. We always had a student aide. And she came to work for us and she was so good I kept bringing her back every year. And then we got her to work during the school year. And then of course, when she graduated from high school, I said, "You've got to pass the test." She couldn't pass the test. She was smart. Smart as a whip. But she could not seem to pass that test. So finally, we got her in under some other

program and got her going. And darned if she didn't pregnant and leave. [laughs] But at least we got her in there for a while. And she did come back to work for the government later on.

Rubens: So did your office literally recruit? Would people go out to the high schools or work with counselors?

01-00:26:16

Santos: Now, let me try and think back because I didn't actually work in recruitment at that time; I was in the technical services branch. So I think pretty much that the schools just provided a list and we'd pick from the list.

Rubens: Did we adequately describe what technical services was? You were talking about filing and records management and keeping track of the regulations.

01-00:26:48

Santos: Yes, okay. Technical services actually did all the reports, kept all the personnel folders, kept all of the regulations. They did all of the processing of the personnel actions. So any time there was a promotion, a hire, a separation, they would prepare a standard form fifty, [it] was called, was the personnel actions. And I signed them all. My name is on a lot of people's documents over almost twenty years. I didn't sign them for the whole twenty, but— Also when the automated systems came in, we handled that. And as we evolved and got more sophisticated, then we started doing audits, auditing the records, making sure that every aspect— We had an audit team making sure that— we'd randomly select personnel actions to make sure that they were correct all the way through. We handled all of the benefits, all of the health and life insurance and the retirement and that. So I would give lots of seminars on— every time there was a life insurance change or something added, or health benefits. We'd have a health fair every year. I'd sponsor that, bring in the different health people. Then I did retirement seminars. I went out and did retirement seminars, brought people in, brought other speakers in. And in fact, for a while, I was even going to other activities; they were asking me to come and do retirement seminars there. So I've done that, too.

Rubens: Other activities, for instance, like Humanities Week and then Humanities Day?

01-00:28:36

Santos: No, I meant like the— I flew down to LA and did one for— Oh, I forget. I think it was the Veterans Administration, for the doctors there at the Veterans Administration. I did that on my own. [laughs] And then I went over to the Presidio and did one for them because I didn't have anybody, I guess, at one point. So I went over and did a retirement seminar for them and went to various places to help them out. Later on in my career—this was after I'd left the army base, but was working for the Navy *on* the Army base, at Public Works Center, when they decided to close down all the Navy bases—then, of course, I went out to all of the Navy bases—Moffitt Field and all of those

places—doing retirement seminars. Because of course, that was a big thing for a majority of the people, that the base was closing.

Rubens: Sure. When was that, that you came back?

01-00:29:32

Santos: Let's see. I left the army in about '86, and I went to Oak Knoll. And I think I was there only about two or three years before the Navy decided to consolidate all their personnel functions into one. And we moved over the Public Works Center on the army base. So that was probably around '90 or '91, somewhere in there.

Rubens: So you were only gone for four or five years.

01-00:29:55

Santos: Yes. [laughs] But I was working for the Navy, but I was on the Army Base.

Rubens: Where was that literally located?

01-00:30:02

Santos: That was over by where the housing was, by the Navy housing. So you had to go through the gate where the guards were and stuff like that, when we worked there.

Rubens: Off of Maritime?

01-00:30:12

Santos: Yes, off of Maritime. It was where the bowling alley was and the theater and all of that. And after I had left the army base—I had gotten married while I still worked for the army, and had my daughter. That was in '85. And so when I had my daughter, I took her to the childcare there at the army base. And so she grew up to be almost like an army brat, because she went to the childcare there till she was five years old. And when I went to work at the Navy, I still took her to—I lived in El Cerrito at the beginning. So I still took her to the army base. But I could not get from Oak Knoll back to the army base in time to pick her up, so I had an army family that picked her up and took care of her. And then on Friday nights I would go out to bingo, so the army family would keep her, they would baby sit her. So she got to be just quite the little army brat, [laughs] going to the movies and—I went through various different families, as they transferred. But she went through quite a few of them, and she just got to know all the army ways and go to all the army functions.

Rubens: Now, tell me a little bit more about the childcare center. Where was it literally located?

01-00:31:30

Santos: It was the same area there, where the Navy housing is.

Rubens: And who staffed that? Personnel hired the staff?

01-00:31:36

Santos: Yes, we had civilian workers there. And there's appropriated funds and there's non-appropriated funds. Now, non-appropriated funds was a little bit different. And some of the people that worked in the childcare were non-appropriated funds. Although my branch, my technical services branch did work on their records and stuff.

Rubens: What does that mean? I'm not clear about the difference between the funds.

01-00:32:03

Santos: Okay, the appropriated funds are the people that are GS wage grade, and they're part of the regular government.

Rubens: The civilian service.

01-00:32:10

Santos: The non-appropriated funds are coming out of the base's money. They're not really civil service employees. A lot of your care givers were non-appropriated funds, although we did have a couple of GS employees in there, like as supervisors and that.

Rubens: And who were the children that were part of the childcare center? Were they both military and—

01-00:32:30

Santos: Yes, most of them were military children. And that's mainly what the childcare center was provided for. But of course, being in the personnel office [chuckles] and being close to the director of that, of course when I wanted to put my child in there, she said, "Absolutely. You have no problem." [laughs] You don't have to go on the wait list, you just— When you have your baby and you're ready to come back to work, you just come on down and we'll put her in." So I didn't have any problem.

Rubens: So that was basically 7:30 to— How long would you leave—

01-00:33:00

Santos: 7:30 to 4:00, when I worked there. And then when I went to the Navy and I had to come back, she would be 5:00, maybe, before— Our hours were different at the Navy.

Rubens: That's when the family took your daughter? But the childcare center went from 7:30 to 4:00.

01-00:33:14

Santos: Yes. It might've even opened earlier than that.

Rubens: How many children were there? How big was it, about?

01-00:33:18

Santos: Oh, I would say maybe twenty or thirty. I don't think it was any bigger than that. They had a baby section and then they had the toddlers, and then they had the preschoolers.

Rubens: So you were pleased enough with—

01-00:33:30

Santos: Oh, it was excellent care. Very good. I was *very* pleased. Yes, they did a fine job.

Rubens: I thought for the record, it might be interesting. Do you remember what your wage was when you started at GS-5?

01-00:33:42

Santos: Oh, geez! I'll tell you what, when I started working for the government, my check was so small I could cash it at Safeway. [laughs] That's how small it was. But yeah, I do not remember exactly, but I know it was small enough—

Rubens: Then the childcare must've been fairly reasonable?

01-00:34:01

Santos: Well, by that time—we're talking in the nineties now, or the eighties, the late eighties—it was starting to go up then. It was expensive, but it wasn't too bad.

Rubens: We were talking earlier about recruitment and who were your fellow workers. The army bases seemed to be a great place that provided upward mobility.

01-00:34:26

Santos: Oh, absolutely! Absolutely! It was wonderful. It's the one place where you could go— It was wonderful for a woman, at the time that I went to work there; for a woman or a minority, that was the place to be, the government. I'm not saying just the army base, but the government as a whole. Army base was wonderful, too. And that's where you could go places and become higher grades through your experience, not just— You didn't have to go out and have the education.

Rubens: They also trained you.

01-00:34:59

Santos: They trained you. They trained you and you got the experience and you got the training and you learned how to do it. And so you could advance. If you went out to private sector and were in the same situation that I was, with the—you would *never* have made the specialist because there would've been a requirement that you have a college degree. But the government and the Army, they would count the years of experiences. It would take you a long time, but that experience was just as good as the degree. In fact, it probably was better because it was specific to the job that you were going into, rather than a general type thing, which is what many people ended up having when

they came to work for the government. So yeah, it was absolutely a perfect, marvelous opportunity for— I never would've gotten to where I was, probably, if it hadn't been for the government and the army.

Rubens: Now, I understand, also when the Army Base closed, that most of the employees were not living in Oakland. Some were living as far away as Hercules and Vallejo, which seemed to speak to the phenomenon that people had made higher salaries and could afford to buy homes in suburban or higher priced area.

01-00:36:11

Santos: Oh yes. . Because I was not there, actually, when the Army Base closed. They were the last ones, I think; all the Navy bases closed first. Yes, when I was there, most of the people in our office did not live nearby; they lived in Walnut Creek or Pinole or Castro Valley or San Leandro or different places like that. There were some that lived in Oakland, there were some that lived close by. But it was pretty diversified. But Bay Area, it's all close anyway. [laughs]

Rubens: Some people have talked about the commute; that with the height of the Vietnam War, that was a tough time; when the Cyprus Freeway collapsed, that was another time.

01-00:36:55

Santos: Oh, my goodness. The Cyprus Freeway collapse. That day— I was working at the Navy then, but my daughter was at the childcare center. So I went to pick my daughter up at the childcare center. And I went in to get her and Miss Marie—that was the lady that was our daughter's care giver—she said, "Oh, I need to talk to you for a moment. Can you stay?" And she wanted to tell me something about our daughter. And so we talked for a few minutes, and as I was getting ready to leave, that's when the earthquake hit. And of course, over there, that's where— one of the worst spots that you could've been because it was very unstable in that area. And I actually fell to the ground, it shook so bad. I was laughing; I had no idea how bad the earthquake was. And so we said, "Oh, my goodness, it's an earthquake." So I left and I got in my car, and I thought— Now, sometimes I would go and get on the Cypress to go home to El Cerrito, and other times I would just take the side street and go down and go that way. Or take the off ramp, or the ramp that takes you onto where they merge with the bridge and 80, because a lot of times that was crowded. And I thought, well, which way shall I go? So I decided not to go the Cypress, to go the other way. Thank goodness. [chuckles] If I had gone the other way, it would've been—

Rubens: -completely blocked.

01-00:38:21

Santos: Yes. And when I got onto the road, I thought, my goodness, there's no traffic at all. Of course, I didn't know the bridge was down. There was no traffic

coming at all from San Francisco. And I noticed that there was— looked like splits in the road. And I thought, well, how strange. And when I got onto the 80, I thought, well, there's nobody coming off of the Nimitz Freeway, either. This is really strange. And it wasn't till I got home and went to the neighbors, because my TV was out and the neighbors' TV was in, that I found out about the bridge collapse and all of the other things that had happened. I had no idea of it. I thought, oh, my God, how lucky I was that she had stopped me and talked to me. Otherwise, I might've left right on time and been on the Cypress when— Because that's the way I was thinking of going. [laughs]

Rubens: Quite a story!

01-00:39:11

Santos: Yes. So that was quite interesting. [chuckles]

Rubens: Tell me about the *Western Arrow*, the Base newspaper. Did you read that?

01-00:39:26

Santos: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, we all read that, yes, always read the paper.

Rubens: Did that come out weekly or bi-weekly?

01-00:39:32

Santos: Yes, I think it was weekly. I think it was about weekly, I'm not sure.

Rubens: And what about your relationship to the military, literally. Did you have any interaction—

01-00:39:46

Santos: Oh, absolutely. Now, you have to realize, even though this was an Army Base, it was a joint military traffic management command. So you had Army, Navy, and Air Force. And also, even though it was a military base, it was predominantly civilian. The military were very much in the minority. There was very few military. The military that were there mostly were officers, so you had very few enlisted people. You had some. You had your MPs and you had some enlisted. But mainly, our interaction would've been with the officers. And we had a colonel that was over our directorate. Personnel was a division of a directorate that had the director of personnel and administration. And that was a colonel. So as I moved up through the ranks, then I got to get to know the colonel quite well, the last few that were there. And we interacted with him. And then the other directors, most of the directors were military. I think the exception was the comptroller; that was always a civilian. And then I think it might've been— I can't remember. There was a few exceptions, where it was reversed. But for the most part, the directors were the military, and the deputy directors, who were really doing the work and were there all the time, [chuckles] were the civilians. But they provided the continuity. The military would come and go; they'd be there for a year or two.

Rubens: Now, these directors, these were usually colonel's positions?

01-00:41:16

Santos: Yes, they were usually colonels. Or captains, if they were Navy.

Rubens: Well, I was going to ask you about the joint command. I understand, for instance, that information technology was usually a Navy position. I don't know if it just worked out that way or it was policy.

01-00:41:30

Santos: Yes, I think they probably did have their billets slide. Usually, the head of the Military Transportation Management Command was always a general. We always had a general. And it was always a colonel, an Army colonel, that was head of our directorate. So I'm sure that they had the billets tagged for Army, Navy, or Air Force, certain ones.

Rubens: But these military people rotated pretty regularly.

01-00:41:58

Santos: Yes, they were only there for two, three years. And so your civilian was there, many times, sometimes for thirty, forty years. [chuckles] They provided the continuity. Now, of course, as you got into the higher civilians, some of them were very mobile. Like our personnel officers. We went through them like— [laughs] Just like the military. They were constantly moving on because in order to be promoted, to get ahead, you had to be mobile, in those days, in the government. So our personnel officers would come and go, and the rest of us were the ones that provided the continuity.

Rubens: Did you notice diversity within the military command? There were two African-American commanders who were base commanders.

01-00:42:52

Santos: Yes, there was a general that was African-American and—

Rubens: I think there was one Hispanic, General Gonzales, as well.

01-00:42:59

Santos: Yes, I think there was. I think you're right, yes. I didn't notice too much. I didn't really pay that much attention. But I'm sure that there was as much diversity among them as there was among the Army Base, the civilian population. But we certainly were diversified. [laughs]

Rubens: You had mentioned, also, discipline. I meant to follow that up, what you had said, one of your jobs was issuing discipline.

01-00:43:31

Santos: Well, that wasn't mine, that was part of the personnel office. I did not work in the employee management relations branch. But they did, they would—

Rubens: What would be an example of—

01-00:43:41

Santos: They would help the supervisor if they had an employee that had a problem. They would help them write a letter of suspension or a letter of reprimand, or actually take the action to remove an individual. Sometimes we caught employees stealing. Employees would be out on the docks and that and they would be stealing copper, like nowadays is going on. Of course, now the price of copper has dropped so low that they stole some copper last week, they took it back this week. [laughs] But no. So they would be stealing things like that and get caught, and so that would be grounds for removal. And then of course, the union—

Rubens: Was this very pervasive, or was it—

01-00:44:16

Santos: Well, no, it didn't happen that often, but yes, it happened. That large of a group, you always are going to have disciplinary problems. There's always going to be somebody that's in trouble. [laughs] And you'd have a removal, and then the union would step in and there'd be hearings. And sometimes you had them come back. [laughs]

Rubens: You mentioned testifying for one particular case. Were there other occasions you remember?

01-00:44:42

Santos: Oh, yes, but it was not a regular thing. But yes, I had to go over to San Francisco to the attorney-

Rubens: The US attorneys?

01-00:45:00

Santos: Yes, the US Attorney. Yes, I had to go over to the US Attorney and give testimony and be briefed by them, in case these— In fact, I think I did actually testify in one that actually went to trial. So yeah, those things would happen. It was all part of the job. I dealt with the union quite a bit. And actually, I got along with them quite well, so that worked out good for me. [laughs]

Rubens: Now, tell me a little bit about the union. Was this the Office and Professional Workers, or—

01-00:45:28

Santos: No, this was the union— I can't even remember what—

Rubens: There was the Longshoremen's Union.

01-00:45:34

Santos: This was the union that was for the base employees.

Rubens: Had you been in one until you moved to management?

01-00:45:43

Santos: No, I never was part of the union, but I knew all the union officials and I dealt with them on a regular basis. And they liked me and I liked them. They felt like they could get correct information from me and everything, and that I wouldn't give them the run-around. I would get mad and them and I'd say, "Why are you defending this person when they're so guilty?" And they'd say, "Well, to tell you the truth, we have to. It's part of our job. And we know as well as you do that they— [laughs] But still, we have to do that."

Rubens: Let me think this out with you. This was either AFSCME or SEIU.

01-00:46:19

Santos: It wasn't SEIU. That union was present; that was a different one, though. The base union, I can't remember, it was an AFL-CIO affiliated union. I remember Clayton Powell was the president, back when I first started with the government. It was AFGE, American Federation of Government Employees.

Rubens: And what was his job?

01-00:46:50

Santos: He was the union president. I forget what his job was. I think he was not doing his job. If he were the president—because he did work there, but you were allowed to leave your job and do that full-time, and your job was held for you while you were a full-time union representative. The stewards and that had their regular jobs, but the union officials were allowed this leave of absence.

Rubens: Could you estimate what percentage of the civilian workforce was unionized?

01-00:47:25

Santos: Not too much, I don't think. It's not as much as you would find in the private sector, because— Although the union would go to bat for the employees and they probably did a lot of good, they didn't have the powers that a union would on the outside. You couldn't strike, you couldn't— A lot of things you couldn't do. But they were pretty powerful and they—

Rubens: You weren't contracting your—

01-00:47:43

Santos: Well, they did negotiate with the union; that was part of the labor/employee relations branch. They would have union negotiations and have a contract every year with the union.

Rubens: But I'm just trying to get the intersection of the GS categories—

01-00:47:59

Santos: It was both GS and wage grade that belonged to that union.

Rubens: Oh, I see. Okay.

01-00:48:05

Santos: But it was, of course, non-supervisory, not management.

Rubens: Would you just clarify the distinction between wage grade workers, employees, and then the GS—

01-00:48:22

Santos: Okay. The wage grade were your blue collar workers. They were the people that were out there, laborers—

Rubens: The longshoremen.

01-00:48:28

Santos: Longshoremen, but you would also have your electricians, your plumbers, all the trades. Those were all your wage grade type people. Your GS were your office workers. Your shipping clerks, your personnel clerks, your supervisory people, your management people.

Rubens: And I've never quite known, what was the balance between management and regular employees? Obviously, there'd be more employees than management, but there was a lot of management.

01-00:48:59

Santos: [laughs] Yes, there was a lot. Probably more than they probably should be. There was your middle management, your upper management and that, yeah. Like in the personnel office, just for an example, I was the supervisor of the technical services branch, and I had about four or five employees under me. There was a supervisor of each of the other branches— The training branch, they would have maybe two employees. Your recruitment and placement branch, they would have a supervisor there and they'd have about three to four employees. Your classification branch had a supervisor, and he had two to three employees. And then you had your personnel officer, who was a supervisor over all the supervisors, [chuckles] over the whole thing. So you see, there's quite a few levels of supervision in there for—

Rubens: Now, did you have regular meetings? How—

01-00:49:50

Santos: Oh, yes. Oh, yes, every week we had a staff meeting, all the supervisors with the personnel officer.

Rubens: And then what about larger—

01-00:49:59

Santos: Oh, yes, the general would have a staff meeting with all the directors. And the director, of course, would have staff meetings with all his department heads, his division heads. And in fact, it was funny. Now, when I first started

working there— well, not when I first started working, but after I'd been there a while, they had the conference room where the general would have his meetings. And this one time I was invited to go to listen. And at that time, everybody smoked. I mean *everybody* smoked, wherever you went. And you went in there and they had— it was almost like theater chairs, but each chair had an ashtray on the side that you could use. And then I was asked to go there one time and give a talk. Up to that point, I had not hardly ever done any public speaking. And I went up there behind the podium, in front of— And I was shaking so hard I thought I was going to shake that podium right off the— [laughs] But I came out okay. I made it through it. [laughs] But yes. Thinking of the smoking, I remember going to training classes that were given in San Francisco and that, and there was these big yellow ashtrays all along the tables, for everybody to smoke. It was amazing, when you think back now, how it's so forbidden now, and it was just everywhere you went, there was smoking allowed.

Rubens: Do you remember when the anti-smoking regulations came in?

01-00:51:26

Santos: I remember when it first started to hit was in the training. I went to a training class; the yellow ashtrays were still there. And the person that was running the class said, "Well, how many people would prefer that this be a non-smoking event?" And of course, the smokers, we were outraged. [laughs] We had to go out in the hallway. We didn't even have to go outside; all we had to do was go out in the hallway. But that's when it started. And then of course, after that, it just—

Rubens: And when is this, about?

01-00:52:00

Santos: It was probably in the early eighties, I would say, about the early eighties. Because by the time I left, in '86, they hadn't forbidden smoking in the offices yet, but they were getting ready to. And when I left and went to the Navy, it was soon after that that the army said no more smoking in the offices.

Rubens: And then by the time you came back—

01-00:52:24

Santos: Oh, yes. Well, of course, eventually, they outlawed it everywhere. But I had just left there and they put that rule into effect, you couldn't smoke anymore in your office.

Rubens: You mentioned earlier, with one of your supervisors, the man who lost his son, that you had gone to the Officers' Club. Was there an Officers' Club on the Oakland Army Base, or was that over in San Francisco?

01-00:52:49

Santos: No, no, there was an Officers' Club. At that time, there was an Officers' Club on the Army Base, down— Actually, I don't think it was on the same area where the NCO club was; it was across the street, on the other side of Maritime. But that didn't stay too long. As the Base went down they, for some reason, got rid of the officers club. I don't know why, because there was more officers, I think, than there was— But I guess they started going— they would go to the Presidio or other places for Officers' Club.

Rubens: And you mentioned the army families. You had successive Army families that would help you out with picking up your daughter from childcare. I've never had a sense of how many lived on the Base.

01-00:53:30

Santos: There wasn't that many. Like I said, there wasn't that many enlisted personnel. But mostly, I think a lot of them were MPs or in the MP facility. But there was— I don't know, I have no idea how many, but I would say thirty, forty families, at least.

Rubens: It was a good presence.

01-00:53:48

Santos: Yes, I would say so.

Rubens: I have to find pictures of the military housing.

01-00:53:52

Santos: Oh, another thing. When I first started working there, we had our own fire department. When you came into the gate and building one was on one side, the cafeteria was across the street, and the fire department was over there. We had firemen, civilian firemen and everything. Of course, later on, they got rid of that, as the thing drew down, and depended on the Oakland fire department for any services that we needed in that area. But initially, we had all of these things. Like I said, the huge motor pool, the fire department, everything.

Rubens: There was a bowling alley.

01-00:54:23

Santos: Yes, the bowling alley was there, I think, right up to the end. But that was for the military. The bowling alley and the commissary, all that was really for the military, and the NCO club. The cafeteria that was right across the street from Building One, now, we used to go there almost every day for lunch. We loved it! We had our little favorite things that we'd get. And when I first started working there, when I was a clerk, we'd go over there to eat lunch and there was— This is really discriminatory, I thought. The open area was for everybody, the wage grade and everybody. Then there was a place for the officer workers, and the wage grade were not allowed to go in there. And then there was another separate room for the executives. And also, if you wanted to be a member of the officers club, you had to be a GS-7 and above. Actually, I

guess the Officers' Club was around for a while, because it was still around when I finally got to be a GS-7. And somebody said, "Do you want to join?" And I said, "Hell, no. They didn't want me when I wasn't a GS-7. What's so different now?" [laughs] So I never did join. And I always thought, why did these executives have to have this separate room? It was the same cafeteria food, the same tables and chairs; they just had to be separate.

Rubens: Well, was this custom? Obviously, this wasn't regulation.

01-00:55:41

Santos: No, it wasn't regulation, it was just the way somebody had set it up. And they just thought they were better, I guess.

Rubens: And how long did that last

01-00:55:48

Santos: That didn't last. As the base drew down and things got smaller, those kind of things all went away.

Rubens: Was that also factored by race or ethnicity or gender?

01-00:56:04

Santos: Like I said, that was strictly based on your job, it was—

Rubens: Your classification.

01-00:56:08

Santos: Yes, your classification. You were either an office worker or you were a laborer, a wage grade type, or you were an executive. And I always thought that was horrible. [laughs] And like I say, eventually that all went away. But at the time, that was the way things were done. Back in the sixties and early seventies, that's the way things were.

Rubens: Now, you also mentioned the MPs. We don't have many stories about the MPs. Who were they policing?

01-00:56:39

Santos: Well, they were guarding—

Rubens: - guarding is really what it was.

01-00:56:40

Santos: Yes, they were guarding the— And I'm sure they were policing the other military. But mainly, I think they were more like the guard on duty at the gates, and probably at the warehouses and stuff. I really don't know their functions there. But there were problems. Now, I can tell you a story. I wasn't there, but one of my very good—

Rubens: Why don't we stop for one second, and let me switch tapes.

[End Audio File 1]

Begin Audio File 2 11-21-2008.mp3

02-00:00:18

Santos:

I wasn't there myself, but my very good friend, who was at that time, in employee relations, was at work. And we had a manpower department. They were the ones that decided how many employees you needed in each area. The manpower said, you need four civilians or you need twenty civilians, so they were important people, too. And the supervisor of the manpower department at that time was an older lady, quite a petite little lady. And she had about four or five employees that worked for her. One of them was a man. He was not very old, but he was huge. He was a big guy. And he was big boned, tall, fat. And in fact, it was a joke that he made the tires flat on his chair; he was so heavy [laughs] that the tires all went flat on his rolling chair. So anyway, I don't know exactly what the incident was, but he had done something wrong and she was going to discipline him. So my friend who worked in the employee relations department helped her to write a letter, just a letter of reprimand, to point out what he had done wrong and what he needed to do to improve and that kind of thing. So this lady decided that she didn't want to embarrass him when the other employees were there, so she was going to wait till after hours. And it just so happened that my friend was working lat that night. And the manpower office was right down the hall from us. And so she waited till all the other employees left and she asked him to stay behind, come into her office so she could give him the letter and talk to him about the problem that they were having with him. Well, my friend was working and all of a sudden she heard screams. And she went running down there and here was this man with blood all up his arms, and there was the supervisor laying on the floor, just covered with blood. I guess when she had gone to discipline him, he had just gone into a rage and started beating her. So immediately they call for the MPs, the MPs came, took him into custody. Then of course, they got the local police, took him away to jail, took her to the hospital and that type of thing. But that was one of the cases where the MPs, they were right there and they were to the rescue. But fortunately, the lady came out okay; and unfortunately for him, him went to jail, [laughs] prosecuted under the [dog barks] civil law.

Rubens:

That's a dramatic story.

02-00:02:56

Santos:

Yes. Oh, yes, it was quite something.

Rubens:

At the same time, people have talked about the Oakland Army Base being like a kind of family, that people got very close with each other, and that in fact, children were a part of it. You talked about your child going to the childcare center. Does she have good memories of—

02-00:03:17

Santos:

Yes. One of their care givers was named Miss Marie. She was a black lady. And my daughter just loved her. That was her special lady that took care of her. And even after my daughter got older, she always wanted to go back and visit Miss Marie and inquire about her and that. And my husband and I used to laugh when we took Chris to the childcare center as she got older and started talking and that. There were a lot of black children from the military families— And my daughter would come and she'd say, "That's mines. Mines." Because a lot of black people do put that S on the end of things. And we'd always be constantly correcting her, saying, "No, it's mine." "No, it's mines." [laughs] So she would pick up from the other children. And she had some good friends that she made at that time. Of course, I later moved to Castro Valley, so she didn't keep in touch with the children. And then they were military; they moved on anyway, most of them. But it was a wonderful place and she had wonderful memories of it, really.

Rubens:

Were there other occasions in which children— or you would bring your daughter to the base? One story that I hear is about the Bicentennial in '76, there was a freedom train and some people brought their children.

02-00:04:30

Santos:

No, I didn't ever bring her to the Base— other than to the childcare. Of course, like I said, that was in '85, when she was born, so—I did have a son, earlier, but I didn't ever bring him to the base for anything.

Rubens:

You were going to explain to me the military traffic command organization.

02-00:04:50

Santos:

We were the Western Area Military Traffic Management Command with, like I said, the subordinate Military Ocean Terminal Bay Area under us. And MOTBA as we called it, [laughs] WAMTMC was headquartered in Washington, D.C. And they also had a similar facility on the East Coast.

Rubens:

What was the joke you were making about WAMTMC?

02-00:05:18

Santos:

Well, WAMTMC, we called it. Well, WAMTMC western area military traffic management command. And they had a headquarters in Washington, and they also had a similar facility on the East Coast that was similar to the western area one, that was the eastern area one. I don't know if it was every year or every two years, I can't remember, but they would have a conference back in Washington. And as I grew in—

Rubens:

Seniority.

02-00:05:45

Santos:

—seniority and in the ranks, then I started going to those conferences. And we did meet with our counterparts from eastern area and from the headquarters and have discussions on the civilian personnel aspects. And I'm sure that all

the other areas probably had the same type of thing, where they got direction from the headquarters and went back there.

Rubens: So it wasn't a contingency that would go back; you would have your separate personnel and—

02-00:06:11

Santos: Yes. Oh, yes. Yeah, personnel would have their conference and I'm sure traffic management had theirs and the different ones. And I went to the East Coast one time. When I was working at the army base, we started automation for the personnel records. And they had a program they called— the initial one was called SKPMIS And when they came out with SKPMIS, the guy from headquarters came out. And he then had us go back there for a class, to teach us how to work this SKPMIS, how to code the personnel actions and—

Rubens: Are these initials?

02-00:06:49

Santos: Yes, these are initials. I can't even remember what it stands for, but it was personnel management information system—I forget was the S was for.

Rubens: But let's just spell the letters so we make sure we get it in the—

02-00:07:04

Santos: I think it was SKPMI— it was PM— it was PMIS initially. I think it was an Air Force system. Personnel management information system. And then I forget what the S was for. [laughs] They put an S on it to make it the army one or to make it ours. Anyway, so we went back there for that conference. That training, actually; it was training. And then as things progressed and we got more sophisticated, the eastern area got a different program in. They got something that was more sophisticated. They wanted me to go look at theirs. So I went to Bayonne, New Jersey and went over to see their system. And my personnel officer went with me, also at that time. So we went there and went to that meeting and viewed their system and everything. And as I say, as time went on, of course, then we got fully automated, as time went on. Now, I left the army and went to the Navy. And they also were doing the same thing, the automation. And I went to conferences, the same thing at the Navy, different Navy personnel conferences for the same type of thing.

Rubens: So to round out your story, you were back at the Navy Center on the Oakland Army Base in '91?

02-00:08:26

Santos: Yes, around about that time.

Rubens: And you stayed there— When did you retire?

02-00:08:31

Santos:

I retired in '96. I think it was '96, I retired. I took early retirement. I could've stayed until they closed the base; they wanted me to. But when the opportunity came for the early out, my daughter was in sixth grade at the time. I thought, I had the years. I was quite a bit underage, so I took quite a big cut for being underage. But I thought, it's worth it. I'm going to go home, I'm going to take care of my daughter. She has asthma pretty bad, so I'd always felt guilty leaving her in somebody else's care when she was having asthma problems. So I thought, I might as well just take the early out, take the money. [laughs] And I can always go to work in private sector or come back to the government, if I want to, later, and enjoy the years— And I was certainly glad I did because I found that— I think that was a crucial period, when they're right around that age, to be home [laughs] with them. So it worked out quite well.

Rubens:

And you had mentioned earlier these observations about the difference between regulations and Army regulations. But what about just observations about the base in general when you came back during those years? Was there any dispirited sense? The announcement for the closure was in '95, I think, '96.

02-00:09:51

Santos:

Well, they hadn't actually announced the Army closing. All the Navy bases were closing; they'd announced that. And some people did say, "Well, don't you wish you'd stayed with the Army now? You wouldn't be going out." And I said, "Well, no, I'm glad I went to the Navy so I *can* go out." [laughs] I didn't know that they were going to eventually close the army base, too. The first thing I said when I went to Oak Knoll, after I'd been there a short time, was that they really do need to close this place. [laughs] It was pretty bad, I thought, after having been at the Army Base.

Rubens:

Bad in what way?

02-00:10:24

Santos:

The way it was run. And I'm not talking about the patient care, I'm talking about administration. Some of the things they did. And I thought, if they would just do it like we did at the army base. And I'm not one to say you have to do it my way or that, but I could just see, having come from someplace where it worked efficiently and [to] someplace where it was so screwed up— [laughs] But of course, I had no control over that. That was not in my area. That was a totally different area. But some of the things they did, I found to be quite ridiculous.

Rubens:

Now, what were you actually doing when you came back to the— You were on the Army Base, but you were with the Navy?

02-00:10:59

Santos:

Yes, I was with the Navy. I was still in personnel. I was still— One of the reasons I left the army is that I was a supervisor. Supervisor, personnel management specialist in the technical services branch; like I said, over all the benefits and that. When I went to the Navy, I became the same grade but not the supervisory responsibilities. So I thought, well, why wouldn't I do that? I can still do the things that I did know and get the same pay, and not have the added pressure and responsibilities of supervising a bunch of employees. So that worked out quite well. And in fact, I got promoted to the twelve after that, with the Navy. And it was only at the end that I had to be a supervisor again. [laughs] But that wasn't too bad.

Rubens:

You had thirty years of governmental service.

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02-00:11:47

Santos:

Yes. So I left the army after twenty, and I stayed with the Navy for— Actually, it was about twenty-nine. I had a year's sick leave, so I had thirty years service as far as retirement purposes.

Rubens:

And how do they recognize thirty years of service? Did they give you a medal or a—

02-00:12:03

Santos:

Oh, probably a plaque or something.

Rubens:

No gold watch.

02-00:12:06

Santos:

[laughs] You have to learn, when you're in the government, you don't get things like you get in the private sector. It's like the holidays. You don't get Christmas bonuses. Although we did get performance awards. And that was always quite nice, especially in the later years. Back when I first started, I think you'd get a hundred dollars or \$200 or something. And that was about the most you could get. By the eighties, you would get a percentage of your salary. And I did get that a couple of times, and that was quite nice. You were getting a couple thousand dollars for a performance reward.

Rubens:

Now, how are those decisions being made? Who's doing the evaluation?

02-00:12:48

Santos:

Oh, your supervisor. Your supervisor would.

Rubens:

And they had the discretion—

02-00:12:50

Santos:

Oh, they had to write it up and justify it and document it. You had to do something over and above and beyond, in order to get that. And it had to be

within your budget, also to do that. But I did get a couple of those, so I was quite—

Rubens: Nice.

02-00:13:07

Santos: Yes, that was quite nice. But anyway, so yeah, that was part of the program, was the performance awards. And then— Oh, I was saying you didn't get parties or anything. We would have our own. Our office would all get together every year at Christmas and we'd have a potluck. And everybody would bring something. There was always one person that would make the turkey and bring that in, hot turkey and gravy and— We had a regular Christmas type dinner or holiday type dinner. And we would have a gift exchange, where everybody'd bring a gift and you'd draw numbers and get a gift. And I'll never forget one year, I decided I was going to play a joke. And the government would always take your picture for an award or something, so you'd have all these pictures laying around. And of course, we had frames that we would give out to people when we gave them certificates. So I had this eight by ten photo, a government black and white photo of me. So I put it in one of our little government frames and I wrapped it up and put that in the pile for the Christmas gift. So everybody's opening up their gifts. And of course, who gets the one that I put in there, the joke one—I had a real gift, of course—is some new girl, some young new girl that didn't know anything. And she opened up that gift and she looked at my picture and just like a look of horror on her face like, this is what I'm getting? And I tell you, the other people that had been there for years, they were hysterical. Tears were running down their faces. [laughs] Not only because of the joke, but because of the one that got it. But anyway, we did have quite a good time. All the employees got along pretty good.

Rubens: When you left, were there people that you had been with a long time, if not just in personnel, but in some of the other functions?

02-00:14:59

Santos: Oh, yes. Absolutely. Absolutely. I had people calling me at the Navy for months, years after. [laughs]

Rubens: How to do something?

02-00:15:08

Santos: Or asking me about their retirement and that. [laughs] Yes, yes. Saying, "Oh, we miss you over here." Yes.

Rubens: Nice.

02-00:15:16

Santos: Yes, so I did. I knew a lot of the people on the Base.

Rubens: Oh, and I had asked you— There's a retirees group. It's unusual, in a way, to have people who don't necessarily work side by side, to be part of a—

02-00:15:31

Santos: Well, it's a federal employees retirement association. NARFE. It's a national organization and they have local chapters. And I always was very fond of them. I thought that was a *great* organization. And even when I was young, I would get their magazine because that was part of my job. And I always found it quite interesting and quite informative because it would give you information about the latest changes that the office of personnel was making on your retirement, on your benefits, on your health plan. Every year, it comes out and gives you the new rates on your health plans and changes and— Anything that's going on within the government that affects the civilian, this organization covers it. And also they lobby and they try to change rules on behalf of the civilian employees and retirees. So when I would give my retirement seminars, I always encouraged the workers to join that when they retired, certainly, because it was for their benefit. They were working for their benefit, to help the retiree—as well as the civilian employee, but more so the retiree. So I've stayed a member of that. I joined that immediately when I retired and stayed a member, even though I don't attend the meetings. And shame on me, but I'm working, so [laughs] I have an excuse.

Rubens: Where do you work now?

02-00:17:01

Santos: I work for America's Best Battery. It sells automobile batteries. But it's also a bi-rail transport truck broker. And that's mainly what I do, is the truck broking part of it, which is also very interesting. [laughs]

Rubens: What does that literally mean? Explain what that—

02-00:17:20

Santos: It's real simple. There's somebody that has a load of batteries that are junk, that they've saved up and now they have a whole truckload full, and they want to get rid of them and send them down to Los Angeles to the smelter there, where they're going to take those batteries, break them up and get the lead out to make new batteries. So they'll buy those from the person. They have to have a way to get them down there. There's a trucking company that's sitting over here that has a truck in that area, that wants to get down to the Los Angeles area. So the trucking company calls us and says, do you have any loads going to LA? And the battery company or whatever calls us and says do you have any trucks going to LA? And we match the two up; that's what a truck broker does.

Rubens: I get it.

02-00:18:02

Santos: And we take a little money off the top. [laughs]

Rubens: Smart business.

02-00:18:07

Santos: Oh, it is a smart business, yes. It's really quite interesting.

Rubens: Good. I think I have one last question for you. When you came back with the Navy, to the Oakland Army Base, was Desert Shield or the second Gulf War, was that still—

02-00:18:29

Santos: I can't remember.

Rubens: I was trying to anchor what perceptions you might've had or what the Base looked like and—

02-00:18:35

Santos: None, really. By the time we came back, it was right after that that they announced all the base closures. So we were totally focused on closing down bases, Navy bases. And that was pretty much my focus, was that.

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Rubens: So do you think you've said everything about your experience on the Oakland Army Base that you wish?

02-00:19:00

Santos: Yes, I think so. It was a wonderful time. I enjoyed the Army Base. I thought I would work there forever, I really did. I thought I'd be there till I retired. And in a way, I'm sorry I wasn't. It was a wonderful place to work and it did a lot for me. It brought me up through the ranks and I can't say thank you enough. I'm sorry to see that it closed. It was a great place.

Rubens: Thank you so much for this interview.

02-00:19:25

Santos: Yes. Thank you for having me.

[End of Interview]