

Oral History Project
Interview of Sherman Moore
December 11, 2019
Interviewer: Richie Ashcraft

Interviewer 1: I'm recording both.

Interviewer 2: Hey, Sherman, tell me a little bit about your career in law— law enforcement.

Sherman Moore: I moved to Grand Junction in 1967. Went into the Colorado Army National Guard, and then, a little later on, I worked with a couple of the lumber companies that are no longer here. And they were good jobs, but with law enforcement, it was a place where I wanted to go. So, I had applied and was accepted in the sheriff's department with Pitkin County. It's Aspen. It's a whole different world up there. But I was up there for two— two to three years and then, come down to Garfield County. And I worked in Garfield County for three to five years. And that's where I—not where I ended my career, but that was one of the highlights of it.

Interviewer 2: Tell me what some of the duties of your job were, as deputy sheriff?

Sherman: I was a deputy sheriff. I started out as a road deputy. We watched quite a few, numerous, notorious individuals during part of that time. But main was patrol— watch— and we worked with the highway patrol quite closely, because at that time, there was only four of us. And then the sheriff and the undersheriff. And we had— Garfield county's about 3,000 square miles, and we would patrol, make— To ensure the safety of the motoring public, for one. And then our ranchers and the residents of Garfield County. But— and that was the main thing. And then, as time went on, I was put in charge of the jail to monitor and keep the safety of the jail going.

And, so it's— it's not been bad. It was a— it was a good job. Had an excellent sheriff, who said— was Jack McNeil. My undersheriff was Kenneth Pidgeon. And it was— it was a good job. And we had a good group of people. So— but road patrol was our big— our big one because we were— we were set with the safety of the population of the county. And—

Interviewer 2: Tell me about the highway that went through from Garfield County to, well, to Pitkin County, or up to Glenwood, it wasn't I-70.

Sherman: No, I see— I-70 didn't exist at that time. There was Highway 6, Colorado 6, and it was a two-lane road that went from, well, come up through West Glenwood, out of Rifle, through West Glenwood, up through Glenwood Springs, and then on over through Glenwood Canyon up to Eagle County. Our other secondary roads was Highway 82, which that's the one who went— that went into Aspen. And then 133 went up through Carbondale and on over McClure Pass.

Interviewer 2: What kind of traffic was on McClure at that time?

Sherman: Not anything like it is now. We had quite a lot of traffic. And two-lane road, of course, made that traffic more congested. But not what we have today, the— the highway we have today is quite nice compared to the two-lane road. And we were running— Yeah.

Interviewer 2: It's okay. You can start over.

Sherman: We were— we were running semis and every manner of automobile that you could imagine, but it wasn't near as congested as what we have now. But a two-lane road really made it seem to be congested. And the 6 run right along the river, through Glenwood Canyon. And so, occasionally, we would have vehicles off in the river: folks just not paying attention. We'd have rocks come down from the— the bluffs there, and the two-lane road made it real hard to get around any of those. Not quite like they are today. So—

Interviewer 2: So, Sherman, you've told me that you were working on the day of the Rulison test.

Sherman: We were— there was all four of us were working on the day that they shot the Rulison. Mel Jones was our— our, what we call our "down valley" deputy. And then, there was myself; the undersheriff was Kent pigeon. We worked the up valley and from Rifle after Rulison site on up through Glenwood Canyon, and what we call West Glenwood Canyon— is where the sandstone is now. And occasionally, even today, you get rocks and landslides in there. But that's— those were our main areas.

Interviewer 2: Can you tell me a little bit about what people – especially the ranchers and the people in town — were saying about this Rulison test. How did you hear about it? What were they saying?

Sherman: Well, the— the sheriff when they first started that, he had one small meeting, and he said that they were going to do this nuclear blast. And of course, you know, the only thing that we knew about nuclear blasts, or myself, was the Nagasaki-Hiroshima blasts. And then, they really weren't pertinent to us because none of us were old enough to remember any of that. So, it— it was concerning because all you see is the pictures. And so, is— well, is this blast going to cause some of this kind of devastation? Are we going to have to watch roads, buildings— caused by it? And pretty much, we were assured at that time that our concerns were probably unfounded. Didn't mean that we weren't concerned. But we put a lot of miles on patrol cars that day.

Interviewer 2: Were the people around you in— in— in the— in the town, or the ranchers, were they— what— what were their thoughts?

Sherman: Our ranchers were concerned about it because of their livestock. And at that time, there was a lot more houses down along the river. And there were several places that don't exist anymore, which up in Glenwood Canyon, was Grizzly Creek, which was a little convenience store, gas station. There were some people up the road on to the north that lived up there, and they were concerned about rocks getting loose. And then, of course, our ranchers were concerned about their livestock because they didn't know how this was going to affect their livestock. Was it going to cause damage? Were they going to— nuclear poisoning or— just, if you can think of a nightmare, that's what they had in mind that was going to happen. And they— they— they did go to some — not meetings, but in— think of the word—. They were informed, at least by authorities, that that was going to happen. This was not going to be an aboveground explosion, that wasn't going to be an aboveground drop from an aircraft. It was all underground. It would all be controlled. And there were still a lot of apprehension that— because you know, thinking about nuclear activity, getting into the water system and getting into the ground and that type of thing.

Interviewer 2: And how were you feeling that day?

Sherman: Well, of course, I was apprehensive because we were going to be right down there where it's going to take place. We were— we're going to be on the roads, we're going to be in the canyons. And we had seen rockslides in those canyons — both of those canyons — before. So, that was our concern. And because we were going to be right there if it— if rocks come down, how do we get away from them? But— and we had gone through the areas that we would be able to find safety away from the rocks. Because the Grizzly Creek area had a big parking area. And of course, at that time, the Hanging Lake had a roadside rest, and it was— had a large area. So, there was places that we could go. But we were concerned about rocks coming down and— and— and then people— when people get scared, they drive faster, they drive more erratic, they get on the wrong sides of the road. Those were some of our concerns: safety of the public.

Interviewer 2: What time did they tell you that the blast would happen, you know? What was the critical time period?

Sherman: They really didn't give us a time. They just— what they— what we were told was this was going to happen.

Interviewer 2: Sometime on that day.

Sherman: So, on that— that day. And I think— I'm not sure, but I believe there was sometime that they had started and then had to back up and— and reschedule it. But it was that day and

that's all— that's what they told us. And we had a lot of— a lot of the ranchers wanting, “Well, what time is this going to be and what do I have to do?” And it's like, “We really don't know.”

Interviewer 2: So, that did take place on September— I'm sorry, September 10th—

Sherman: 10th.

Interviewer 2: —1969.

Sherman: Mhm.

Interviewer 2: And so, tell me— describe to me what it was like, what you did before it was detonated, where you were standing, and describe what you saw.

Sherman: Well, before the detonation — because we were up and down the highway trying to make sure that we had as much of it cleared as possible and as much traffic held up. We actually slowed a lot of traffic down.

Interviewer 2: That's what I was going to ask. So, you— did you— did you close the highway?

Sherman: We didn't close it. The State Patrol backed off some of it. Right up to the— the scheduled times for the blast, we slowed the traffic way down. 'Cuz there's some folks that just wasn't interested in somebody setting off a nuclear blast, they just wanted to get through. And they were a little hard to work with. But that is what we did do. The State Patrol closed a lot of our roads to the west, and then ones we had up on this end, we slowed those way down.

Interviewer 2: How did you slow them down?

Sherman: Well, we— first, we put patrol cars in— in the highway when the— set up basically roadblocks with patrol cars. And then we had always had officers out there and we had, oh, ten I think, volunteers. And they would stay with the cars whenever we had to go someplace else and explain to people what was going on and why it was going on, why we were blocking the roads. So....

Interviewer 2: And how long did it take, when you were blocking roads to when something happened?

Sherman: It doesn't seem like it was long at all, but I'm sure it was. I'd say 20, 30 minutes. And then there would be a pause, and then there'd be another 20 or 30 minutes and then it came down that it was done. [laughing]

Interviewer 2: How did you know anything was happening?

Sherman: Other than being told? The sheriff went to several meetings, and he didn't tell us a whole lot about those meetings. He just said that he had meetings. The county commissioners were there— that we were going to have this nuclear blast to work with. At the— basically, at that time, they didn't use the word “fraction,” but that's what they were doing. And that's all he told us that, 'cuz he didn't understand a whole lot of it either. So, it was kind of a new world — the whole bunch of us, and to the general populace.

Interviewer 2: And tell me what you saw that day, when you realized that the blasts had taken place.

Sherman: At that particular time, I was up by the water diversion dam for the power plant there in Glenwood Canyon, as we were a little bit concerned about it fracturing some of those diversion tunnels that brought the water around, because that's all run with hydro-turbines. And we were sitting out there, and you could— you could just kind of see a little upheaval in the ground. And we thought, “Well, this breaks that dam. We're going to— somebody's going to get wet.” But it didn't. It just went kind of up. Not like— [motions] but just small— just a small wave.

Interviewer 2: And were you standing— were you inside your patrol car or outside?

Sherman: I was outside.

Interviewer 2: And what did that feel like, on your feet, for you?

Sherman: Well, it just— kind of like you stumbled and were falling. Didn't fall. It wasn't hard, wasn't quick. And I've not ever been a participant in an earthquake, so I can't say it was like an earthquake, but it just— if you actually looked at it as we sat there on the road, as we stood there by the water diversion dam, you could see it just heave. And then, of course, the— the water, you got a little bit of a wave in it, but not much. It wasn't what we had anticipated.

Interviewer 2: How long did it last?

Sherman: Probably just as quick as— as the blink of an eye. You could see it coming, and then it was gone.

Interviewer 2: Were there any aftershocks?

Sherman: Not that I noticed. I was— we were kind of pleased that it was over and nothing fell. So—

Interviewer 2: And that everybody was safe?

Sherman: Yes.

Interviewer 2: What did people say about it afterward?

Sherman: A lot of the ranchers, when we got to talking to them— and one of the things that we did do was go around and ask them, you know, “Notice anything with your livestock or, any odd actions or activities?” And most of them said, “No, there wasn't.” They said, it— most of it was, it seemed like it was much ado about nothing because it was not near what they had anticipated. And some of those guys were, older— older ranchers. And they had been around during the Nagasaki blasts. And so, that's what they were expecting, and that didn't happen. So, they were pleased.

Interviewer 2: There's a question, I didn't think of earlier, but was that a work day? Was the schools and that kind of stuff in?

Sherman: I believe they were.

Interviewer 2: They didn't take any extra—

Sherman: Not that I know of. There was a lot of things they didn't tell us, and the city officers knew a little more than we did, but none of us knew what we should have or what we would like to have.

Interviewer 2: What are those things that you would've liked to have —

Sherman: Well, we'd like to know more about what we were going to be looking for in when they had the blast. It was— was—

Interviewer 1: Sorry, cut.

Interviewer 2: Yeah.

Sherman: Oh.

Interviewer 1: Yeah, that's a big cut.

Interviewer 2: We don't want to mess up your sound.

Interviewer 1: Cutting. I'm sorry.

Interviewer 2: Okay. What were you saying? It was good for you....

Sherman: Oh. It was good for us because we gave us an idea of what else was going on in the world. I mean, you know, you can— when you get into a little area like that, you kind of isolate yourself.

And I've got several friends that are, they want to get into law enforcement, and they want to do this and they want to be that. I said, you know, "That's a good occupation." And I don't feel bad about it. And I spent 30 years in law enforcement. I don't feel bad about the time that I spent there. I've seen men with a lot of good— good people and good things. But there were some bad ones. But the one thing you need to realize is all these friends you got once you've been on that badge, you're going— they're going to get real small. And that I— I lost. I really enjoyed being working with ranchers and the people who lived along the river and up in the canyon. Grizzly Creek had that little convenience store, and they were wonderful. But they were really concerned about that, because Grizzly Creek was right there below one of those rock bluffs.

Interviewer 2: You were telling me a minute ago about the things that you wish that they had told you leading up to the test.

Sherman: I would like to have known more about what was going to happen leading to the test. We had no idea what kind of activity was going to go on, and we could have informed our ranchers and our general residents a little bit more about it, and— so that they would have felt more comfortable. We would have felt more comfortable because we really didn't know what was going to happen. And of course, you know, of course, my father-in-law was involved in World War II with Japan, and the— some of the stories he had to say is just rolling around in my head, you know? So, I didn't know what was going to happen. It would have been— if I had known more, I could have told some of the ranchers and some of the, well, the kids too. We had a lot of kids want to talk to you that— what was going to happen or what we thought was going to happen, but we didn't. And I'm sure it wasn't a deliberate oversight. I think it was just something that nobody thought about.

Interviewer 2: After the testing, did you inspect the test site? Did you ever go out there?

Sherman: I never went up there. I know it was fenced, and— and I don't know if it's fenced today or not. And I know that right after that, you know, they started all the oil drilling. We had drill rigs all over up there. So I figured, well, probably not all that hazardous.

Interviewer 2: What— leading back to what people were saying after the test, what did you hear about the success of the test?

Sherman: A lot of people didn't realize if it was successful or what the actual results were. It was kind of quiet. Nobody really got to where they were exploring the results. I mean, there was a film that was published. You know, the blast went off, and this is what happened. It just wasn't published.

Interviewer 2: So how did you find out about it? What the results were.

Sherman: Well, we had, we had some information that the sheriff put out, and he tol— and he told us, he said — because he was fielding a lot of calls — and he was saying, “If somebody calls, then this is what you tell them.” And that's where we got it at, is that the blast went off, that it's— that they're up doing all these tests and to see what all is going on. And, and he said, “Outside of that, there's not much more that we can tell.”

Interviewer 2: Is there anything else you want to tell me about that day? Anything else that happened or that I may not know about?

Sherman: Well, of course, we were real concerned because there's— and we got four of us out there. And if— if there had been— where our concern was if something really happened, how were we going to handle a crowd? And there's two highway patrolmen, and us, and the city police of Glenwood Springs. And that was all there was. And of course, then our populace was a whole lot more cooperative than they are today, because today there's— there would have been a riot. [laughing] But—

Interviewer 2: There weren't any protesters, there weren't—

Sherman: Not that— not that we were called on. There may have been, but most of— most the people in, at least in this part of the state, was just— it was just another everyday event. It's just one of the things that happened in their lives.

Interviewer 2: So, the Rulison Project just had its 50-year anniversary, just this year. [inaudible] How do you feel about that test now?

Sherman: Well, the test itself, I still don't know a whole lot about it. I've kind of monitored a little bit of it as time goes by, especially when they were testing the gases. Ultimately, the goal was to fracture that area and be able to recover gas. And now, the gas they're finding is radioactive, even 50 years later. And it's like, well, okay, it's— so we have this. But it still was — I think, personally — was a— a successful test because they did get gas. May not do it again with a radioactive blast, but....

Interviewer 2: Anything else you want told?

Sherman: I can blather on forever, but I probably better not. [laughing]

Interviewer 2: You're welcome to, if there's something that you think of that I didn't know to ask.

Sherman: Well, the biggest thing is, you know, the other thing that was affected was, you know, our live— not just livestock, but our wildlife. And they were— they had— they got up in the hills and they stayed there for quite a while. You didn't see a lot of animals for quite a while, as we

used to have at least one or two incidents a week involving deer getting hit on the road. And we didn't have that for a month, three months, because they just didn't come down there in that area. And of course, today that's different — if you go down there, you really want to be careful. But that was kind of a unique situation.

Interviewer 2: Yeah. It's interesting. [inaudible] Do you— do you want to describe where the test site took place? You know where— 'cuz you said you didn't go up there, but—

Sherman: Well—

Interviewer 1: It was on Highway 6?

Sherman: Highway 6.

Interviewer 1: Highway 6.

Sherman: Yeah. That's the only—

Interviewer 1: That's the only one. The only highway— I-70 didn't come along 'til sometime later.

Interviewer 2: And you said you could see where it was happening from— from the road where stationed. You could kind of see the area?

Sherman: Couldn't see the area. Thinking back to, you know, after whenever they— when the blast went off, where I was at, you could see a slight roll in the soil. And that was real interesting.

Interviewer 2: How far away from the test site do you think you were?

Sherman: I was probably close to 10 miles. I was along where— what they call Webster Hill. So, I mean, doesn't exist now. I-70 went through it and it's— Webster Hill was because of the road. But it was a real interesting area at that time. It got real interesting after that, because there were— a lot of people did go up in those areas and they wanted to see if there was something in the g— in the soil that was caused. But wasn't anything there. And course they—around the site itself was controlled.

Interviewer 2: Is there anything else? Anything else? Dave?

Interviewer 1: Yeah. I like that last statement that you made, that it was controlled.

Sherman: Controlled. Yeah. They did. They were real good about the— and I don't know if they had— there was no security department that I know of that was controlling it. And we didn't. But I'm— there was the Atomic Energy personnel that controlled that. You know, a lot of people

would have gotten in there, and then there would have been some hazards. And today, if they could get away with it, they'd get up there. But they don't.

Interviewer 2: Well, that's all that I had.

Sherman: Oh.

Interviewer 2: Do you have anything else that I don't, I didn't know to ask you, or that you thought of since we talked a few days ago?

Sherman: No. I'm sure that I'll think of about 10 or 30 questions after I get out the door. [laughing] But—

Interviewer 2: You know, and that's okay if you do, let me know. We can capture them.

Sherman: Mhm.