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Dave McLean
May 3, 2016

Interview conducted by Lu Ann Jones and Neil Mackay
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ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW

WITH

DAVE McLEAN

By Lu Ann Jones and Neil Mackay

May 3, 2016

Transcribed by Teresa Bergen

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

The narrator has reviewed and corrected this transcript.

START OF TAPE

START OF TRACK 1

Dave McLean: We'll start again?

Lu Ann Jones: We'll start again.

Dave McLean: We'll get a good, clean shot at it. Okay. I'm Dave McLean. David Dempsey McLean. My uncle was named Uncle Dempsey, and I'm named after him. Born in Norfolk, Virginia, on August 3, 1932, to Petit McLean. My dad, whose name was Alexander Petit, and my mom, Ann Elizabeth Jordan, her maiden name. So, these two families came together, each with nine children. I had four uncles on my dad's side, and about the same on the other. So, with their marriages and the family increasing, nothing to it having 40 people at a get together. Why don't you come over? We'll get the stadium out here somewhere. (Lu Ann Jones laughs)

Dave McLean: So that was right in the middle of the Depression. Mom was working any job she could. We were living in my grandmother's house there near Lafayette Park in Norfolk, and so were a couple other uncles and aunts who had not quite left the nest yet. She'd build a wing on the house whenever the new kid would come along. So, we all lived there, and grew up with streetcars, all the things that were going on in old town. Of course, segregation was in full swing. You got on buses; you wonder why those people sat in the back and you sat in the front. We were just too little, and we didn't know what in the world it was about. Everybody else knew, I guess.

Lu Ann Jones: You said that you had, you had two siblings at the time you were born.

Dave McLean: Yes. My older sister, she was — let's see, my brother and I are six years apart, so she was two years older than that. So, Marietta was born, [unclear] what the math is before that. Then Mac came along. He's a junior, Alexander Petit McLean, Junior. Then my sister was born two years after me. We had two sets of kids two years apart, six years in between. And so, we lived there, and my dad was working for the Seaboard, what they called the Airline Railway at the time. I don't know where that came from, quite. But most of my young life was spent going down to see the trains coming in. The Silver Meteor was a big deal when they came through town, down through the train stations in Norfolk. And also, there would be steam engines that came through. The Silver Meteor really was stainless steel. It was just an amazing train. But that was a big deal. Of course, going to car dealer ownerships at the beginning of the year was one of the traditions.

Dave McLean: But we grew up there. And later, as Mom and Dad got a little more prosperous, he left the railroad with — he was the secretary to the president of the railroad. So consequently, he traveled a lot up and down the east coast. Miami was a big place to go, and then of course New York City. He'd always be going out to Kansas City and out to Chicago. The big rail had junctions, you know, where towns were formed because of the railroads.

Dave McLean: As time went on, his three brothers started an auto parts business, and he joined with them and eventually took over one of the stores over in Newport News. We moved from my grandmother's house over to Winona, the little town, little area, I don't know, about eight blocks away. Then the big deal was to go over, move over on the James River, in Hilton Village, which was a village that was built by some guy that had a vision. He was with Huntington, the shipyard people. So that was where my sister and I and our family started to grow into a longer stay and more of a residence in, that's where we went to high school. We were the Warwick High Farmers. (laughs) Over in Hampton, they were our rival, were the Hampton Crabbers. Down in Newport News, our other big sports rival was the Newport News Typhoons — which we don't have typhoons; we have hurricanes. (Lu Ann Jones laughs) Anyway, it sounded a little better.

Dave McLean: But Julie Kahn, this wonderful old Jewish guy that, he could make guys do anything, he was such a coach, lived right across the street from me. I'm competing against his stars. So, it was a great growing up time.

Dave McLean: It was about there that I started going running. It was a lot into distance running and playing. I played four years of varsity football at Warwick High. Went to a lot of neat football trips all over the state. Track meets. Go to Williamsburg. And sometimes compete against college students. I remember going against, up there, and I even competed in the state championship there. I had it, was going to be in the state, except for that last ten yards. (laughs) The guys went by.

Neil Mackay: Is there any sort of early influences even then that kind of inspired you maybe to get into design or drawing? Or just to—

Dave McLean: Well, my brother was quite a guy that would take things and make stuff out of them. At the time, there was no such thing as wallboard for doing houses. They had lathe, little strips of wood. Once they put the vertical studs up, they'd put these at an angle, and then they'd cover them with these little wood strips. Well, Mac thought, hmm, I could make a kayak out of that. So, he made the ribs for a kayak and covered it with bedsheets, you know, just regular white sheets, and made the whole thing out. Then he'd cover it and then paint it, paint it with house paint.

Dave McLean: And we lived right across from the river, the Lafayette River. We'd go out there and then have water battles. Just take an oar and splash until you sunk the other guy, and then one would swim ashore. They'd go back, next day they'd start on a new kayak. So, he did things like that. He took washing machine motors. I don't know why they weren't gas-powered. But no muffler on it. And he'd build these little carts and have a little steering thing. He'd go about the neighborhood. So, I watched him do stuff.

Dave McLean: Then as the war came on, he was doing little models of airplanes. Beautiful. Nope, nothing, just from scratch. Quite a sculptor. And he would do little P40 planes, about eight inches, with folding landing gear and all the detail of it. I think that's the big influence to going ahead and trying to do things.

Dave McLean: And then I drew since I was little. Would always sit around and try to draw the Walt Disney characters — Daffy Duck and Mickey Mouse and stuff like that. And then, occasionally, pick up a something and do some sort of a design on it. I don't know why I did it. I've got an old paddle, 50 years old, and I have this Indian looking design on it. I always wondered, why did I do that? It's that stuff that's Indian that you do things like that for. But it was a time when we were young and very adventurous and very bold. We were on bicycles practically every day of our life. I didn't take the school bus to school. I rode the five miles on a bicycle and tried to beat the school bus there. Often would go back to Norfolk, over the ferry, all the way past the naval base and on to my grandmother's house on a Saturday morning to wallpaper her house inside, do chores for her. And then at night, it would be dark. I'm going back across, running behind a tractor trailer, drafting the thing. We didn't have gears on bikes at the time. And getting up to the point where he shifted into that next gear and then all the wind came, and I slowed down. Across the ferries. So, we did that.

Dave McLean: We took bike trips. We went to Washington, DC. It was like 91 miles, you know. We'd do that in a day. Uphill, up and down hill. Stayed in DC for two weeks. You know how far Springfield [Virginia] is from Washington. We stayed in a log cabin out there in Springfield. Had no water, no electricity. It was just shelter. We had, on our bikes, brought these World War Two jungle hammocks which are a regular olive drab colored thing, hammocks that you tied to trees. It's got mosquito netting up the sides and it's actually got a roof. And so, they must weigh ten pounds. We put those on the back of the bike. And that's how we slept. And kept the bugs off of us. We did that. We took that trip.

Dave McLean: Then we also took a bike trip down to Nags Head. And we did that in one day from Norfolk. These are bicycles.

Lu Ann Jones: So, this is in the '40s, '50s?

Dave McLean: This is in 19, let's see, I graduated from high school in 1952. So, it's coming up 1950, something like that. At the same time, my uncle who is the oldest, they call him the baby, he was about six-foot-three, a big guy, and was a singer, entertainer. He sang with Sinatra in New York one time and all kinds of stuff. Uncle Freddy opened up a drive-in restaurant at Nags Head. So, all this stuff was happening that you kind of go and do things and be like an entrepreneur.

Dave McLean: My cousin, Laddy, the two of us would go down there and keep that place going. There were only two restaurants at the whole beach. There was nothing. We would keep [the restaurant going], and even drive into town and get whatever the special was. It's going to be hot dogs this week, that's all we had. Next week it's hamburgers. (laughs) And we'd run that place. But even before that, Uncle Freddy, these were big influences on my life, had let Laddy and I come down to Virginia Beach, where there was a hotel that was owned by Charles P. Gay, and he called it the Gay Manor. Of course, today it's got a whole different connotation. But it was like a good old-time place. And worked two summers, Mom and Dad let Laddy and I go down there. We worked as beach boys hauling umbrellas. And it was a life-changing thing. We were like eleven years old, down there all on our own. And we'd be there until school started. But we did that for two summers. And then later this restaurant thing came up in Nags Head. So, it was quite a look at seeing somebody that said the heck with it. I'm going to go do what I want to do and start a business or be the head guy at a hotel. These were very formative years. And of course, high school was going on.

Dave McLean: So, I guess it was about this time that I went to graduate from high school. I was like nineteen, and I didn't know what I wanted to do. The big Newport News shipbuilding and dry-dock was the big thing in Newport News. Fifteen thousand employees at that place at the time. Funny stories about guys who would play paycheck roulette, or paycheck poker. If the numbers were right and you got the right cards, everybody paid a dollar to get in. So, somebody got \$15,000 every payday in the shipyard. And they'd quit. They'd just retire. At that time, you could buy a house for like \$1300, so you could imagine how much money that was.

Neil Mackay: But it sounds like you were always working. And interacting with a lot of different people.

Dave McLean: Yeah. A lot of grownups. A lot of interaction in an adult world. And yet, what I've always said was that my mom and dad were confident enough to give us the ability to go off and do something. You know, it was like not, don't go do that. But go do it and if you make a mistake, I'm going to beat the heck out of you. You know, it was one of those. I'm going to give you a bad spanking. So, we'd take a chance and go do things, and I think that's, those were formative things in growing up that you were let to have freedom and use your own judgment and go out with a lot of friends who, some of them were ones you looked up to. Some of them looked up to you. So, it was this nice balance of friends, three or four of us that were real tight.

Dave McLean: So along comes the end of high school. And I went to the shipyard and decided I was going to be in the apprentice school. It's a five-year college where you go and work in the yard. And I was in the sheet metal shop. I built water condensers, where they make water for the ship, for the famous liner of the United States. Which was like a military secret at the time, it was so fast. They had ships that burned, so they made the United States totally, nothing would burn. Even their swimming pool was stainless steel. But all the chairs were, everything was aluminum. Very fast. So, I started doing this and was in the yard. Coming home absolutely coal black with soot. Huge machinery. I'd never done anything like this. Big 30-foot diameter propellers would come down, all polished in bronze. I remember that thing — you'd look up and this thing was slowly going on over one of those Gantry trains. And then the big furnaces where they made the metal and where they cut, they would cut, first of all, [bring this] sheet metal, they'd say, "Well, you've got to go over to these machines because you're going to need to notch it." And we've got this machine, you put your metal in like this, you take your hands back here, and you press the button and it goes ja-joonk and it cuts whatever you told it to cut. And I'm in there. One of the instructors said, "This is Charlie. And try not to do this." This guy shows, he's got half his fingers gone and all of a sudden, I thought oh, my, that was scary.

Dave McLean: So, I'm walking through with these professionals who had lived it. They started showing me some of the machinery in the place. They had machines that would cut the two-inch plate steel. [unclear] plating for the ships. That thing would deafen you because that piece of metal would fall. It was like old Pittsburgh, you know, pictures of making steel with the sparks flying. And the noise was unreal.

Dave McLean: I kept getting these envelopes in the mail that said something about Selective Service. It was kind of, you know, oh, what is that? I don't know about this. So, I threw it on a dresser. And they came, I don't know, it

must have been every couple of months. Finally, it was two weeks before Christmas and I said, maybe I ought to open one of those up and see what that's about. And it said, "You've been drafted. We've selected you to go to war." (laughs) And so that was the next step.

Dave McLean: Before I knew it, I went to, what do you call it, induction center. They took us up to Richmond. Funny story — everybody's in this room. They take all their clothes off. and they stand there, and they go check and see who's got bodily problems. So, everybody's bent over. (laughs) And these wonderful young people from everywhere. Some of them have never been out of the farm. So, these guys are supposed to spread your cheeks. Bend over and spread your cheeks. And there's this one kid who's up here like this. He's got both of his face cheeks in his hands. And the guys are, they're trying to be serious. "Not those cheeks."

Neil Mackay: This would have been like 19—

Dave McLean: This was 1952.

Neil Mackay: 1952.

Dave McLean: Yeah. So next thing I know, we were going on a troop train down to Shreveport, Louisiana, to what they call Camp Polk. They call them forts now. To Camp Polk. I mean, it was traumatic. It was a change of life. Because I was really athletic and really good, so I could stand up to the whole physical stuff. But they put us through stuff like you hear about today. The machine gun courses and going through the mud and marching all day and all night. It was a real character-changing time. I never left the camp; I never went out the front gate ever. Guys would go and I'd just stay and wash my clothes. I didn't know [unclear]. (laughs) Just kind of young and dumb. And it really made a big impression, you know, difference.

Dave McLean: Of course, you'd left your high school sweetheart at home. The girl. And that was the other real big thing was that you were writing letters every day, just this tie to home, and to Mom and Dad, and to aunts and uncles and stuff. So, we were tied in real tight with the family. But I never did anything more than just do what I was told in those months. Then one day they rounded us all up and said, "You're finished, infantry, basic, and now you have been selected to go to military police school." And everybody's asking, "Why us?" "Well, you're special," and all this stuff. Nobody believed them. Nobody gave us a break, anyway. (laughs)

Dave McLean: So anyway, we went out to this runway and there was this old C47. The one with the tail, tail dragger, you know, it sits there with the back wheel. And this guy, a young guy, he couldn't have been more than about 22, and

he was a staff sergeant. He'd already been in combat in Korea. And he starts telling us to get into that plane over there and we're going to fly you. We got in; it had no seats. It just had slings. You tied in. We went up to New Jersey to the military police at Fort Dix at the time and started being a combat military policeman. That took two months, and we went through court, all training and combat training and all sorts of weapons.

Dave McLean: Oh, the other thing, I almost died twice in basic training. They were teaching us how to use the different weapons. They had these assault camps where they had cables that ran back here. These guys controlled these buildings, what showed in the building. There was a street down the middle of these buildings. In the buildings were these cutouts. And they could pull a cable and a guy would stick out. Boom! Try to shoot him. We had these two assault groups. One on the right. The one, we were a little more efficient. We got ahead of the ones on the right. The guys thought well, I don't see any targets. I think I'll shoot on those targets on the left side. I'm noticing that there are bullets picking up the ground all around me. I said, "This is the time for that entrenching tool. I'm digging the fastest foxhole." They shut down the range. They didn't kill anybody.

Dave McLean: The next real eye opener was they said, "We're going to go over today and show you how to use a hand grenade." They'd march us forever, out in the woods, way out there. We sat on these tree stumps all around, and they started lecturing us. They said that everybody sit still and then they set off a quarter pound of TNT put on one of the stumps right next to us. Everybody went crazy. Then he said, "That's how much power there is in a hand grenade." They let us know what that raw power was. Then they said, "Come on up. We're going to show you how it works." They've got these great big models. They had a model hand grenade that was four feet across. They show you, when you pull this pin, this lever flips over here. It strikes this thing and it goes down this little chain of powder until it gets to the main charge. That takes three seconds. But if you hold onto the handle, it won't do that. Pull the pin, you're ready to throw it. So, you know. So, he says, "Okay, I'm going to show you how to do it, I'm going to lecture one more time." He takes this grenade, hands it to the guy on the front row, and he pulls the pin." He said, "Don't let go. Don't let go of the handle." And this guy, he never saw the demonstration. He was just trembling, sweating beads. At the end of it, he went, "So that's how grenades work." We were just like, numb.

Dave McLean: He said, "Okay, son, let me have that grenade." He walks down and he says, "Okay, keep the handle down." He goes, he says, "Oh, there goes the handle!" He threw it right in the middle of all of us. Of course, we're just going like crazy. It went, poof! It was only the powder charge without the

part that kills you. "And notice," he said, "it's powder blue. That's a demonstration grenade." So, we learned what demonstration grenades were. So twice I almost became a casualty.

Dave McLean: Oh, and then the next thing was we went out to the range the next day. And they said, "This time we're going to have real grenades." And they had these little alcoves that were about, when you sat on the ground, just about as high as your head. Maybe four feet. Little alcoves all in a row. The first guy would sit down, and the guy would step into the thing next to him. He said, "Now stand up. Here's a grenade. Hold it against your chest. Take your left hand. Pull the pin out. Extend your right arm, like in old John Wayne movies, and throw that grenade, and get back down in the sand, into the sandbag."

Dave McLean: You heard them. "Okay. Ready. Pull. Throw." Boom! And they got closer and closer to you. I got up and I did mine. Got down. And they went off, they weren't but five or ten feet away. I was sitting in that little thing. All of a sudden, I heard the guy say, "Okay. Stand up. Pull the pin. No! No! No! No! Throw it!" and I heard this smacking sound as the instructor knocked it free. And the grenade, I heard it hit just above my head on the sandbag.

Neil Mackay: Oh, no!

Dave McLean: And it rolled over the other side. It went off just a sandbag's width from me. (laughs) If he'd dropped it in my little enclosure, there wouldn't have been anything left. But they closed down that range that day. So, we were getting some pretty real experiences before we ever got into the real thing.

Dave McLean: So that was basic. And then all of the stuff at Fort Dix up in New Jersey was teaching how to be an MP.

Lu Ann Jones: Did you get posted at another place where you actually practiced being military police [officer]?

Dave McLean: No. No. You just went through training. Then one day they said, "You graduated." Of course, they had to pull one more trick on us. They said, "Everybody's got to pass. You can go have a good weekend and on Monday we'll talk about where we're going to send you to your assignment." So, he said, "We're going to go bowling. Anybody like to go bowling?"

Dave McLean: So, we all stand up. He said, "Everybody who wants to go, just move over and make yourself a group over here." He said, "Okay, fine." He said, "The rest of you all can go on leave." Right then, this guy comes out of the supply room with these bowling brushes. Toilet bowl brushes.

Lu Ann Jones: Oh!

Dave McLean: Dirtiest trick. (laughs) No one ever volunteered for anything after that. So, a lot of stuff like that. Which happens to everybody in the military. But it was the beginning of realizing that you were going to go to war. My grandfather had been in the Spanish-American War. My dad had been in World War One. He was in France. Left me a wonderful book of all the things he did. He was a supply sergeant and was right at the front every day. When I got to the apprentice school at the shipyard, this guy hauled me aside, my instructor. He said, "My name's Monk White." He said, "I was with your dad in France." He said, "Your dad's the bravest man I ever met." And my dad never told us. So, he and my dad would get in this truck and they would go across these bridges way up to the front line and count the dead. I always thought that was so gruesome. And they'd come back with the body count. But on the way, the Germans were firing artillery, trying to get them. They'd go up and count and they'd come back. He said, it was an amazing story. So here you are. You're the offspring. Oh, and then of course after my dad's thing, he took my brother off to the bus station and sent him off to World War Two. Mac was with the 82nd Airborne, and he saw some tremendous action over there. Eventually he was with Eisenhower's honor guard in Berlin. A very proud thing. And was in New York City when they all came home. Big parades, ticker tape. So, a real proud heritage.

Neil Mackay: So, then you went to Korea.

Dave McLean: So, the next thing I know, they said, "Here's a train ticket. Get on this train and go to Portland, Oregon. When you get off there, there will be somebody to meet you." So, I'm in my uniform, you know. I've got that big old duffel bag, and left home. Got on a train and traveled for four days all the way to Portland, I had never been any further west than the Shenandoah Mountains. Four days of beautiful country. The railroad was the lifeline in the '50s in every little town.

Dave McLean: When it came through, even at night, people would, you'd meet all these people, were shaking hands with these people out in the countryside. It was a real thing. Of course, having never gone anywhere. Nicest people. It just ran right through the middle of town.

Dave McLean: So, got to the coast and the pulled us off and kept us there for a week or so in a little camp. And we got to go on leave once in a while. We weren't free. Because we were now pretty much nothing as far as having a rank. We were just Private Nothing. So, it wasn't too long before they said — oh, of course to go back to when they were given the assignment. Some of the people got to go other places. They went to Germany. They said, "Oh,

you're going to go to Korea." It was a famous saying, just because you go to Korea doesn't mean you're going to go to, you know, the front. And they would always go "just because." Well, every one of those "just because" happened, and I'm on this troop ship. It took us three weeks, 21 days, to get across the Pacific on this ship that would do eight knots. It was a Liberty Ship that had been built by Kaiser in World War II. They told us we were accompanied by submarines. They told us when we passed Hawaii, too. (laughs) And of course, we went through a typhoon. It was amazing! This thing was huge, we'd go underwater. The waves would rush over the ship. And everybody, many of them, were from places way inland. They'd never even seen the—

END OF TRACK 1

START OF TRACK 2

Dave McLean: — the ocean at all. They were sick, and because they were sick, they got people that didn't get seasick, sick. And down below, it was a nightmare. All the bunks, they took out all the internal part of the ship and they put these canvas-stretched bunks. The first one was about 18 inches off the floor. Just enough to squeeze in sideways to get into your bunk. There were three or four, right up to the very top to where the beams of the ship were. And that was where you went when you went to sleep. I quickly realized the guys in the top bunk got sick over the side, and the ones in the bottom had to either sleep or whatever in it. I mean, it was just horrible.

Dave McLean: So, you had your jobs. You had the different things that you had to do on certain times of the day you report to so and so. I remember I broke eggs. Three hours breaking eggs into this huge caldron. You'd break them in a little bowl, and if it's okay put them in the bigger. So, we did that hour after hour.

Dave McLean: Then one day I was standing out on deck and walked up to this guy. He had a clipboard and had a pencil over his ear. We were talking. "How you doing?" "Well, I'm pretty good." "What's your job?" He looked both ways. He said, "I don't have a job." I said, "What's that you got there?" He said, "That's my clipboard." (laughter) Everybody was learning how to survive and not get caught — and he would just bull his way through.

Dave McLean: Till the last day of the 21 days, I could still see him up on deck. He'd look at me and wink and then he'd write another name down. (laughter) Nobody questioned him. But that was the beginning of what a GI does. You know, you see it in the old war movies where they do it. And you just learn to survive.

- Dave McLean: So, for weeks and weeks. You know, I slept on deck. I'd stay up there at night in one of those huge air scoop things, the funnels. I'd get up inside of that, right on the edge, and tie myself in somehow with my belt, and sleep up there because down below was awful.
- Dave McLean: So, one day, we started seeing fishing boats. We were seeing the Japanese fishing boats off of Tokyo, or Yokohama. Starting to come in. They were little boats. And they weren't, you know, and the guys, so many of them, when the wind wasn't going, you'd see them working the rudders. So, I was up on the bow side where it was pretty calm, beautiful, clear day. I could see Mount Fujiyama, that snowpack, you know? It was like, where in the world are we? Of course, we'd grown up as kids playing like the war movie. We were shooting Japs, we'd always, you know. And here I am. It's only a few years later. I'm coming in six or eight years after the war into the homeland.
- Dave McLean: We finally docked, and there sitting on the dock is a Japanese Zero. With a big meatball on the wing, you know? And part of the tail was blown off. And I realize, this was a Japanese submarine base that we're coming into. So, it's just peeling back these layers, in another part of the world. Of course, we were all in shock because where we were going, what are we going to do, and what's next.
- Dave McLean: We stayed there about a week. Then they said okay, get on the ship. We went across the Sea of Japan to Korea. And as we landed, they were actually bombing the place. They said here, this time we're giving you real ammunition. These are real bullets. We got off and they put us on these trains. Now in Korea, they had this reputation for this bedrock train track base. I think they'd got it from the people from India. You know, the engineers, they'd come in and developed a lot of these countries. So, every time they went through a tunnel, there was a machine gun nest up on top. Guys had sandbags protecting us. Of course, the train was no better than a streetcar. It had wooden slat seats to sit on. This went on for days, trying to go through to the front lines up north.
- Dave McLean: Finally, we went through Seoul. And that was the most moving — I realize, we are really going into combat. Here come the trains going south from where they'd had the big action up at the front. There were Korean civilians with everything they had.
- Dave McLean: They had a habit of wrapping things up in bags, just a piece of white cloth. You could hardly see the train, there were so many of them, holding on with one hand, and everything they had in the other. This train went by next to us, right in the middle of this town. We realized; this is real.

- Dave McLean: So later we went north. Finally, the train stopped, and they said, “Okay, get off,” and put us in these trucks. We got in these trucks that were, they called them deuce and a halves because they carried two and a half tons. But when you’ve got three GIs in the back, and that’s it. (laughs) It didn’t depress the springs. All the roads were like a washboard, so the vibration just went on day and night. You’d stay in the back. Once in a while they stopped and said, okay, use the latrine, will you? Then you’d go on for days. We found that I could take my steel helmet and buckle my chin strap and put my rifle up across my forehead up into the top. And I could sleep sitting up. Of course, it left a gunsight imprint right on your forehead. (laughs)
- Dave McLean: But we get to the front one sunny afternoon. They said, “Okay, that’s the place, you’re going over there. Report in.” You know, they don’t tell you anything. I walked in. The guy at the gate said, “Yeah, come on in.” Barbed wire everywhere. You can see this is real. I walked into the orderly room. They said, “Go in there.”
- Dave McLean: I went in. There was this guy with all this brass on and everything. I sat down in the seat in front of him. There was a chair in front of him and I sat down. He said, “Soldier, what are you doing?”
- Dave McLean: I said, “I’m here to report, sir.”
- Dave McLean: He said, “How do you report?” Oh, oh! It had been so long; I’d forgotten all that stuff. (laughs) I stood at attention. He said, “You remember, don’t you?” (laughter) He was nice enough not to put me in the brig or something.
- Dave McLean: So that was the beginning of being at the front. It went on for two years. And questions about how did I get started, besides all of the things that they taught us, the job was to go to the front every day and be a military policeman in combat conditions at intersections where the enemy thought it was a real good place to zero their guns in and take out that intersection with a mortar.
- Dave McLean: So, I did that, I don’t know, a week or something. And one day, what they had was a little building with sandbags all over it. They cooked the food in there, and you took your tray. They gave you a stainless-steel tray with the forks and knives attached with a wire, so it could go in the soapy water. Then they had three different garbage cans in front.
- Dave McLean: And when you finished eating, you’d take your [tray to the] garbage can and you’d dip it down in the first one and rinse it. Then you’d walk to the next one and rinse it a little more. The last one, you know, was soap suds. Then you’d take it back to your tent. The next time, you did the same

thing. So, I mean, it was a real eye opener. I kept thinking this is bad, but I wonder what it was like for my dad and all my family and all the things they'd gone through. I was in a tent. This is pretty neat.

Dave McLean: One day I'm washing my stuff. And made friends with this great big guy. I wish I could remember his name. Big, tall man. He was in full combat gear. Older than me. I said, "What you doing? Where you going to go? Where you been?" And all like that.

Dave McLean: He says, "Well, frankly, I've been here since World War Two. When that war ended in the Pacific, they sent me over here." He said, "I'm trying to go home. I'm getting short."

Dave McLean: I looked at him, I said, "You don't look short to me. Something wrong with you?" (laughter) I didn't know what that meant.

Dave McLean: And he said, "No, I've got to get somebody to take over my job."

Dave McLean: I said, "What's that?"

Dave McLean: He said, "Well, see that old tent over there. That's the sign shop." He said, "If I get somebody to take over, I've got a couple of GIs over there and I've got a couple of Koreans." He said, "If I get somebody to take over my job, they're going to let me go home."

Dave McLean: I said, "Well, what is your job?"

Dave McLean: He says, "I'm head of the sign shop."

Dave McLean: I said, "What do you have to do?"

Dave McLean: "Paint signs once in a while, stuff like that. And keep, make sure these guys [keep working]." He said, "You know anybody who'd do that?"

Dave McLean: I said, "Yeah." Because I was going to get killed sooner or later going up to the front driving around with a Jeep with a big stripe across the front and one on my helmet.

Dave McLean: He said, "Okay." That was what changed my whole life, when I became in charge of a bunch of GIs who knew what they were doing. The Koreans, too. I was going to be their supervisor. That's how I spent the next two years at the front. They gave me a Jeep. And I got rid of my M1 and had a .45 pistol.

Neil Mackay: And you were planning and producing signs.

Dave McLean: Right. Yeah. And I realized I wanted to learn how to letter. So, I sent home to — Mom and Dad were so supportive. One time the big Hwacheon Reservoir froze over in the middle of the winter. I said, "I like

to ice skate.” Wrote home. “Mom and Dad, send me some ice skates.” So sure enough. They came in the summer. (laughs)

Dave McLean: Anyway, they would send me up to the front, and I would put signs in. The guys would prepare them. They’d paint the Jeeps back in this little tent. We kept everything going. It was a motor pool area, and every Jeep — must have had 50 Jeeps with this “military police” right across the windshield and a stripe that ran all the way around — and it was all hand-painted. It was just beautifully done. These Koreans were real artists, and the GIs were great. They could take a, make a, you know, you’ve seen stripers? They could do an eighth-inch stripe down the side of that jeep, wouldn’t falter. Wet the brush again. Keep it going down the side. Go all the way around the front. Back down. All by hand! I was just blown away by that. I thought, I bet I could do that. So, I sent home for these lettering books and things about how to do that. Mom and Dad sent me stuff, and even some brushes. But the fun part was the paint. There was nothing to thin the paint but gasoline. We didn’t have oil or thinners or proper shellacs and all that stuff. So, you’d do a sign somewhere and about a month later, it would just fall off. All the paint [would] just chalk up and you didn’t have any way to get good paint.

Dave McLean: So, it went on like that. We’d go to the front. Oh, the first time, before I got this job, memorable moment was I’m standing at the top of this mountain, in the road, with a guy that was showing me up the front. And the trees, because the enemy on one side was firing artillery, and on the other side, we were firing in back, it had trimmed the trees down on top until it was just dirt on top. It was like a crew cut. The trees got longer and longer as you went down the mountain toward the artillery piece. It almost shaped the trajectory of the artillery. We’re up on the top there. I heard this sound go over [makes whooshing sound]. And I thought, whoa! A little later, one went the other way and it had a little different sound to it. I said, “What was that?”

Dave McLean: He said, “That’s artillery.”

Dave McLean: I said, “I never heard that before.”

Dave McLean: He said, “Don’t put your hand up.” That’s how low, close it was over our heads. And I thought, I’m going to die up here. I can see that’s coming just in a matter of time. One’s going to be low, and that’s going to be the end of us.

Dave McLean: That wasn’t the only thing. When they gave me my Jeep and I went to the front, I’d ride along, and the artillery was dug in like this. They had tanks set up like that so they could be protected. At the right moment, they’d fire on the enemy way off somewhere. You couldn’t even see the rounds in the

air going away. Well, they'd wait till the MPs come along. The road was just below the guns. So, the concussion. Of course, they hated MPs because last time they went into Chungcheong, they couldn't, you know, they got carried off and put in the brig. So, they'd wait till we went by and go under the gun muzzles. It would pull your helmet right off. I mean, the concussion would just yank your helmet off the top. But we did that every day to the front.

Dave McLean: The other memorable thing of the terrain was the fact that on the back of that mountain, where the enemy was on the right side and the sheltered side, they would dig roads, chisel them into the surface. Big enough for a tank, a 46-ton tank to go along that ledge. When it got to a point where the road got a little dirt or washed out or something, they had Koreans up there taking little rocks, no cement, no nothing, and filling in the road where this tank tread was going to go across. They would still be working with the tank tread going by six inches away. We'd go over. They're hanging out there on like cables, you know. Putting this thing together by hand, like they've done thousands of years, I guess. It was amazing.

Dave McLean: So, you'd get to the end of that road. And I'd do this every day. You couldn't go around the mountain, and you couldn't do a switchback without using up a lot of real estate in order to go back the other way. The road was just wide enough for one vehicle going one way. So, when you got to the end, it's turn left and down the mountain. Straight down. Skidding, carrying on. And tanks do this, too. It was down, I don't know far, it must have been 50 yards, down to the next road that went back the other direction.

Lu Ann Jones: Those signs, what would the signs say?

Dave McLean: Minefield. (laughs) Yeah, stuff like that.

Neil Mackay: In English as well as Korean.

Dave McLean: It was Korean. Yeah. I eventually learned how to letter a little bit in Korean watching the guys. It was fun. I learned the difference between Japanese symbols, or kanji, and the Korean letters. I can still see them today. I can tell the difference. So, the signs in the place were for the vehicles, for the minefields, for areas, like one-way signs. Danger zones, where you realized if you got in that area you were into an impact zone. A one-way; two ways. Command points. Places where the [unclear] roads came together.

Neil Mackay: So, you had to put it all together and make sure—

Dave McLean: We had to get it up there. So, it just went on and on and on. Of course, you'd get the signs up there, and when a big offensive action came

through, blow them all away. So, you had to do them all over again. So, the signs around the community area, around the company area, that's where I first did my first billboard. It was a sign that was about five feet high and then about, I don't know, 25 feet long up on poles. I've got pictures of these somewhere. They said, "Drive slow—" something like that — "See the scenery. Drive fast, see the CO." You know, the commanding officer. And then we were doing signs on the tents in different areas. The guys played cards and bingo and everything else. It was endless boredom. And they'd always want me to do a sign for their tent. So, I learned how to letter.

Neil Mackay: So, who were you were doing that for?

Dave McLean: Doing that for our company area. Yeah. We did that. Then one day I got a call and they said Commander P. D. Ginder, the division commander of this whole two hundred thousand guys wants you to come over to his base. So, I went over there, and I walked in. "How do you do, sir?" I'd never seen a general before.

Dave McLean: He said, "I've got these suitcases. I'd like to have them lettered with my name on there." So, these bright, beautiful aluminum things, I guess he was getting ready to go home or something. But that was the first time I got out the lettering book and said, oh, Old English. So, I'm doing it and it's this German looking thing. General P. D. Ginder. I was so proud of that! Take it back, he loved it. And I had learned to do, all from the examples shown inside of these lettering books. And learned all the brush strokes and stuff.

Neil Mackay: [unclear]

Dave McLean: Yeah. And you'd teach it, you'd try it and do it. Then somebody would say, "Oh, it looks pretty bad," or oh, psychology, I had this big "psychology" sign and I ended up leaving out one of the letters. And halfway across the word, I had to do it all over again!

Neil Mackay: So, did you do that for the duration of your time at the front?

Dave McLean: That was what I did for the whole time. Even one time, they had a big offensive and we worked almost nonstop for a week to put all the signs back. And it was later that I realized I'd been given the Bronze Star. I'd been given it for meritorious duty. I said, "What did I do?" It must have been that big deal. I've never really quite figured it out. So, I'm a decorated war guy.

Dave McLean: As it ended up, I came on home, and got back to my dad's auto parts business. While I had been away at the war, they'd moved to Virginia Beach. I'm back and in heaven; it's surf time. I got a job at the local shoe

store up the beach. Wonderful time working all day long and surfing afternoons. Mom and Dad were home, they were letting me stay at the house because I wasn't making enough money to support myself. But he had the company trucks and he wanted me to letter them. So, McLean Auto Parts. I made that with these little beautiful brushes, lettering on a real commercial truck. It took me forever, of course. But they looked good. So, I did that for a while.

Dave McLean: Then I said, "oh, I can do mailboxes." (laughs) So I started on up and down the beach, doing mailboxes. I wasn't making any money. It would take me all day to do a mailbox, you know. You weren't fast because you weren't really good.

Dave McLean: Then I went to work in Norfolk for a guy named Lazarus. This wonderful old Eastern European Jewish guy that did all of his lettering in silver paint. When you do silver, you can't see the stroke marks. So old Lazarus, you'd always see "Lazarus" at the end of his signs. So, he had me doing it. I remember going down to the harbor in Norfolk and hanging upside down with ropes around my knees, painting a Coast Guard emblem on the side of this tugboat. This was some kind of big tug. Bright yellow lettering against black. I had to do it over and over and over to get the density, and after a while I had done that enough.

Dave McLean: My dad would go down with his brothers to a little place in Norfolk, to a luncheon they'd have for the Shriners. He got to know this guy that had a little commercial art studio. He was one of the Shriner members. Dad went and asked him, he said, "My son is into stuff like this. Do you think he ought to go to school (college)?" You know, we didn't know. Go to college, or go to what? So, Dad wasn't an artist. He was a wonderful man, but this wasn't his thing. So, he asked a question anyway.

Dave McLean: The guy said, "Yeah. Have him come on down." So, I brought all my pictures and all this stuff, the things that I'd done. And the guy said, "Yeah. You look like you ought to go to college." So that was that next little time of moving on. It was a big deal. It was that moment when they said go onto college.

Dave McLean: And I said, "What's the place I should go?"

Dave McLean: He said, "Well, at Richmond." It's part of the College of William and Mary. It is the Richmond Professional Institute. We came up with a lot of names to go on with the Rather Peculiar Institute and stuff like that. (laughter) There were a lot of real arty people that went there. But sure enough, the GI Bill was going to take care of it.

Dave McLean: I went up there and checked in a dorm and went around, registered for these courses. I had no idea what I was doing. Life drawing. Drafting. Art history. All the things for a fine artist to know. And that's what I was, again, you know, you're young and dumb. But I wanted to do stuff. So, I started that first year living in one of the dormitories. The dorm was the mansion looking over across from Monroe Park. The exact mansion that the Reynolds Corporation, family, had had. And they'd sold it to the college. And it's like a five-story building out there. It was amazing. With a central stair up the middle and all that stuff. And we lived there with a lot of guys. And we started commemorating various holidays by going out to various suppliers and getting neat things and building material. We'd do Pogo night, you know. And we'd do them to look just like the guy that did the comic strip. We'd get cardboard, and you'd paint up these characters. They were fifteen feet high. And it was these huge, 12-foot ceilings in the area, and 30-foot ceilings in some areas, really, in the downstairs. So, we'd do these parties and make up all this. This was kind of how you got into doing real art, you know, cutting them out and making big cartoon images in 3-D. Standing them up or hanging them from the high ceilings.

Neil Mackay: That's a lot of creative —

Dave McLean: Which was structural. You know, you had something to do. It was just cardboard. And then there was another tradition of what they called Dooley's Frolics. That some guy that had been at Emory University. And he said, "Dooley is the spirit of spring at our college. Let's start one here." So, Dooley would raise, he would come to life. And after a week, he'd rule.

Dave McLean: He'd go into any shop, any college class, and tell the professor, "Everybody gets one cup of coffee. You go buy it for them." You know? So, he'd get coffee. Or he'd say, "Well, they get 15 minutes off today." And everybody would go. They'd leave the class. But Dooley was in one of those cloth skeleton outfits with the bones. You know, black with white bones. And nobody knew who Dooley was. It was three or four different people. So that went on. But in the process, we had to make him a coffin. So, we went and got the cardboard. But we said, it's got to be nice inside. We went up to a ladies lingerie fabric manufacturer outside of Richmond and got this pink silk. They said, "Yeah, take all that. We're going to throw it away anyway."

Dave McLean: And we made this tufted coffin. It's pink with a lid and the whole business. And then the party started with Dooley coming to life. We'd roll him in. And then everybody was having a good time and Dooley would come out. And then he'd say, "Okay, you get so and so." And he'd start ruling for the week. And at the end—

Neil Mackay: And you'd design all this stuff.

Dave McLean: Yeah, we'd design all this stuff. So, at the end, we'd put him back in the coffin and we'd take him out, and Dooley's gone till next spring.

Dave McLean: So, it was stuff like that that contributed to it. And the influence of other areas that I'd never been exposed to. Drama students? Interior design people. The people that were into medicine, because we were right next to the Medical College of Virginia. My dentist today is a guy that I used to sit next to in the evening almost 50 years ago, in the dorms where you'd go to get a date. You'd see a girl on the campus and make a date. Go to the dorm at seven o'clock. Can't leave until seven. You've got to be back by eleven. And we'd sit there and wait. Of course, the girls were never ready. They'd always come down a little later. We'd sit there and get to know, who are you? I'm so and so. I'm in medical school. I'm studying dentistry. So, all these stories interwoven. But the school went on like that.

Dave McLean: I spent all my summers and all my Christmases carrying mail back at Virginia Beach for the post office. And surfing when I could. And I had worked at the shoe store at one point. That was the wildest thing, because all these lovely young ladies would come there. Of course, we'd been off for two years away from everybody. This pretty girl would come in. I'd say, "Oh, let me fit you this shoe." Kind of like the roadrunner, zip, back at the front door. And say, "Can we have a date tonight?" So, it was a crazy time, because I had this little red car. Little convertible with no roof. It was just open. It was a Crosley. And would go and say, "Where are we going to go?" "Well, let's go," didn't have any money, "we'll get a couple of cokes and we'll go up to the Sand Room of the Surf Club."

Dave McLean: Well the Surf Club was a big-time nightclub where all the big bands came. And it was a chain-link fence on the ocean side. We'd sit in the sand. And you could sit there. They were paying 25 cents for a coke — but cokes were a nickel, it's a big deal — inside. And people all dressed up in their clothes. And then Tommy Dorsey, all the big bands were playing. We'd go to their side and dance. Dance in the sand, you know. (laughs) It was an incredible summer.

Dave McLean: Eventually did all this work. In the meantime, my dad with his auto parts company up in Norfolk knew of a service station. Remember those signs that swing out front, in a little frame, and the wind blows, next to the curb. And he would say, "I've got a couple of jobs if you want to do a couple of those." They were about three feet wide and maybe four and a half feet high, you know. A big thing. And it was show-card lettering. You know, so and so's Exxon or Esso and specials, tire changing and all this stuff. So that's where I learned layout and I'd hand letter the thing. But I didn't

have anything but water paints. We didn't have enamel. We didn't have any money. And so, I had to spray it. And spray cans had not been invented. There was no aerosol cans anywhere. That came later. So, there was this tube with a little hinge, and another tube that went like this, went vertical. You'd take the one, stick it in the varnish, and you'd get on the other end and you'd blow. As you blew across the top of the thing, it would suck up the varnish and atomize it and spray. Of course, it was like lacquer. And besides making you blow your breath out, every month I had two of those to do. (blows) Blowing this banana oil kind of crazy thing to coat the—

Neil Mackay: You'd have to lay out the whole sign?

Dave McLean: Yeah. Every one, it was all original. Yes. That was a good thing, learning how to lay stuff out. But in the meantime, I became kind of a leader of the art guys because I was always wanting to do something crazy. And they thought that was cool. "Dave will do it!" (laughs)

Neil Mackay: So, did they have any, like graphic design, 3D design, going towards a certain career? Or was it—

Dave McLean: Well that was the other real landmark moment. But after the first two years, they got us together and said, "Next year you're going to be coming back here. And I want to ask you a couple of questions. Would you like to work whenever you want and do all the stuff you've learned here? Or would you like to have someone provide you with a lot of work and say when they wanted it, and when you want it done?"

Dave McLean: And everybody said, "Oh, I don't know." They said, "What does that mean?"

Dave McLean: He said, "One of them is called fine art. And the other is called commercial art."

Dave McLean: I didn't know what. So, I said, "What happens with the fine art?"

Dave McLean: They told us a little bit more. They said, "Sometimes it's really good. Sometimes it's not. You don't always have work. And you've to [unclear]."

Dave McLean: So that was a big moment when I said, "Commercial art." So, from then on, we started learning typography. Printing. All of the overlays. How to do mechanicals. How to paste up type. How to do the real core. And to estimate how to set a block of type into all of the layouts around the pictures and not have, oops, I got two lines of type left over at the end of the book.

Dave McLean: So, I learned that. And at the same time was working—

END OF TRACK 2

START OF TRACK 3

Dave McLean: — afternoons with my friend who was not a GI Bill guy. And we went down to the W.T. Grant Company downtown in Richmond and went up in the attic. And you know those signs that have this letter that says, “Special: \$4.99.” We did those. We did those little ones that were a foot size. Some of them were only a couple of inches. Some of them were three feet. We’d spend all afternoon, two afternoons a week, going down there and doing show cards to put on for prices. And we made some extra money.

Dave McLean: The other thing was that the department store, the big, Thalheimer’s had a big layout area. I learned how to do fashion ads. You’d go up there and the guy would show you how to draw. We were learning figure drawing. We were learning how to do layouts. Basic design. I mean, I never got over it. It just never ended.

Neil Mackay: And this was something you kind of found yourself? Or did the school help you?

Dave McLean: Yeah. I just kept going and asking. Go in and knock on a door and say, “I’m a student over here at RPI. Do you got any kind of work?” “No but call me again next week.” And stuff like that. It was a beginning. Of course, it had already begun with my trying to do mailboxes and things like that. (laughs) Found out, “We don’t want a mailbox, we can find—.” And then, “How much do you want?” “I want three dollars to do,” because it’s going to take me all afternoon to paint his name on it and his house number on it. But all that stuff adds up.

Dave McLean: Eventually, near the end of my career at college, my GI Bill ran out three months early. Because that was how much time I’d put in month-wise actually in government service. I got this thing, like my draft notice. It said, “You don’t get any more money. That’s it. You’ve got to make up the rest yourself.”

Dave McLean: So, I went to the college and asked them. I said, “I can letter. I’m a pro at this. I could do this. Have you got anything I can do?”

Dave McLean: He said, “Yeah. How would you like to be a professor in the night school teaching lettering?” (laughs) So whammo. There I was. I was teaching all these people. They were doing what I had done coming up through. I was teaching them how, stroking these letters onto—

Neil Mackay: While you were still in school?

- Dave McLean: I'm a student and in the night school. So, it just, it was a phenomenal education. Everything comes together to make it all happen. I'm trying to think what the next area. Well, I finally graduated, and I decided I was going to go get a job. Everybody said oh, you can go to Washington, D.C. That's the place to go. Everybody going up there. So, went up there. My good friend, Jim White, had gone to school with me. He had been there at school with me. So, I arrive at this place called the Redskins Building in D.C. where there are literally 60 artists on the floor. You can see from one side to the other. There are animators, there are guys there from Hungary, war refugees, all sorts. There are real fine professionals. There are the guys doing the very first illustrations of the space program. These big billboard like show card things that they're going to do, all by hand. And there is Jim White sitting over on the other, he's like the assistant art director. And I'm thinking, what?!
- Dave McLean: Anyway, they hired me. And I became an artist as part of the staff. That's my first job.
- Neil Mackay: In D.C.
- Dave McLean: In D.C. at the big time, and I was really in it. So, I had been married about that time. This girl I went through school with. We lived in Alexandria there. She went into the business. She was a commercial artist, too. We had a job up in Silver Spring. And so, we, you know, did what we did for a couple, three years. I guess it was maybe four, five years later, we didn't make it anymore, the marriage. And so there I was, you know.
- Dave McLean: That was the real moment where — I had been working for a printer up on New York Avenue, Merkel Press. Was doing union publications, these newsprint things that weren't real big. But it was a magazine. And would work all day long.
- Dave McLean: And then would start on the design for that as everybody went home. In the morning, it was ready to go to press, all the whole mechanical stuff for it. And I did that for three or four months.
- Dave McLean: One day this guy comes in, the guy that I was working for. He said, "You know, I hate to do this," he said, "but you're just not fast enough for what I need." And I thought, oh, no. He said, "I'm going to have to let you go." So, I'd never been let go on a job before. That was a real, real shocker.
- Dave McLean: So, I'm out on the street. And I'm running around, trying to find stuff. And I remembered Jim White's dad had been with Walt Disney. He was an animator with Disney. When they were really at their peak. He had become the chief art director at the Department of Agriculture. So, I went over to see Elmo White. Elmo remembered me and we talked and all. And

I said, "Mr. White, you know anywhere that I can get a job? I was doing so and so, and I was all right with it. But the guy wanted to you know, go on, move on, wanted me out of there." I said, "I've never been fired before."

Dave McLean: He said, "I'll tell you what." He said, "Over there on the other end of the mall, there's an outfit called the Eastern Museum Laboratory."

Dave McLean: And I said, "Wait a minute. Let me write that down. That's a lot for me to remember." I said, "What in the world do they do?"

Dave McLean: He said, "Oh, they do stuff for the parks." Didn't describe much.

Dave McLean: So next day I get all my little photographs, all the stuff I'd done and went across. It was in one of the temporary buildings from World War One! In these old wooden buildings. And walked in there and talked to this guy named Russ Hendrickson. A Marine colonel, retired Marine colonel. And he had just taken over from Ralph Lewis. This was the change of an era, where Ralph Lewis had always been the one that did it by the book. He was a curator. But there was the Eastern Museum Laboratory and there was the Western Museum with a guy named Floyd Lafayette on the west coast. And they had their museum. And they designed, built and produced all the exhibits right there. You went outside, guys were doing murals. There was—

Neil Mackay: Dioramas?

Dave McLean: Huh?

Neil Mackay: Were they doing dioramas?

Dave McLean: They were doing dioramas with asbestos. Just buckets of asbestos and mix it with stuff. And you know, I don't know what happened to these people. But here I am. I said, "You got any kind of work?" He said, "I'll tell you; would you like to become a freelancer or a contractor or something?" He said, "Up at Cape Cod, there's a map they want to get done up there. The guy's name is Tommy Gilbert. He's the chief naturalist up there."

Dave McLean: And I said, "Well, what is it they want?"

Dave McLean: He said, "They want a big map. They want it done for outdoors. It'll probably be finished in some kind of plastic or metal or whatever."

Dave McLean: I said, "I don't know."

Dave McLean: "It's to fit in a shelter. And it's the map of that end of Cape Cod. Pilgrim Heights." And I thought, gulp. Again, thought, never painted a sign, either. And so, he said, "We'll give you three grand." He said, "They need it. Get

it done.” So, there with the divorce, she got the Porsche. I got the Nash Rambler. (laughs)

Dave McLean: I went to and talked to all the people I could about how to do this stuff. About plaster of Paris, and how you reinforce plaster of Paris with burlap, so it doesn’t break when it gets brittle. And how you first do this plasticine. It’s this forever soft, gray, putty-like clay. And I went and got all kinds of enlarged photographs of contours for me to cut out all the little contours. And I went and bought all this stuff. And went north. Went into a scientific park there in Hingham, Massachusetts, and found out where I could buy polyester resin with the hardeners and all this stuff. I’d never heard of; people didn’t know what fiberglass was.

Dave McLean: So, I started on this map. It was nine feet in diameter. Octagonal shaped. And started forming it and shaping it and making sure where the water was going to be, where the sand dunes were going to be and all that.

Neil Mackay: So, did you go into the park and—

Dave McLean: Yeah. I’m working in the park, in the basement of the naturalist’s house.

Neil Mackay: With the naturalist—

Dave McLean: Yeah. He was the naturalist for the park. And he was my resource guy. So that was my first planner, you think about it. It was really intense. I was just devastated over my personal life having gone completely crazy and gone to heck.

Dave McLean: So, I’m up there doing this. Eventually I got the thing, the clay shape, and he approved. He said, because I had all these cutout contours you fill between and smooth it. Then I started putting plaster on top of this shape. Mixing it up. Hour after hour, mixing plaster of Paris and putting it in and letting it harden. And then putting burlap in with the plaster so it wouldn’t break.

Dave McLean: Then finally I’d cast this map. And it was nine feet across; I just stand it up on end and turn it over. And then take all of that plaster, all that clay out of there. And now I had a map that I could begin to use as a mold as I laid in the fiberglass-reinforced polyester resin.

Neil Mackay: The mold?

Dave McLean: It was the mold. It was in fiberglass. And so, I started cleaning it and polishing it and shellacking it, doing everything I could. It was crazy. That was the cast, that that thing of fiberglass, whatever, was what I was going to lay polyester resin into.

Neil Mackay: Oh.

- Dave McLean: Yeah. I took away the mold. And then that was my cast, because it would be the wrong way.
- Neil Mackay: So, this was basically the topographic relief map of the park.
- Dave McLean: It was called Pilgrim Heights.
- Neil Mackay: Which in our world, in the exhibit world, is such a key element in National Park Service visitors centers.
- Dave McLean: Yeah. So, this was the first time. And I realized how important it was for people to comprehend this part of Cape Cod. And making it so it was tough enough to be touched. And not inside somewhere you put glass in front of it and all that. So, this was a big learning curve. Once I cleaned all that clay out of there, then I shellacked it with this old orange shellac and then waxed it with that old orange bowling alley wax. And then, big moment, okay, start laying fiberglass in. And I started, and I'm working on this basement, fiberglass, to kick off, has to be 70 degrees. It won't set up otherwise, so you have to keep the doors closed. And I'm in his house, in the basement, under his Park Service house. I'll never forget it. And of course, they'd come down (coughing) "How's the job going?" It was just crazy with the fumes from polyester.
- Dave McLean: So, I did it. I got it all finished. And then I pulled the clay away and it was, it worked. It was done. And it was good and solid enough you could walk on it.
- Dave McLean: And then, to paint it, to paint all the right colors. And go get this outdoor polyurethane paint so it would stand up to the weather. And then hand-letter all this stuff, all the names of the lakes and the trails and back to, all the stuff was all coming into play. And I did this in two weeks, total.
- Lu Ann Jones: Two weeks!
- Dave McLean: I did it in two weeks. I think back, I never would have done that! But I did it in two weeks. And he was happy as he could be. And I got to know everybody in the park. I come back to Russ, he said, "Yeah, here's your money. You did the job and they're real happy up there." I thought, whoa. Has he got anything else? "Well, we got a call from Statue of Liberty the other day. Somebody blew up an exhibit there. You know how to make bomb-proof exhibits?" (laughs) Russ asked me.
- Dave McLean: So never did that. I never designed an exhibit. I had no idea when I came to the Park Service.
- Neil Mackay: You built things in college.

- Dave McLean: I built all that stuff. But I had never, you know, had any experience in doing anything you could call an exhibit. There were no schools. There was nothing for it. And I was having a ball. It was like this new horizons and new challenges. So, I went up, like I knew what I was doing. Went to the Statue of Liberty for the first time. The guy said, "Well, see that hole right there? We've got to have an exhibit there, we need it by," you know, so design an exhibit for that and put it. And it went in.
- Dave McLean: Finally, Russ said, "How would you like to come to work for us?"
- Neil Mackay: Because you were freelancing.
- Dave McLean: All this time I was, you know, driving a Nash Rambler around.
- Neil Mackay: So, he offered you a job?
- Dave McLean: He said, "See if you can get yourself a portfolio together." Of course, there was the map. I had already had a Park Service project. And I put it together. And sure enough, he hired me. It was like a GS-4. But the amazing part were the people that were working there. They had been there for a long time. These guys had been around since World War II. Many of them were war vets. World War II vets. Many of them were college professors. Many of them were curators. A lot of them were from the advertising world in New York City. There were illustrators, there were classic artists; one guy was a world-renowned painter of cats, animals, tigers and lions. You know, Ed Bierly, and there was Dan Feasa who had been a commercial designer and illustrator. He was competing every year for the duck stamp prize. These are real fine art jobs.
- Neil Mackay: This is all at the Eastern Museum Laboratory there in those old "tempo" buildings on what is now called the National Mall. In fact, the Eastern Museum Laboratory was right where the Smithsonian Air & Space Museum is today.
- Dave McLean: These are the guys that were at this little temporary building. They were working outside half the time, and building these exhibits, and doing this stuff. And then there were the historians and the curators. And I thought, wow! This is such a contrast. Because the commercial art business is a bunch of hot guys that are straight out of school and they've got all these flashy ideas and they want to get it done real fast. These guys, they were doing it right. They were talking about what it would take. Then I realized what Russ had taken over was, he had taken over a long-existing group of people that had done it the way Ralph did it for so many years. And Ralph, bless his soul, he stayed on for years and years. He was at Harpers Ferry till, I don't know, ten years ago. But he had done what he knew. And done it well. He was so respected in the field of museums.

Dave McLean: As time went on, people wanted things a little more exciting, a little more stimulating. The way they did exhibits was really methodical. The first time I looked at one and I thought oh my goodness, it's like a book. It's like, you have to do things in a linear fashion. If you don't, and if you haven't read the preview material, then this doesn't make any sense. And then the next thing. So, you build on. But the method they used was a very small amount of graphics. Almost non-existing artifacts and lots and lots of words. So, you stood on your feet and you went around this room. And they used the walls. Almost always, it was on the walls. Never anything in the middle of the floor.

Neil Mackay: So, these were some of your first impressions?

Dave McLean: These were the first exhibits that I saw that they were doing—

Neil Mackay: Right.

Dave McLean: — when I went and saw these different ones. I started in my own mind to say, “oh, I don't think I want to see this.” Even the Smithsonian, they're doing them the same way. It was this book on the wall thing. To me, I didn't know what the popular term, but later I realized, but it occurred to me this stuff was not stimulating. It wasn't communicating. You'd watch the people. I'd never watched people in museums. I watched it when they would come in. They'd go up there and they'd read it. And you'd see them reach back and get their back, because you stand so long with your back arched that way, it's like “uh huh.” Then they'd start changing, shifting from one foot to the other. They're about halfway down the paragraph. And then usually you'd see a yawn. And then they'd like, “uh huh,” they'd walk on to the next big panel. And they'd go, “mmhmm.” Then finally they'd just walk out the door and read a couple of things, you know? Because you don't read a book standing up. You go sit down and enjoy it.

Neil Mackay: I mean, what was your first role there?

Dave McLean: Well, I guess I began to realize that there were things that people got excited about, because they had some exciting stuff. The artifacts they were bringing in, they were charged with, from the White House and from historic sites all over the country. The guys there took the exhibits out and installed them. When they did a mural, they did the mural in the shop on the wall. And there was, the stuff that was just done by hand. All the lettering was done by hand. There was no printed lettering.

Neil Mackay: So, what was your role there initially?

Dave McLean: Was to go out and do the exhibits, like the thing was to start doing exhibits. Start to do small things. And finally, I forget where the first one was, oh, New England. They asked me to go up to the Battle Road at the

Minuteman National Park. They had some exhibits, but they needed a map. So, I said, oh. And I learned that it was a pretty good-looking map if you just used the contours and made the lifts very small. Because they wanted a battle road and the fact that this was Bunker Hill and it was advantages of terrain and stuff like that. So, I did this map, I don't know, must have been 15-foot long map. Done out of gray cardboard, cut to the contours. I could go get them off the maps. And I made this the central thing of the room, it was this map. It was talking about the battle road when they came in at the north shore, whatever it was, and they marched out to Lexington and Concord. And that was the center of the room. Then I had some of the graphics they had, didn't have any graphics. They wanted to use the real ones. You know, there's only about ten actual graphics from that period.

Neil Mackay: So, did you start to also design some of the surrounding exhibits as well?

Dave McLean: Yeah. I did the wording that went with them. The very first one was this thing that grabbed everybody. It had a railing around it. People could say well they started over here, it went to here, and this is where the so and so battle was. And then they could view the next thing. It was a physical something, hands-on. It was cheap. It didn't cost them much to do it. The park liked it. They liked the idea that they could participate, that they could lead tours through. Then they'd get some money to get a little film done. The parks didn't know what to ask for, really. Because it always just had been a book on the wall.

Neil Mackay: So, this was, you began, correct me if I'm wrong, but I think 1964?

Dave McLean: About that time, yeah, something like that.

Neil Mackay: So, this would have been the mid '60s?

Dave McLean: Yeah. Beginning. Because I'd been in graphic design studios in D.C. Maybe three of them. The one at the Redskins Building. After I'd been there a year, somebody came and said, "Would you like to come over here and work in our place?" So, I did all these jobs. It was such a transition from, graphic design is meticulous. And it's so demanding that you actually physically laid type in, gluing it on to a page. And if it's crooked or anything, you know, you've seen paste-up. And the graphics have got to be right. And you have to take a manuscript and translate it into whatever typeface you want. And it was what I had learned, but it was so very demanding. But then I got to exhibits, it's like, oh! You can put a picture over here and it's three dimensional. If you want to change, you don't have to worry about it being on a piece of paper. The color, the paper, the coating for the paper and all that stuff. So, it was this moment of freedom and I thought, I am never going back to that again!

- Lu Ann Jones: Were you, for example, in New England, would you go and consult with the park? Or what was the process you were part of?
- Dave McLean: Yeah. I don't remember having a person on the mall, Park Service, that went up with me as the writer. I think, if I remember, I got to the park and the guy said, "We want to do an exhibit about so and so." And he'd start talking about it. And I'd say, "Well, what do you got to show that?" I said, "Would a map be a good thing?" You know, because that's kind of to hold it all together. And we'd talk a while and I'd do some sketches.
- Neil Mackay: Oh, I was going to ask—
- Dave McLean: You know, we'd start with sketches. And he'd say, "Yeah, that might do a good job!" And he said, "Well, where can we show people what General Gage looked like?" I said, "Well, have you got pictures?" I said, "We can get it." I knew my graphic thing, I could enlarge them and make them in color, and we could put type under them and all this stuff. So General Gage would be over here, and the different people, cast of characters. And all the minutemen would come up. And people that have done illustrations, depicting the event could be included with the few historic images.
- Neil Mackay: So, at this point, were you actually building models or what the exhibit would look like? or were they pretty much sketched?
- Dave McLean: I did a model of that. Little model, it was about a foot and a half long. And they got excited about the possibilities.
- Neil Mackay: Because that's really been, I think, one of your hallmarks was the building of models.
- Dave McLean: Yeah.
- Neil Mackay: — exhibit models to help everybody, especially the park — visualize what it might look like there in their visitor center.
- Dave McLean: Yeah.
- Neil Mackay: — and understand what it is that they're going to get. And also, for you to figure out what you needed to do to accomplish this idea
- Dave McLean: The process, which I did hundreds of times, was to go to the place, listen to what they wanted to do, and say, "Okay, I have got to have a replica of this. I've got to make a facsimile of your space." So, I would sit and start with a tape. I'd say, "Would you take one end of this tape?" And we'd measure out the entire room, where every door was, what the height of the room is, where there were special jogs in it and all that stuff. And then, there was the other thing. When I first got my job with the Park Service,

they sat me down to do something, and I said, “What’s this?” It was an architect’s scale. I didn’t know what an architect’s scale was! They said, “That’s what you change from that size to this size.” (laughs)

Dave McLean: So anyway, I’m taking measurements of the rooms, of these spaces. And then I began to say well, how do people come in here? And they’d say, “Well, they come from the lobby to the bookstore, and sometimes they go to the restroom.”

Dave McLean: I said, “Wait a minute. How much space?” I said, “Physically, I’ve got to have a replica of this whole place in order to make a sensible decision.” So, I spent all this time measuring and getting it real measurements. Then I’d go back and take my architectural scale and say, “How big is this model going to be?” Because if I make it too big or too little, and I would do a complete architectural model to scale, a dimensional floor plan of the whole place. Then I’d find out from the real objects. How’s it going to fit in here? And I’d go get the actual map and enlarge it or reduce it till I could put it in and say, okay, it’s going to be four feet wide in the exhibit.

Neil Mackay: And so, were you were also making the exhibits?

Dave McLean: I did make some exhibits later on, yeah. But I was actually doing the models of them. And then people would, the fabricators would do it at the office there, yeah.

Neil Mackay: So, in-house.

Dave McLean: In-house. Everything. That was the part that was crazy. Now this was, I don’t know, three or four years before the Park Service brought in all the media people. The motion picture people were in the top of the Interior building. That’s where they’d made films for years. This was a new breakthrough for the Eastern Museum Laboratory.

Dave McLean: They were actually in a new permanent place that, you know, it wasn’t going to be there forever, and it was not in the back room of a department store somewhere in downtown D.C.

Neil Mackay: And the publications were being done?

Dave McLean: The publications were being done; I think they were in the Interior building as well. And so, this magic moment that came along, a little later, it was in 1968, ‘69, before the 1970 actual building of the design center, was that they brought together all these people. And Bill Everhart had the genius. He was a historian from Saint Louis, if I remember. And Bill said, “We’ve got to have divisions. We’ve got this kind of media and we’ve got that kind of media. We need somebody in charge of these things.” So somehow, he reached out and got the best people at the time. Motion

pictures were being done about parks, I think. A lot of times they just got who they could to go make a film. So, they got somebody in charge of, and it was Carl Degen. He had been previously as a producer, of “Meet the Press.” Big network TV thing. And then later he had left that, and he’d gone into the Atlanta film industry for one of the big churches down there. And somehow Bill Everhart got wind of the things he was doing and came to Carl. And Carl said, “You want me to do this? And you’re going to pay me for doing that? To go to all these great areas?” Carl was like on cloud nine. And so, it was amazing.

Dave McLean: There was Russ, who had been over at agriculture. He had been, early on. And he’d had the exhibits there on the mall. So, he was the obvious one to head up for exhibits.

Dave McLean: Vince Gleason had been a groundbreaker with getting the Government Printing Office to do things they’d never done. The GPO, Government Printing Office, would not print but one color. They would print, you want it black? And some of the primary colors. And Vince Gleason got them to print in four colors! I remember, this was something when I was a graphic designer. It was the time of the Cold War. I did this little pamphlet. And on the cover was a tractor. And I said, “Tractors are red.” It was just a one-color, not any dimension or anything to it. It came back from GPO and it was in blue. Because that’s red. That’s communist. They wouldn’t print in red ink. I mean, it was that narrow. It was like the McCarthy thing.

Neil Mackay: Was there one overall director of everything at that point? Or just these different groups?

Dave McLean: Well, the other thing, and by the way, I watched the Ken Burns show on the Park Service coincidentally the other night, to watch the conclusion.

END OF TRACK 3

START OF TRACK 4

Dave McLean: I’d seen all the other episodes. But sure enough, they got into the formulation of interpretation a little bit in the film, if you’ve seen it. Oh, I’ve lost my track now.

Neil Mackay: Who was leading the—

Dave McLean: Oh, Bill Everhart was the one that started the center. And it was a big deal, because they had gone all over the district area for years, trying to get a place for us to take all these disparate interpretive components and put them under one roof. They came up somehow with the idea, and I guess it was U.S. Senator Byrd, got the money, one million dollars, to build a design center out there. Because everywhere else they do it, and the

Defense Department had lots of bucks, and they would take it away. Every place you got looked like it was a good place to have it. Of course, it was going to be in the city. So high-priced. Lots of logistical problems. Many people, when they said they were going to go to Harpers Ferry, said, "I'm not going. I'm not going out there." You know? And they left. They didn't come. And many, many people came, and spent years and years and years commuting back to where they lived in the city. Because they didn't want to leave where they loved to live. Bill Everhart was prime, but the big deal was George Hartzog. He was the guy. He was another mover; what a politician. George was so smart. And he stood behind Bill and he stood behind everything Bill wanted to do. When Bill Everhart wanted to hire these three guys from corporate America, and he did, it was a big breakthrough.

Neil Mackay: So, it sounds like you were painting a picture before of maybe sort of the previous way things were done. And the type of interpretive approach, maybe, had been done the same way for many years, let's say. Was this, how would you characterize, it's a physical transition to Harpers Ferry. But how, was it also, in what ways might it have also been kind of a transition in how—

Dave McLean: Well, the big breakthrough was our going to the park and talking to a person who was a by the book naturalist, archeologist, or historian. All these disciplines that were academic. But they had no experience in communicating. Just like many people that are experts in their field, when they do a dissertation, they can't leave out stuff that their peers would think they don't know what they're talking about. So, it was back to the book on the wall. So, they didn't understand our goal, but they knew the subject, but you couldn't, and of course they wanted to hold onto ownership, to writing it, when it came to, you going to do that exhibit? I'll do that part. "No, you left out so and so. You've got to have that in there."

Dave McLean: And they'll say whoa, man, look how long, you know? No, sir. So, there was this transition from the communicator, from the person that knew all the context, to let go and give it over. That was when you used to go in and they would grudgingly say, "Well, okay. Make sure you include the fact that that bird has six different colors, three times a year in its feathers. You've got to do that. You're not going to leave that out."

Neil Mackay: How did you kind of help them see your approach? Mocking things up?

Dave McLean: It was a matter of doing things in front of them and getting their enlistment. You'd go to the park and they never, the thing that I and a bunch of other designers do, was you set the roles down. I went there and began to say, I listened to them and I'd do these sketches. And I'd say,

“Tell me what it is, so and so.” I’d sit there drawing and sketching. And after a while I’d say, “Well, is this what you’re talking about?” Well, the guy that thought he could communicate would shut up like a clam. Because he realized he didn’t know how to communicate like that. So I began to take on a role as the one that could visualize in a way I thought was going to work, while they sat there and said, “Yeah, you did include what I said, but it’s not quite like what I thought. But does it work? Yeah, it’s still there. But it’s briefer, it’s more exact.”

Dave McLean: So, the business of taking a group of people, and this includes, and typically you’re at a park, the superintendent’s there, the assistant superintendent, the chief of maintenance, and the guy that gives the night talks to the people. And usually chief of maintenance is the most influential guy. He’d come in. I’m at Jewel Cave and they’re talking about, I said, “I may have the carpet white in the thing.” He said, “Have you been into the cave? It’s black stuff, there will be black footprints,” chief of maintenance said. “Okay. Thank you. Thank you.” I almost stuck my foot in — so it was a team thing. Everybody took on their role, and we began to evolve into a way. And then I’d be there with somebody, like my first guy was a guy named Keith Trexler. I’ve got all these names written down.

Dave McLean: Keith Trexler and I went to Jewel Cave out in South Dakota. We met with this couple who had come through there. The park said, “We’ve got to have an exhibit. We want to do a big visitors center.” The Jewel Cave began with a hole in the hill where the wind would blow out of it. And a couple of cowboys noticed it. And would put their hat over it and blow the hat off. Why is it doing that? They’d put the hat over it and (makes wind noise) hat’s gone! Different times of the day, caves, they exhale and inhale. So, there’s an atmospheric change. And so that’s how someone had found this cave.

Dave McLean: Now Wind Cave was another one. But it had been pretty much commercialized and finally taken over by the park. But inside, there was none of these precious formations. It was like everything had touched the walls and taken off what they want, you know. They’d call it reverse lunch. Take a lunch bag. “I’m just going to take my lunch down here.” They’d come back in. “How come your lunch bag’s still full? Okay, let’s leave that here. You can’t take that.”

Dave McLean: So, Wind Cave was one where we went out and started talking with them. But we went through, and this was a wonderful privilege was to be a designer not in some studio in Washington anymore. But I’m in this exotic place, going underground, before the sun comes up in the morning, and exploring a cave to know the resource. And I’m with the chief guy of the

park, plus I'm with my planner, Keith Trexler, who himself was an archeologist. I'm physically going through this cave to find out what it is. And they're showing me stuff. No one's ever seen this thing I'm looking at. No person has ever been down in this cave. They're putting me through little tubes and chutes, because I'm the biggest guy. They said, "If you get stuck, let me know, because we can't get through if you get stuck." And they'd pull me back out of these holes.

Neil Mackay: Really the beginning of going and scoping a project out.

Dave McLean: Yeah. Experience the thing. And then we'd get to the end. We'd say we can't take everybody through that. Some will go through the experience. But the visitor in general won't. So, what the Kahns, Julie and Jan? Anyway, they were older folks that had come west, and they'd taken on exploring the cave. It was three thousand feet. When they finished, it was thirty-three miles that they'd explored. They have something called a Brunton compass. Most compasses just measure, you know, in floor plan it just measured what's over there, how many degrees from here to there. The Brunton compass does it, but at an angle. Because caves are just not all flat and level. They go up, they go down. It's kind of like a circulatory system. And it's all the limestone that's dissolved from so many years of water going through. So, they had explored this cave, and they found this one place where there was a big dome. That's where, just above on the surface, we were going to build the visitors center. And we were going to put in an elevator. Where are we going to put that elevator? It's five miles to that little hole in the ground on the other end of the park.

Dave McLean: And so, Jan and Herb, Herb Kahn, they got their compass and they found, and they measured, and they said, "Okay. Drill a hole right there." And that's where they drilled, and that's where the elevator was, and that's where they're going to have people go from the visitor center on top, down the elevator, and boom! They would be in the cave.

Dave McLean: And then they put in walkways. Nobody could touch the walls. They kept you away from them. But it was that sort of thing where one is involved with the architects and so many others.

Neil Mackay: I was going to ask about that. Because that's another whole area of collaboration.

Dave McLean: And the circulation, because the artifacts, the very things that the place was value, were getting destroyed. They would just, people, once you touch something, it's gone. It was like crystals; some crystals were hair. They would flow in the breeze. It was actually crystals. So, you know, I was involved with doing all that. Then I came up with the ideas, about that time they sent me to Montreal, to the World's Fair, for a couple of weeks.

Neil Mackay: Oh, the expo?

Dave McLean: Yeah. And I went up there and Russ Hendrickson, again, trusted me to go up. Gave me the week. Drove my little car up there.

Neil Mackay: Was that 1967?

Dave McLean: Expo '67. Yeah. So, I'd seen all of that and I'd gotten more exposure to the best exhibit designers in the world.

Neil Mackay: Was the Park Service part of it? Or were you looking at it to—

Dave McLean: They sent me up there, no. It was the U.S. pavilion, which was Buckminster Fuller's big geodesic dome. And then they had the exhibits, which was representing America. I saw that and I was real proud. And I was impressed with that. Just the fact that they could do such colossal things. I'd never been to — in 1939, my mom took me to New York when I was seven years old to the 1939 World's Fair. With the ball and the sphere. You knew that thing that stuck up. I never knew. All this stuff in your life, you never know where it's going to go.

Neil Mackay: So, you were in Montreal to—

Dave McLean: Just to see the whole fair.

Neil Mackay: To absorb kind of ideas—

Dave McLean: Go up there and get ideas. Take a camera with you and get ideas. And I shot more pictures. Stayed with a French-Canadian couple. And, you know, hitchhiked over to a place called Longueuil [best guess] and would stay there with them. I couldn't speak French. And—

Neil Mackay: Wow. This is really interesting.

Dave McLean: It was quite an exposure. And again, it was like me, telling the story about my son with his camera, Russ trusted me to go up there and just absorb all this stuff. It was a changing of my lifetime. And I'm still doing stuff that I saw up there, you know? The use of materials and graphics. And the film stuff. Oh! You went into the American pavilion, and somebody had the guts to say, "You stand in the middle, and we're going to do film that goes all the way around, up above your head."

Neil Mackay: So, were there any other colleagues of yours with you?

Dave McLean: No. No. Just me. He sent me up there. He realized that I was going to, you know, go be this nut that was going to take off. Never able to snuff me out after that. (laughs) But it was such an exposé of how to handle huge amounts of people. How to get them to see complicated subjects and to keep them organized, and to keep them interested enough to stand in line

for four hours before they got through. In a couple of instances, even putting them on treadmills. The sidewalk moved, and you can't stop. There were so many people. Four thousand people an hour are going through an exhibit and coming out the other end.

Neil Mackay: At this point, were your designer colleagues, were they changing, too? I mean, how was the kind of design approach, in what ways might it have been evolving at that point?

Dave McLean: The designers were the guys that had been the illustrators. And they knew how to do wonderful portraits and illustrations, scenes.

Neil Mackay: Two dimensional.

Dave McLean: Yeah. And they knew how to do exhibits. They'd done exhibits. But it was not the thing that was going to be the most effective. They were doing what they knew. And along came new people. Like Bruce Geyman. And they hauled in, you know, an architect, Kip Stowell. They began to pull people from the field. Ben Miller had been in a historic park. [On this piece of paper] I've listed Russ Hendrickson. Ed Bierly, he went off to Africa, I think, as a painter of wildlife. So, the guys were not into the — they knew it. They did the stuff. It wasn't that. But it wasn't the thing that would be most effective. It wasn't that they couldn't do exhibits. They did exhibits. They'd been doing them long before I came along and even knew what an exhibit was. And then there were the people that built the stuff.

Dave McLean: So, you had, like Peder Kitti; he was amazing. When you'd say you wanted to do something, he would sit there and start to make it happen. He could build a diorama. He could make something dimensional. He could do little figures. With a diorama, there's a transition from what's in the front being bigger and what's in the back is getting smaller.

Dave McLean: But it has to be done at a believable scale. These guys, they were pros. I don't know if anybody does that anymore. They probably do it with a computer today. But, and there was so much depth and so many years of experience there. But the transition began as we started doing new things.

Dave McLean: While I'm still in Springfield, which was where they moved from the mall out to Springfield, exit five on the Beltway, they came up with this idea in Washington of doing, because the riots were imminent, eminent? What is it? Anyway, they were coming. And they knew some danger was coming. So, they brought in this guy, Osborne, from up in New York City. He was a famous cartoonist. And he came up with the idea of Summer in the Parks. Let's go have a party every weekend. The Park Service is going to put big bands out there. We're going to have parties in all the parks in the city.

Dave McLean: They said, “How’d you like to do the centerpiece for it?” So, the French bicycle team is coming over to race around the ellipse behind the White House. And there were these wild guys up on Fourteenth Street. They were doing these psychedelic illustrations of things. You know, very distorted. So, I took some of those ideas and I built these bicycles made out of cardboard. My wife Rose was out there with me. We stuck all these poles up, laid them all over the ground and translated them into these distorted bicycles. That was the centerpiece of the race. The French bicycle team was here, going around the outside. And I’m driving up my little car and we’re painting them on the ground on a Sunday afternoon. I didn’t know they were going to pay me for this extra. I should have gotten paid extra. (laughs)

Dave McLean: Anyway, Summer in the Parks turned out to be an incredible time. We brought a lot of people together. And it made a difference. And when the riots finally came, I think it helped to ward that off.

Dave McLean: But all of this was tied into this brave new world that was happening. First with the visit to Montreal. Then Russ said, “They want to do something at the entrance to the American Pavilion, to talk about our national parks.” So that’s when I went back up and did this exhibit in the waiting area, before you got into the main auditorium. That was when I hired the French guys to work for me. And I couldn’t speak any French to them. A couple of guys, funny guys, really hardworking and humorous, and they’re building this thing. I can tell they don’t know who this guy is from America with these funny looking images. It was flags, and I’ve got pictures of it and all. But—

Neil Mackay: So, there were some, not necessarily specific park visitors center projects, but kind of special projects.

Dave McLean: It was special things that kept coming up. And they soon found that I could go out and do it and knock myself out because I got enthusiastic about it.

Neil Mackay: You kind of continued to do that in your career after that.

Dave McLean: Yeah. Well, it got to a point, years later, when, you know, the Peter Principle took over and they wanted to make me a supervisor. I fought tooth and nail, but I was the head of the exhibit designers along with my boss, Bob Johnsson, and then Saul Shiffman was in charge of the planners. And I had to do performance reports and all this stuff, and evaluations. I think it went on for eight, ten years. I was not a happy camper. I’m a creative guy. Eventually they changed administrations one day. And they came down and said, “You’re now head of special projects. You’re the chief.” As my friend Ed Nieto called up, he said, “Ole, Jefe! You are the

chief.” In Spanish. So that was, again, return to the freedom of being able to express yourself and do things. I just loved every minute of it.

Dave McLean: I have this wonderful wife. Rose and I were married way back when we started the Summer in the Parks thing. She, bless her soul, would go with me on those weekends down the mall and go to the big concerts. Invite her mom and dad down. Stevie Wonder was singing one time, and the entire black crowd pushed us right up to the stage. We said, we better get out of here. There was just this tension that was going. But she, Rose was the one that lovingly supported my enthusiasm through all these years, even as she took on becoming a mother to our three children. She is my strength and stability and life’s love.

Dave McLean: In the midst of this, you know, I’m going out on the racing circuit with my sailboats. I’m doing Olympic style high competition stuff with the little sailboats that you put on the thing and go to New England, go to Florida. Rose has just been incredible. My backbone. I don’t know where I’d be without her. I really don’t. She’s just amazing. She stayed home with our kids all those trips. And I would take her with me once in a while, but not nearly enough to ever pay back for the years that she spent at home here.

Neil Mackay: So that Harpers Ferry Center, when did the actual transition, physical, like you started working there? Did the doors open in ‘70?

Dave McLean: We had worked up in some of the old buildings before they actually moved us up there into the design center. The Armorer’s House.

Neil Mackay: Oh, in Harpers Ferry.

Dave McLean: Uh huh. When we transferred from Springfield, and physically, we physically moved all our stuff up ourselves. And Carl Dagan, bless his soul, without permission, he moved the AV people to the old Anthony Library. And one of the assistant directors was walking through there and the center hadn’t quite opened up yet. And there’s Carl. He’s got his whole AV section. He didn’t ask permission. He asked for forgiveness. (laughs) And he told me, he said, “Howard Baker said, ‘Carl what are you doing up here?’” Oh, well, he faked his way in. He moved his whole division up there. On his own. He would take a chance. Carl and his wife Andy became close friends and experienced so much of life, right up to the day he passed. I so miss him!

Neil Mackay: Then they were designing the building.

Dave McLean: As the building came together, there were all the sections, all the divisions, and all the new chiefs.

Neil Mackay: What was that like? Before you were painting a picture of sort of disparate interpretive media operations here and there.

Dave McLean: Yeah.

Neil Mackay: And now you're all—

Dave McLean: Now they've brought everybody together. And they've got a chief. And they've got a guy, Bill Everhart takes you in his office and said, "You know all about what you do. I will give you the funds to do it." I mean, it was just like that. It was just a blessing. I mean, I'll never forget the time that, I had never been to San Francisco. I was designing an exhibit out there. They were going to build it out there at some west coast thing that contracting had chosen. And I'm in the parking lot. And I saw Bill. I said, "I've never been, I'm going to go tomorrow, do the red eye, and get back, I'm going to save you some money. I'll go one day and come back the next."

Dave McLean: He said, "Where you going?" He said, "Have you ever been to Angel Island? You ever been down to Fishermen's Wharf? Ever been to Carmel?"

Dave McLean: I said, "No. I've never been out there before."

Dave McLean: He said, "Put it on my account. Take five days." He said, "Take your wife." You know, was a phenomenal time. Because after, I'd do anything in the world for the man. It was just like, he just trusted me to go. After that, even up to that point, we always worked nights at the center. We never clocked out when it was time to go home. We'd be there doing stuff.

Neil Mackay: Now I was going to, because one of the interesting things about your work, you've talked about it a lot before with me, is interpretive planning. Going on IP trips, we call them. Interpretive planning.

Dave McLean: Yes.

Neil Mackay: Where everybody in the different media come together and go to the park to try to holistically approach a new way of storytelling.

Dave McLean: This was Mark Sagan's, Mark Sagan's idea.

Neil Mackay: Tell me about that a little bit. Did that start when the center opened? Or was that previous?

Dave McLean: I believe it started with the center. Mark Sagan was there while Bill Everhart was in charge. But Mark believed in the interpretive prospectus. Which is how all the media is going to work together and complement each other. And overall, more importantly for the bean counters, they knew that the guy that worked for movie making said we're going to need

so many square feet. We're going to need a theater. And okay, give me your price. How much is it going to be? They had an estimate of what it was going to cost. So, year one, year two, year three, that visitors center, that park, finally got its interpretive shot. And when it came up, it was like every three years, they had these great big sessions at the center where they would choose which park was going to get what. And they would sit down and spread all the parks out and they would say all right, so and so park is going to get its movie this year. Because the IP team had gone out there and said, but they didn't just go by themselves. They went with all the other media people. I'm in there saying exhibits and somebody else is talking about publications. What it began to do was to meld all of the things together. The people in conservation realized that Dave McLean said he wanted a left-handed shovel [unclear] to go in the exhibit. And it might come up next year. We've got to go get that, and we've got to preserve it. Because he said in that prospectus, he definitely has got to have one of those. And so, you began to get the preparation coming up, and the budget people beginning to see it. But overall, when you talk to a park, you said look, we've got experience doing this in other parks. You want to see how we did that? And they'd say, "Send us a team." And so, they funded just an IP team. It was just the greatest thing in the world. I must have been to 25 different ones over the years.

Neil Mackay: Were there any that come to mind that were particularly—

Dave McLean: Fun? (laughs)

Neil Mackay: Yeah. Or just where maybe, maybe was for, you know, a breakthrough in terms of thinking about how to mix different media together, or were, you know, maybe it was a new park?

Dave McLean: Yeah. Many of them were brand new parks. Many of them were established parks that had things in place. Many of them were where they were changing to a new approach, the stuff had been there forever. Back to Mission 66 goals. But they had the very classic approach. Rocky Mountain National Park, outside of Denver. I went there beforehand. But we went as a team, also. And went to their little exhibit center. There was just a building, maybe 30 feet square. And in it were these Class A exhibits about natural history. And they said, "You want to see our collection?" And they opened the drawers under the exhibits of the birds and animals and all. There were every bird from the time they were just hatched, all the way up, in the drawer, these little taxidermied birds of every shape, so they could do a natural history talk right there. That was one of the parks when we finally came in and we did a whole new visitor center and everything, I said, "What ever happened to the old exhibits?"

Dave McLean: He said, “Come on down the road. I’ll show it to you.” They’d kept it; the parks loved their old exhibits so much, they kept them sometimes, they said. You know, “I’ve been coming in since I was a boy. What happened to that exhibit?” The guy would say, “Okay, come on. Don’t tell anybody.” Because when they took the money, they didn’t give any money for the old exhibit to be kept up. So, there was a natural pull, it was like somebody changing your house right under you. So, the business of doing a combined prospectus team, it was the most fun trip to go on. Because you knew you were going to be there a week. You knew that you were going to be in concert with a lot of the people that you would be with from then on. Whoever you made that agreement within the film department, or in the conservation or in the publications.

Neil Mackay: [Or outdoor exhibits waysides?]

Dave McLean: All the different media, they were on your side. It wasn’t somebody coming up with a lone idea in the fabric of a park.

Lu Ann Jones: There we go. That’s good.

Dave McLean: You can hear, (makes swallowing noise). My pacemaker’s just over here. My defibrillator’s next to it. (makes whining noise)

Lu Ann Jones: (laughs) I hope we’re not picking that up.

Dave McLean: No. Heartbeat, possibly. I don’t know. We’ll see. What is that funny sound?

Neil Mackay: No, I think it’s great to hear about a lot of the beginnings of the Harpers Ferry Center.

Dave McLean: The center was a breakthrough. I guess the other thing that was even larger than we knew was that there were national parks around the world. America’s best idea was the planting of an idea, that had sort of started in other parts. The British began to come over with what they called the Countryside Commission. Which was not the British national parks. We began to cross-pollinate. The coolest thing was to go to their places and go to their countries. And then the Russians came along. A bunch of Russian delegates came to Harpers Ferry. You know, it was this exchange of ideas. And later, it wasn’t right away, but later, I got to go to some of these places and see what they call a national park. I mean, it was so cool.

Neil Mackay: You went to quite a few places.

Dave McLean: Yeah.

Neil Mackay: And, to work. I mean, you were—

Dave McLean: It was just an eye opener. Yeah.

Neil Mackay: So, the countries that you went to—

Dave McLean: To Bulgaria and Poland and stuff like that. And to Japan.

Neil Mackay: Saudi Arabia.

Dave McLean: And Saudi, yeah. We went to before the Gulf War, in 1990, 1989.

Neil Mackay: So, what were some of the things you did when you went abroad?

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Dave McLean: Well, first of all, they would say they needed a team to come. It was interesting, because we'd go along with the chief people at Harpers Ferry. The director of the center, the chief architect from Denver. The chief of interpretation of the Park Service. Some of the heavy hitters. We'd meet with these people with a whole different frame of mind. The only time we went separate was Scott Harman and I went to Tokyo, just the two of us, from Guam, and we spent three days exchanging ideas with the Japanese. But the business of going like to Poland and to Bulgaria is that we went with the head of the center and the people from our regional offices. And also, the USAID. I can't remember the letters. It's the Institute for International USAID [United States Agency for International Development], I forget. But we met with these higher government circles, you know. And we'd also go to the embassies.

Dave McLean: Which was a funny feeling, to go to another country and we'd go into our little representation in the middle of this foreign land. I'd never done that before, and that was really interesting. Of course, the frame of mind, you've got a little Marine there. And his job is to shoot anybody that comes in the door. He's a military thinking guy. And here we come in here with these fanciest ideas, like what you got in this country? So, some of those were most interesting.

Dave McLean: The Bulgarian trip involved taking us to places which had been subject to historic battering, I guess I should say, from the Nazis, from the World War Two, and the communists having been there for 50 years. And it was just a cultural shock. I mean, I couldn't believe it. They had been there in that condition for 40, 50 years. One real landmark night was they said, "Come to our house." And of course, the town is very gray. It looks like those old movies. Remember "The Third Man" theme? You could just almost hear it, everything, the skies are gray, the cities are gray, it's grim. And they said, "Come to our place."

Dave McLean: We go up these old back stairs this evening after we've been meeting all day. We're in their little home. They're nice homes, they've got Persian

carpets on the floor and drapes, kind of dark, everything's heavy. But they're cheerful, they're bright. But they've all got scars from the years of being under that oppression, and of course I'm there with Dick Hoffman, who is this wonderful colleague, just lift you right off the ground spirit. He's saying, "Well, what do you do? Got some music?" Of course, the shocker was, "You like Tommy Dorsey?" That was what they had. They hadn't had any new music since Tommy Dorsey. It was a shocker. Dick and I said, "Let's roll up the rug. That's what we do in America." And we danced! We jitterbugged with them. Later on, we sat around and listened to them talk about, "Yeah, I remember you Americans. You bombed us. Your B29s came through, bombed our town into oblivion."

Neil Mackay: You were developing actual exhibit plans and designs?

Dave McLean: We were there to do a little cultural visitors center. Not in the city of Sofia, but up in a little town called Dragalevski. And we went up there and met the people and they put on festivals for us and dances and played their really unusual music. We had their meals. It was just the craziest thing I'd ever done.

Neil Mackay: So were they sort of learning as you were doing, or trying to—

Dave McLean: Well they were telling us what it was they wanted to tell, and they were showing us. They took us through the various things that they wanted to be included. One was going down the road, way out in the countryside, beautiful forest.

Dave McLean: We got to this big clearing, and there's two Russian tanks and one German tank sitting there. "This is part of our park." And you know, you could see they just stopped right there. That was where the war ended for those three vehicles, and no one has touched them. And their great sand dunes area was still an active military maneuvers area. "We do tank practice out here." You know, not like ours, pristine.

Dave McLean: Down the road further, you come to this little, tiny glassed-in visitors center. You go in and it's all in Bulgarian. And there's two rows of tombstones right there. And Dick was very quick at telling us, he said, "Those were all the intellectuals the Nazis murdered. The first row is one day, the second row is another." And they commemorate the poets, the artists, the musicians. It was just a whole different look at doing a community. I mean, we have our Civil War, which is awful. But it's a real shock. And they wanted us to do an exhibit about this.

Neil Mackay: So, you were doing the whole plan and then they were going to build it?

Dave McLean: Yeah. Yeah. I've got the models and all this stuff, and the drawings and all that stuff we did. We'd do it in like two weeks. You know, we'd go there and work like crazy.

Neil Mackay: I had the opportunity to travel with you to Argentina. That was a chance to also collaborate.

Dave McLean: Yeah.

Neil Mackay: Where you were actually showing how you design.

Dave McLean: We designed it.

Neil Mackay: Having them collaborate so they—

Dave McLean: Yeah. They were part of it. And they knew what we were doing. And we had town meetings. Dick and I would be conducting these in Bulgaria. All these people, the politicians, would come in and they'd talk and talk and talk. And then we'd say, wait till they finished. Then they'd talk for 20 minutes and give us a two-word answer. Dick and I said, they're not telling us what they said. (laughs)

Neil Mackay: But sometimes, well, like in Argentina, you were actually helping to train their staff to see how it was done, how they interpret things as well.

Dave McLean: It was a way of thinking and a way of looking at it a little differently. And having been out of, not had the exposure that we'd had, and all, you know, so many parks to mess up. You can try a lot of times and say, whoops, we did that. Didn't work. And they had not had that. But they've got their one place. And of course, the Argentine thing was just, it's a fabulous area.

Dave McLean: And of course, the amount of geography that it covers. We went up to Iguazu all the way down to, what is the name of the tip, Patagonia.

Dave McLean: The international trip to Bulgaria ended up in Dick and I doing all the drawings, doing a model, doing a floor plan and all the topics that they wanted. Collecting all the graphics. Dick doing all the writing. I mean, it was a complete thing when we finished it. The model's one thing, but there was a total, I've got pictures and I've got the whole plan where we finished, where we came away and they said, they actually built it. I mean, it was so enlightening. It was a different way of thinking parks. So, we had to be a little flexible, too.

Neil Mackay: So, what did you bring back from that? I mean, were there things that you could, just in general from your international experiences?

Dave McLean: Yeah, I think what we brought back was there's a lot of commonality. They looked like soldiers; the Park Service guys. They were in charge of protecting. But they had a little different enemy than we have here. There

were guys that would come in from over the border ten miles away in the next country, and say, “We’re taking some object. No more [unclear].” And they were part soldiers and part naturalists. But wow, were they educated. They were classically education.

Neil Mackay: But there were some commonalities between the countries?

Dave McLean: Yes. Yes. I thought there was a lot with our Park Service guys having first been rangers as part of their, you know, their, however you classify what they did. It was so gratifying when we got an idea across and they would see it and were open to seeing it. I mean, some places you go, and they said, “We’re not going to do that.” You know? They liked it the way they had it. They were keeping it close. There’s a bunch of Bulgarian wood carved figures on the sideboard over there that I picked up on the street. That’s the idea of what the people look like. Beautiful carved. We put them out at Christmas time.

Lu Ann Jones: Would you like to take a little lunch break?

Dave McLean: Yeah. Let’s do it. Let’s go. Okay, hit the button. Let’s move this away.

Lu Ann Jones: Resume here now after lunch.

Dave McLean: Okay. And so 1:30, 1:29.

Neil Mackay: Dave, one of the things we were talking about over lunch which would be great to maybe capture here, too, a little bit, is talking about the architectural collaboration. You were mentioning a few projects how the exhibits would be created, connected with the architecture, and really getting to work with architects, and that kind of back and forth. So, I don’t know if you—

Dave McLean: Yeah. It kind of goes back to the sensible end of an interpretive prospectus, in that the people that are going to do the media, if that’s the proper, medium or media, whatever, for interpreting to people, have to declare what kind of space they want to the architects and engineers. And then the landscape architects have to declare that early on in order for them to get the money. They’ve got to know how many square feet you want. Oh, I don’t know. Pick a number. It’s not like that. Then there’s the relationship of the spaces in the center when someone in their infinite knowledge said, “We’re going to have a building at Tuzigoot, and it’s only going to be so many square feet. Do you remember the last one we did? This is as much money as, you can [unclear] it up any way you want.” So, you’re now competing with a lot of different ones.

Dave McLean: There’s the people that said, “oh, man, we’ve got a new building? I always wanted to have a nice archive. I need a good study area for me. I need a—

hey, man, maintenance needs, you know.” And so, they started by asking at these meetings, what do you do?

Dave McLean: So, I figured out what an average visitors center was. Look at the kind of stuff that I think’s coming. And said, hmm, this is maybe the second size, not the biggest size. I was able to plot out the shape of the space that I wanted it to be. Not a perfect rectangle, but be longer, you know, one way or the other. And also say where I wanted people to come in. I wanted an entrance up in this corner or something like that. But how much power are you going to need?

Dave McLean: Well — and then I got started going to lighting conferences and saying, “Okay, I want you guys to do this for me. I know it’s a little expensive to start with. But 18 inches off the floor, I want power sources all the way around the room. And that’s going to be one every eight feet.” So, they, “Okay, we got that, we got that.” Then I’d say, “Well, but in the ceiling, light tracks are eight feet long, so I want to grid that ceiling out as if I’m going to use light tracks. Not against the wall, but eight feet out from the wall.” So, I did all of the eights. I could figure that out. And then say, “And on a light track, I’m going to use ten 150-watt bulbs on each one of those light tracks.” And so, they’d figure how many watts that was. Then I’d say, “I’m going to use X number of [the] kind of light bulb that doesn’t put out but so much heat.”

Dave McLean: Now you could use LEDs. But then it was incandescent or florescent. And the florescent people brought out, the people in conservation said, “You’ll bleach everything else in here! We’ve got to put the ultraviolet screens on it.” And all that stuff.

Dave McLean: So, once I’d gone through that enough times, I was able to stand up with my piece of that building, what I wanted to do and gave me the most flexibility to still do an exhibit that was successful. It was only when I sort of got some crazy idea going in my head that I really wanted to do that I painted myself in a corner. And they said, “Why does that wall have to have a 60-foot radius? Why does that wall have to be curved like that from one end to the other? And what about the room that’s on the other side? Or if that’s the outside of the building, how about all those curved bricks? Oh, man, you’re giving me a headache.”

Dave McLean: So, then you would, unless you needed like a mural, a diorama, you know, some sort of panoramic thing, then you would try to work it out ahead of time. That was my way of trying to get the most I could beforehand. That whatever would happen. And that came and went with a lot of technology, because later on, like at Fort McHenry, I did a room that was 10 by 15. I lit it. I did a period setting of Revolutionary War soldiers that had been

there. And they'd just left. They'd just had their lunch. Candles on the table. Tablecloths, different things. I lit that entire exhibit with one single lightbulb sending light through fiber optics. And the fibers emerged, even in the candles, I could have flickering candles in the table. That's one light bulb. The maintenance guy opens the door outside of the room to check the bulb. Turn it on for the day, and off at the end of the day. And he had a little sensor light outside the room; there's a red light on. It's still on in that room! So, times like that, you could try by learning some of the technology and listening to the engineers. Satisfy, and get the most, get the best that you're going to get in the long run. And then you were left alone.

Dave McLean: Where I got most involved was with a business that the presentation to the public is done with an exhibit. It's also done with a film. It's done with the sales area, where people fill by printed matter. And it's done by the desk, the personal service. But even more so, like at Jamestown, people go to the restroom. They walk all the way to the visitors center and they say, "Where are the restrooms?" And that's the first thing. Maslow's law of needs or something. So, at Jamestown they said, restroom's on the way in. It's a separate building. Down there where the walk turns. And you get up to the visitors, all the guys just point. "You just passed it." (laughs)

Dave McLean: So, in the whole diagrammatic moving of people through a center, you can regulate clogs and backups and knots of people. Sometimes you have huge crowds. Sometimes you're on a circuit where they drop two Greyhound buses. And the park rangers get out front say, "Well, you can go in the auditorium now. Visitors center is full." So if it comes to choosing spaces that relate to each other, and I would prefer to have some influence on them, and also be with a cooperating association who are really paying for the show with their beneficial bucks of interpretation, then you can get this balance and make the place work. And then hopefully the architect will go along with you and say, you know. And go back to the big pie. He has got, from what I just told him and what the other people in the mix tell him, he's got to power it. He's got to cool it. He's got to heat it and do all that stuff. So, it's a big thing, which I've gone through many, many, many times. And it's, I'm supposed to do this when I do many, many times. (laughs) Fingers and stuff. That I got more people on my side, rather than getting into an adversarial thing with the people that, they can't be flexible. They're not loosey goosey. It's, we're in North Dakota, and a square foot out here costs so and so. And that's the money. That's all we got. And so—

Neil Mackay: David, what also struck me was how when you would do that, and correct me if I'm wrong, but you weren't only thinking about your particular

installation. But you were thinking ahead to future designers and kind of setting it up so there was that perimeter of power. There was the—

Dave McLean: Yeah. I never was going to use as much power as I asked for. And I had that every eight-foot grid on center of the ceiling. This came four feet out from the wall and then grid in the ceiling out every eight feet.

Neil Mackay: And not getting so tied that it would only work for your sort of exhibits, but for future designers.

Dave McLean: Yeah. That's right. And aesthetically it's in the plans where this power grid exists, but you don't see it. It's covered up. And they know to plot out to their drill hole, you have a power source. So those were collaborations. But jobs like Channel Islands, where I worked with a wonderful architect guy named Dick Cusick.

Neil Mackay: Yeah.

Dave McLean: Yeah. You got the whole stack. Long arms. Good. Let me pull these over here. Dick Cusick and I would work together. He was an architect for Denver. And he would come up with some, we'd say, "We're going to do so and so." And he'd say, "Yeah, I got this idea." He was from a school where they had found that the great orb, an opening in the top of the building, was the thing to integrate the exterior and the interior.

Dave McLean: It's a little different play on Frank Lloyd Wright's, you know, indoors/outdoors. But we'd play ideas up together. I'd go sketch with him. Not many architects will do this, will let you sit down with them and sketch ideas. We came up with the, with a visitor center in Channel Islands — for Channel Islands (north of L.A.) National Park — that was going to be a pyramid from this point, this crease, this crease and this over here, the building was open on one side. And then it was open over to a point. And then that other little piece of the pyramid was going to be the place the visitor was received. The desk, all that stuff. and across here was an enormous tide pool. Because it was all about the Pacific and the tide pools and all the little critters. Then up this wall were cliffs. We worked out the plumbing and everything, so the tide was going to rise in the building. I mean, it was just wild. And we were together. And then I had all of these big cutouts of whales and porpoises and sea creatures suspended from above.

Neil Mackay: You made a model.

Dave McLean: I made a model. I've got pictures of it in here. Again, it was that collaboration. Well, on something really bizarre. And I presented it to the director of the Park Service at Harpers Ferry. And [unclear] we went to director's office. And he got to the end of the presentation. He said, "I'm

sorry, Dave.” He said, “How much is this going to cost?” Eight million dollars. He said, “I guess I’m going to have to — that’s a little too conspicuous.” The other thing, it was the most, the highest building that close to the Pacific Ocean. There’s a law that buildings can’t be but so high so close to the edge of the water. He said, “It’s the highest thing on the whole west coast.”

Dave McLean: And this is where you went back with your architect. So, they said, okay, cut it back to four million. So, the architects took that. Now you’ve got a building out there that stands today. And it goes up like, it’s got a little point. This is cut away over here. There’s a funny little building with a slope. Over there is the other half of the pyramid. See the little pieces are there. So, it worked. But we had to cut it back from the original idea. And that’s the business with working with architects. Sometimes they will go with you, or will go wonderfully overboard, and you dream together. And then they’ve got to answer for it, too.

Neil Mackay: But it requires early collaboration.

Dave McLean: It’s both of you going for something that’s going to be really architecturally possible. In all that other area, that building was all offices.

Neil Mackay: Functional.

Dave McLean: And theater and all that stuff. It was on a piece of property in the marina that was 120 feet one way and 60 the other. It was crazy. But those are the kinds of collaborations that you sometimes get to do with the architect.

Neil Mackay: What about kind of the challenges of working in historic buildings? Because of course — you described a new building. But for a lot of the work it’s in existing buildings.

Dave McLean: With a historic building like those at Harpers Ferry, there was a oh, golly, what’s his name, the young man that had been there for years. Ray, Jack, somebody. Can’t think of his name. Anyway, we had this idea that we wanted to tell the story, the fact that when Harpers Ferry was taken over during the Civil War, that they took over certain buildings. Just like GIs did in World War II. You see those old war movies where they took over a place. And we’ve got a fireplace and a mansion in the main hall of the thing. And they pulled a tank in, and they use the cannon for a clothesline, and they’re living in the space. They found on the wall in this one history building in shoe polish the name of, his name was Stuyvesant or something, Schuster or something like that. And they looked up and found that he was — I learn all this stuff from working with a historian — he was from the Philadelphia Zouaves, which is a bunch of guys, they were like firemen. But they wore red knickers. (laughs) I mean, it’s crazy. I don’t

know anything about this. But they found from that one thing who the troops were. So, we did a reconstruction of that whole room with a little glass wall. And I've got a model of it in here.

Neil Mackay: In the historic building.

Dave McLean: In the historic building. And it meant that we needed light above. And of course, it's now, we needed some kind of light. But we were able to bury the lights in the fixtures in the ceiling without disturbing the historic fabric, as they call it. That was where you take a historic building. And the other is, you can't go in. (laughs) Oh, yeah, I'm remembering my great faux pas, the master armorer's house. I did an array of the arms, all the rifles and all the stuff that John Brown was going after. And all the ones that the master armorer did. Made an exhibit up. Wouldn't go in the building. Wouldn't fit in the building! Built it in Springfield. I had to take the historic windows out. Which thank goodness were tall enough. And they got this exhibit through the windows and down the hall. You could work with architects. That was the maintenance people that made me look good?

Neil Mackay: That kind of brings up, I think, a tremendous collaboration between you and Bill Brown.

Dave McLean: Oh, Bill was great to work with!

Neil Mackay: Historic furnishings curator at the center.

Dave McLean: He'd been at Maryland Public Television for a number of years. He did one of the prime shows and knew, he was connected to probably every historian in the country. He was very resourceful in the ideas he would come up with. We did, that was the last big two million dollar exhibit we did out in Springfield was his idea. He would come up with, hey, what was it that ran through things at the turn of, this was in 1860. What was it that you saw everywhere? Pigs! There was pigs all over the town. So, we did cutout pigs. Just weird stuff to put in exhibits. We'd do these kind of. People would ask questions. "Now let me tell you. Here's the story." So, it was those introductions that you get with a really good curator. And Bill was just, he was so steeped in his academic thing. But he was so imaginative. We just had more fun together.

Neil Mackay: So, he did many projects.

Dave McLean: Bill and I did a lot, yeah.

Neil Mackay: And he brought that whole historic furnishings, curatorial perspective.

Dave McLean: He was also part of the move to recast the cannons for the bicentennial. And they did them in Brunswick, I think it was. Brunswick, Maryland.

They actually went, gosh, if I could remember these names. But they cast cannons. They cast real cannons of the period and made up new ones that they needed. I mean, there was always something going on he'd come up with.

Dave McLean: But the collaboration and the ability to work with the architects on what was going to happen in the building, when in some cases the architects had never been involved in a facility that had to serve as an armature, I guess the best thing, to house the interpretive functions. So much of the time was spent in educating them. Not that I knew everything. But that they would, they would get to the point where they would listen and not just say, well, I don't care, it's a village, it's going to look like this.

Neil Mackay: So, you were working with architects from the Denver Service Center as well as architects from the private sector?

Dave McLean: Once in a while, sometimes it would be a guy from an organization that had never worked with the Park Service. It was really sometimes a struggle, sometimes it was a nice new look. They'd come in with some new eyes and say, hey, our guys never would have thought that way. That was good.

Dave McLean: But the business of making the space function and complementing the program of the park, and also giving the park a rationale to go back and say well why did you spend so and so many bucks to do that? And they'll go back, and all these people told them what to say. (laughs) It was fun.

Neil Mackay: Well, you know, there's a whole other notion here, too. I know when we were going over the initial notes and thinking about what to chat about. And you had the experience of working directly with some important people. For example, Director George Hartzog. You had mentioned having, you know, working with him, director of the NPS from was it 1964—

Lu Ann Jones: Mm hmm.

Dave McLean: Yeah. They would—

Neil Mackay: What was the context of that work? Because that seems like an interesting—

Dave McLean: It was his (George Hartzog) going before Congress with something. And I would go down there to the Interior building and help him put it together. It would either just be a bunch of pages in a book. It never was a model or anything like that. Sometimes it was a sketch. But most of the time it was a map—

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Dave McLean: — visuals and things like that that he needed to go before Congress where he didn't have the expertise. I always thought it was so funny, because he was such a remarkable man. But he had a technique of never being wrong when he met people. He would extend his hand and say, "I'm George Hartzog." And you'd have to give your name. It was a great technique. And I would work with him all week long, all weekend, you know, day and night and come back in on Tuesday morning. He'd say, "Hi, my name is..." and he'd do it every bloody time. He would do it, and it was great.

Neil Mackay: You would go down—

Dave McLean: We'd stay in the Interior building. Yeah. I remember I wrecked one of my Porsches one morning, I was so tired. I came early and took off on an onramp and the guy in front of me hadn't left yet. (laughs) (makes vroom sound) Too late.

Neil Mackay: That must have been an interesting experience.

Dave McLean: Well, it was good to be working with that level of people that you don't get to be with usually; I mean, you see them. They come and they give speeches to you. But there's a level, there's a layering of those that are in trenches and doing the actual work, and those that are, I mean, it's a rarefied area because you don't have any idea what they face. You talk to a lot of people that they get; I call it the Peter Principle. Because they get successful at what they do, and then they're promoted to a place where they don't want to be, and they're not good at it. They just know all the stuff under them that they did. But now they get poking their head into a different world. And they're asked to do things that they don't believe in. and I guess it's the way it works. I never quite understood, but I suppose that's the system. Because somebody's got to move up. (laughs)

Neil Mackay: Dave I know in your resume you also mention meeting Mrs. Coretta [Scott] King, and working on a presentation—

Dave McLean: I went with, I think it was Ben Miller. Who was it that was doing the curatorial stuff in the old brick building across the way from the center? I can't think of his name now. I've been doing pretty good bringing back some of these names. Anyway, we went to Atlanta. Martin Luther [King] had been assassinated. And "Time" had passed, and they'd gotten together the idea to do an exhibit as well as the memorial where there's a sarcophagus that sits with fountain, and they'd done that. And they wanted to do it. And so, we went there, and we went to Coretta's home, MLK's home. We walked in the front door and there she is sitting in the chair and she's talking to us. We're in the living room and I'm sitting there with her.

And we're talking about some of the ideas, you know, how do we talk about Martin? And then she said, "I'll tell you. Let's go down and look at some of his stuff." In the basement of this little brick house, I remember, his automobile, his bicycle, all his personal things.

Dave McLean: There's like a big cedar closet. Must be 20 by 20, and all his stuff has been preserved on racks and hangers and boxes and cases. She said, "Well, here's his briefcase. Would you like to open it? I'm too sensitive to open it. I've never opened it since he was assassinated." She asked me, this little white boy (laughs) from Tidewater, who had grown up with segregation. And I'm here in the home of one of the most prominent people in the world, who changed everybody's thing in the world. And as I opened it up, she said, "You'll see, there's his notes that he was writing. He was sensitive to certain things against his skin. And there's his silk underwear." We just went through all of his personal stuff. It was like going through somebody's pockets. It was a memorable moment to be sitting there with her.

Dave McLean: From that, I did the exhibit. There's a model in there. They brought all the stuff in and they said also, "And here's this round gold thing. This is the Nobel Peace Prize." Solid gold, you know? And it's about this big around. And it must be a half-inch thick. She said, "You can hold it."

Dave McLean: I said, "You want to put this in the exhibit?"

Dave McLean: And she said, "Uh..." She said, "Maybe that's not a good idea, right?" (laughs)

Dave McLean: So, I wish I could think of who the guy was in conservation. But we said, "We could probably make a good replica of this. So, if somebody does break the case..." So, they made a perfect replica at Harpers Ferry. They did a great job. We actually used his briefcase and a lot of his stuff; the real things are in the exhibit.

Neil Mackay: Oh, okay.

Dave McLean: Yeah. They actually were on the case. This is the first exhibit. And then later they came along with the New York exhibit designers where they did the March road and all that's there now. It's a whole different approach. But a lot more alive, a lot more actual voices going and actual witness the exhibit the way they did it so it's more of an exchange thing. But, yeah, that was kind of a neat moment to be with somebody that was part of our history. I had a couple of times when I was talking to some black people that I knew. I said, "I was part of something you'd be proud of, you know. And I bet you would have liked to have been the one that did it." So, it was good.

- Dave McLean: I've never been prejudiced. I don't know. Raised in the South and all this stuff. We had, didn't have a lot of money but somehow Mom had some people come from the black part of town to come and clean our house and do things like that, and even stay with us when we were little kids during the Depression. We were just a couple of years old. I've always felt no prejudice. In fact, Truman, when he came into office, and my first time in Louisiana, he in his not so wise, he integrated the army. He put one single black guy, in that 200 men, he put one. And he slept right next to me in his bunk that night. And I always thought about, what a thing to do to somebody. It was so awkward for him. He was from Emporia, Virginia.
- Lu Ann Jones: Emporia, Virginia?
- Dave McLean: Yeah. Yeah. It was funny, way down in the swamps in Louisiana.
- Neil Mackay: Dave, I think another highlight of your long career was receiving the Presidential Design Award in 1984, I believe?
- Dave McLean: Yeah. I don't know what I got that for. It's been too long. I really don't remember what it was. It wasn't one of those handshake things where I went up and he gave me an award. But it was quite an honor, and a lot of other people got them, you know? It was similar to the thing when they said, we have a lot of Korean veterans in the Interior Department, and we want to remember their service, and it's been 50 years since they were in the Korean War, and we want to give them recognition. So, I was able to get in my uniform. It was 15 years ago. And went down to the mall and this Korean general comes. This is like my Bronze Star that I got. They said it was for meritorious duty.
- Neil Mackay: Well certainly you had a distinguished career—
- Dave McLean: It was something.
- Neil Mackay: —before then and afterwards as well. And maybe if we could spend a little time talking about that legacy, it would be kind of nice. I mean, when you think back, you know, the mission of the National Park Service and your joining, as you were describing earlier, when it was in the midst of some change. And how things were interpreted.
- Dave McLean: Yeah.
- Neil Mackay: What thoughts would you have on your legacy, whether it's designing or the people or the Park Service as a whole?
- Dave McLean: I guess the thing that I feel good about that I tried was to break the mold from the stuff that you were trying to tell people, trying to stand on its own without any thought, much thought. It was just kind of put out there and it was so precious to the people that put it out there that they thought

everybody would get it. I had some times where we said, “What if we do it a different way?” I said, “I don’t know if this will work.” The thing was that whatever I said, I said it right. And somebody thought, well, let’s give it a try. I hate your idea, but let’s give it a try. It’s going to be all your fault if it goes wrong. (laughs) And it didn’t matter, you know? We did that a few times when we tried things. Some of them were done outlandishly just for the effect.

Lu Ann Jones: Are you thinking of a particular example of that?

Dave McLean: No. But I remember there were times when they were going to do something. And I said, that’s not very exciting. What’s a better way to get people’s attention? And I’d say, let’s put a baseball bat in with a sword. People would say, you know, they’d start asking questions. It would be crazy. Well, baseball bat’s pretty good. It’s got a limited range. (laughs) It was times like that when you had someone that you wanted to kind of shock out of their thinking.

Dave McLean: And what was neat was that they became an ally. They tried to think well, Dave, what if we do so and so? And I’d say, that’s a little far, but how about how about so and so? You know, and they’d start thinking experimentally. And I think that was what was fun to try out. The sort of seat-of-the-pants crazy stuff.

Lu Ann Jones: I’d like to explore that a little bit more. Because I feel like the Park Service, you know, is at another moment, I think, of real change. And my observation is that sometimes the Park Service is hard to change. It can get stuck in its ways. So, for you, that was one technique that you used, of just trying to kind of shock people, almost, out of their complacency—to invite them, almost force them, to think differently. Were there other ways that you felt like not only you, but I get the sense that there was. There was a cohort there. There was somebody like Bill Everhart that was really trying to manage change. Sometimes quite consciously, maybe unconsciously. How do you think those changes got made? And were they maybe more difficult than we — there must have been conflicts along the way, too.

Dave McLean: There definitely were, of course, because there’s a natural tendency to not want to change when you’re comfortable.

Neil Mackay: Right.

Dave McLean: And no one had ever told them that it didn’t work anymore. So, they were happy with what they had done, and they were the originators of the ideas, and so they weren’t about to do it and it equated to not about to take a chance. It’s always worked, we’re going to do it this way. When newer people came who had been exposed to newer ways of presenting things,

they kind of got the idea that things were creeping and were changing, and maybe we ought to try something different. Or maybe somebody came in, didn't know they were standing there, and really lambasted what they were looking at. Said, "That's the most boring damn exhibit." You know. And the guy would say, "Oh. That's mine." You know? And then they would almost slink away and come back. And when you brought them something new, said, "Can we try something different?" So, it's hard.

Dave McLean: So much is the fabric of the organization. The Park Service was really a bunch of soldiers. It started out with the military job of protecting. Later it became some people that came in and just saw the fantastic potential and saw how much they loved the place and how outstanding it was, and how much they wanted to tell everybody. Then there's a whole bunch of people that came along and said, don't tell anybody, because they'll ruin it. It's almost like a comedy act. You've got the protectors that are coming over here saying, "Stop protecting so much, let me look at it!" No, no, just we're going to look at it and kind of hold it to their vest.

Dave McLean: Those were the hardest things to change, because the people had been safe, and they'd been in their jobs a long time, and they had put a lot of their guts into getting the dollars to get that place saved. "And do you know how hard I worked and how many years, and you want to change that now? And what, it hasn't been working all these years?" And it had. But then it got to a point. And those are the moments where someone that beats to a different drummer, you know, has to kind of rattle the cage and say, how about we try something different? I'll let you be the author.

Neil Mackay: Did you have management support? In addition to your media colleagues, like leadership at a certain level that was helpful for you?

Dave McLean: Yeah. So, you've got to enlist, and it goes back to hiring. But you got a guy like Hartzog who hired a guy like Everhart, who hired three guys that were going to be heads of the divisions. And they were people that had bigger vision, had been out in another world. Even Gleason had been with the automobile industry. He had been with the big time Detroit. Carl had been not only with NBC network television for a good long time, he'd gone out in the communication world where there were a lot of protests and he was breaking down walls with the religious thing. He called it the God work or something that he had a name for it. He wasn't quite an atheist, but some things happened when he was, you know, down in, I think it was Georgia, that people just, it became political and not spiritual.

Dave McLean: And then Russ, Russ Hendrickson was the kind of guy that, he was from up in Beloit, Wisconsin. Went to Beloit College. Here was a guy that was a crazy combination. He'd been a Marine, he'd been a combat Marine. He

was in Korea before me. He was there when it really was nasty. And I didn't know until just recently that he was there about the same time I was. But he was like a commanding officer. He told some pretty wild stories. Bruce and I entertained him here, I guess it was about six months ago.

Dave McLean: So, you've got these people that have been places and done things. And Russ, especially, he would try things. Wow. We had a budget problem up at Fire Island, up off New York. Denver couldn't get enough money. They needed a building. They needed some kind of shelter for people. Russ went and found out the geodesic dome things from Popular Mechanics, I think it was. That you build out of two-by-fours. Build the diamonds out of two-by-fours and plywood. And then you put roofing material on that. He put up three shelters on Fire Island Beach. And I went up and he came up with the idea of using Sonotubes when they form columns. And we cut them off about this big. Cut the front off. Put molding there and made a case out of them. And I carved out all these figures out of Styrofoam. People playing on the beach and doing all this stuff.

Dave McLean: He did it without Denver! We put the three visitors center buildings up on the beach. And it worked. It stayed there for a while. I don't think a hurricane came. But—

Neil Mackay: He was experimenting.

Dave McLean: Yeah. It was busting the mold. It was saying we don't have the money. Well, let me give it a try. "How much money you got? I'll take that money," is probably what he said. But I've never quite known that. But I remember, he got away with it. And it's taking chances.

Neil Mackay: You've described people who were very helpful to you and so forth.

Dave McLean: Yeah.

Neil Mackay: But I think to round that story out, I mean, I think you're also known to have been a mentor for a lot of—

Dave McLean: Oh, I hope so.

Neil Mackay: — people coming to the Center, too. So, I wonder if you might share a little bit of that. Because I mean, what strikes me, [speaking to Lu Ann Jones] Dave was one of the first people I met when I first came to the Center. And your willingness to really help and support people who were new to the Center, maybe young designers and so on. So, I think it might be interesting to talk a little bit about that.

Dave McLean: There were some really fun times. When Rose and I were just married, we went to, Kip and I were selected to go to the Aspen Design Congress for a

week. This is like, go play in the sand box. These were the best designers in the world. And they come to Aspen. While we're out there, Mo Udall, was it, the ex-Secretary of the Interior, was there. One day he said, it's lunchtime, we're all sitting around on the grass. This is a big, popular man. He was in the film by what you call about the Park Service. And he said, "It's lunchtime. And I want you guys to go get whatever you get. Go get some food and come on back here. But just get enough for one more person." And that was when Kip went off, and each of us went off and got something, brought it back. But we brought that idea back to the Center.

Neil Mackay: [Vincent?]

Dave McLean: Yeah. And Kip and I had this crazy idea of let's do an event at the Center. We'll do the same thing here. And it brought all the people together. We went out to the farms nearby where they had these giant pieces of plastic that they wrap over new grown food for cattle. We found that we could seal it and make it into this air-inflated thing. We got those big fans that were in the hallways, you know, at Harpers Ferry Center. And we hooked them up.

Dave McLean: We did a pillowcase that covered the entire square in front of the building right there. And everybody had this lunch. And Kip felt like, it was his idea. It was crazy. And so, people started to take off. And I guess that was maybe something I contributed is try something crazy. And then people are crazier than me, I found out. They'd do stuff that was really, I hadn't thought of going that far. And we'd have a good time.

Dave McLean: I have to keep thinking, and of course Kip was one, as far as design and stuff, he was really a rebel architect in that he tried things, and he tried to get things done. And he brought something, you've seen samples of it, using architectural shapes for economy reasons and for expediency. Using systems. And it really influenced what I did. Because I began to find that if I did something custom for every exhibit, it got overpriced and exhibits went from a dollar a foot to 350 dollars a foot. So, I started trying things that he had brought. And that was where—

Neil Mackay: Does that speak a little bit to maybe the differences between what you can consider to be a traditional museum, let's say it's in an urban area or whatever, and that's the experience, you go to that museum, in contrast to National Park Service visitors centers exhibits. In other words, what are your thoughts on what distinctive characteristics there are about National Park Service exhibits and what that might mean for designers who are entering today?

Dave McLean: What they were, what somebody in their whatever it inspired them to do, but they were doing natural exhibits. They were making them out of

natural things. They would bring in pine bark inside an exhibit, in an exhibit room. They would bring a lot of stuff from — and it would work at first. But it looked, you know, it was such an overpowering thing., it began to detract from what subjects they were trying to show.

Neil Mackay: Within the National Park Service?

Dave McLean: Yeah. Yeah. At a lot of Park Service centers, there was the CCC, Civilian Conservation Corps buildings. And there were a lot of places where they did CCC type exhibits.

Neil Mackay: The early years.

Dave McLean: Yeah. And they were around for a long time. And people loved them. But they were difficult to keep up, and they weren't flexible, and you couldn't change them, because they were made of stuff you can't get anymore. A lot of materials were rare. But the business of looking at materials that complement what the subject is but not getting carried away with, we're at the seashore and I want my exhibits to look like waves.

Dave McLean: And you get this kind of General Motors styling effect where these curvilinear shapes are saying, "I'm at the ocean." It's corny but it takes away from what you're trying to say. There were so many opportunities to get carried away with the shapes and the styling. In some cases, it would have something to do with a little bit of the exhibit. But the rest of the exhibit was, why's this one shaped like that over here? So, the styling of the furniture in the place would get a little carried away. And I felt that there was a better need to let the subject matter come forward and let it, and whatever furniture we used, for better use of the term, whatever the armature is that holds it up is easily manipulated but is calculatable when you're doing a space. That was why I went to a lot of geometric shapes is because I could figure out quickly the five-foot aisles needed for a wheelchair to do a spin. Everywhere it had to be. And that was one rule. It's like painting backwards. In watercolor, you have to leave the white. You can't paint white on. That's like your dad must have known this. And so, it was like that. I'd put in all the pathways and say well what's left is where the exhibits go. And it was a fun way to do it. And if you did it perpendicular and horizontal, it became a really boring looking exhibit. It was square and had a lot of sharp corners that necessarily wouldn't work with things. So, then I'd try angles and stuff. And it was a method of, in the presence of a committee that had to leave for lunch in the next hour, they'd say, "Well, what do you think we can do?" And I'd just do something real quick. And I'd say, "Well, we can get about eight exhibits in this room." And they loved it. It was not, and I repeated it a whole lot of

times. But it was a way of quickly trying to not overdo the subject matter. And find an armature that could hold it.

Dave McLean: Bruce Geyman did one using the Abstractor System, which was, it's a tubing system that they join at the corner, they make squares. And you put a square off in any direction, you've got a cube. And you can have squished tubes or equilateral tubes. And then he had the idea of let's turn it on the side. So, it was sitting to the floor this way. And he used that at King's Mountain for the exhibits. And he hung the exhibits in space. You know? And it was just genius. I mean, it really was neat. But the park couldn't get it. It's just, it was the way it seemed to go. They hate you or they love you. And you're dealing with people that can't stretch that far. I thought that was a great exhibit. And it was flexible. They were doing, just what I was just saying, they could do anything you want. You can change it, you can edit, you can put enclosures around it and protect everything.

Dave McLean: Oh, here's another thing that really contributed a lot to — my thing was that we worked when we had the exhibit fabricators on the mall, and later at Springfield, and then even at Harpers Ferry, you went downstairs to where they built the thing and you said, "This is what I want to do" to Cliff Funkhouser. And Cliff would say, "Yeah, that's a pretty good idea." But then he'd go over, and he'd say, "See how much lumber over there?" And he'd tell me, he said, "That's going to really cost a lot of money." And he'd start to explain to me. He said, "You try it." I said okay, you've just taught me some, so you could try out stuff by going down. And the other thing that that afforded a designer was to feel scale. Scale is so important. You can get out of scale with components and they feel wrong.

Neil Mackay: So, when did the exhibit fabrication shop leave the Center? The Center opened officially—

Dave McLean: 1970. I don't know how many years, but I know that it was, we were building exhibits. We had our own tractor trailers. I don't know if you knew that.

Neil Mackay: A loading dock in the back.

Dave McLean: That's what it was for. We had our own spray booth big enough to put a full-size automobile. You could spray exhibits. Huge exhaust fan going out, polluting the whole area, the whole Shenandoah Valley with paint fumes. (laughs)

Neil Mackay: So, it was for a few years there.

Dave McLean: Oh, a good number of years. Yeah, Mary Herber, in fact, before she became, you know, a supervisor, she used to pull silk screens for me.

Neil Mackay: What kind of a change, it sounds like it must have been—

Dave McLean: The thing was, somebody on the outside said, “We can do that cheaper.” And the Park Service was shamed into saying, you know, we ought to spread the money around. That was the slippery slope. And it also was the slippery slope toward the people that designed the exhibits, you know, going to the fabricators themselves. And the people that supervised the contract as it came in, having never done an exhibit themselves. And it just, the more it went where you contract, you contract, and I think that’s where you are right now, is that the people that contract for fabrication or contract for exhibit design, many times they’ve never designed an exhibit. You’re just generating a lot of people that don’t have any business doing that. That’s what it seemed to me. And then, it contradicts what happened with the space program.

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Dave McLean: — They did get the lowest bid and they got the best things. And they never made a mistake. They never had a breakdown because of low bid. But what happened with the bidding process, which ran away a lot of contractors, was they skew the idea. Let’s get the best deal for the Park Service. We’ll say we want to reach out and ask for a lot of contractors to come. We’re going to guarantee whoever gets it, they’re going to have this contract for three years. And every year, we’re going to guarantee that we spend X number of dollars with them. Say, \$500,000 or \$50,000. It was ten thousand. It wasn’t much. So, they got a lot of people came in, and they couldn’t possibly use them all. So, they started paying out the money to these people that hadn’t done a thing for them. They were happy as they could be. I just got ten-grand. I haven’t done a thing for the Park Service, but they pay me. And it was a way of guaranteeing they got something for all their time.

Dave McLean: But then on top of that, they came along and said okay, next time we get a job, let’s bring in three of them and say, “Let’s renegotiate again. You gave me your best price when you came to work for us. Could you make us a better price?” And so, their profit went down. They made less and less each time. And then, you know, it was so much paperwork.

Dave McLean: I’ve talked to a lot of them that said, “We couldn’t afford to work for the Park Service.” Because they’re their best charity.

Neil Mackay: Well you were, of course you were there when the doors opened.

Dave McLean: Yeah.

Neil Mackay: And obviously, HFC's undergone a lot of change.

Dave McLean: I have no idea now where it stands.

Neil Mackay: But I guess it would be great to get your, maybe your sort of thoughts for future leaders. You know, so HFC is continuing its role.

Dave McLean: The leadership is driven by what the parks want to do. That was another trend that happened was that the parks were going out and getting their own stuff done for themselves. They didn't need a central design center. Once you remove the funds, you can't support a design center. So, you've got to get the people believing in there being the best price, the best deal and all from the central office. That's what it was all built on, and they were getting the best deal and the finest talent anywhere, because there were coming, breaking down the doors to get in to work at Harpers Ferry. So, if you're going to get people to come and work there, they've got to believe in that.

Dave McLean: They've got to realize this is the state of the art, they're going to have a future, they're going to matter. That works from the contracting officer right on down to the people that are putting pencil or their cursor to paper. You hire with a description of what the job's going to be and what the structure is. And piecemealing it only protects yourself. If you say we want somebody to do so and so and they don't realize what the kind of organization they're getting ready to join, quickly the people are going to join and then flee, because it's not the brave new world they were hoping for, and not this wonderful organization that had, and I think still does have a reputation, a good one. That flexibility and that whole knowledge. For what I lived through, it's got to start at the top. You've got to have somebody that is the director. And he's got his finger, George Hartzog made sure every congressman had a park in his state. That was the smartest thing to do. He went in, I don't think it was Rhode Island or somewhere he didn't have a national park. He could go to Congress, go up there and say, okay, you don't want that in your state.

Dave McLean: I lost my train of thought, what I was thinking. The building from the top. Having a director. Having a director of a center. That the whole pyramid, sort of like that, that all worked together. And the next level is the regional, the regional offices, plus the regional interpretive chiefs. How they come together, where they come from, you know? There's been a lot of, over the years, disturbances that were instigated by the chief of interpretation being, not totally believing in what they were doing. And sometimes they wanted to just take their region and go. And monetarily there must not have been enough, you know, damage incurred by their doing that.

Neil Mackay: So, what about those new designers entering—

Dave McLean: Well, you've got to—

Neil Mackay: [unclear]

Dave McLean: The thing that happened when I saw it was, I was coming from a world that was based on monetary things. It was a commercial world. As they told us, you're going to be a fine artist, or you're going to be a commercial artist. I was in the commercial end of it. It was only when the ingredient was added of the treasures, and being a part of this country's treasures, the national parks and the national historic sites. And there are 400 different ones. It's just so neat. But to me, that's the big draw. And for me as an adventurer and all, it was a chance for me to go see all those places. And it was always the carrot for me when they'd say go, I don't care where it was, you better believe it, and I'll work my butt off and I'll come back with something neat you're going to love.

Dave McLean: And they'd send me to another place. It was like that. Plus, the food! (laughs) Daggone good food, good meals. Let them have a list of your favorite restaurants. All the meal cards and all the per diem you overspent when you thought I'm going to have this. I won't eat breakfast, but I'm going to have this tonight. It's the quality of working for the Park Service against the quality of working for the almighty dollar. I think that's the big difference.

Dave McLean: And then this, it never has gone away, and that's the people. The actual people that are in the Park Service. In fact, I don't know the specs on it, but probably half the people in the Park Service don't get paid. They're volunteers! They're volunteers that come back year after year. And they're paid in sunsets, as they say. The pride, of working for, and it pulls in people like nothing else can. There's nothing like the Park Service.

Dave McLean: You know, the other parks around the world, where you get to spread the U.S. ethic and what happened here. Yeah. So, it's a proud outfit to work for. I guess it's the pride that draws in the good people. And holding on to a center, like Harpers Ferry is. I think that's the hardest thing of all. And I don't know how you move people on when you've got somebody, you know, you've got an organization that's not where — how do you get to that next level to start again? Because it's so ingrained in money and, I don't know, politics is probably always part of it. But the going for funds against I can have another drone flying over Iraq if we didn't have that exhibit. The tug of war between the military dollar, which nobody can deny.

Neil Mackay: Well, we've covered so much. You've had such a long career. But is there something that we haven't chatted about that you want to share?

Dave McLean: I think, I noticed on Ken Burns thing, he ended up with something that was really neat. And one of my last jobs, my work with Bill Brown, was at Fort McHenry. We did a lot of fun things over there. The one with the lightbulb that lights up all the stuff. And we did a lot of crazy things with new materials, and worked with the chief of interpretation there, whose name I can't think of now. But the new woman superintendent came in was called Casey, Casey Cook. Well, it never hit me till I saw this film. I'd worked with her dad for many, many years out in the west. John Cook. Yeah. It's that continuity. It's that family thing with people that I think makes the Park Service different. And working as a designer or whatever, you're going to go out there and you're going to meet with the real people. And the parks are very much the same thing because you've got people that, like when I was at Isle Royal, it was at the end of the world up there. It was six hours back to the mainland and 20 by helicopter when I got my heart attack to get to Canada.

Dave McLean: But these people were way out there, and they love being there. And they only come out there for certain part of the year and have to go back to shore. That's families giving a lot. And over the years, listening to all the families talk about, we'd go to some remote parks and they'd say, "Yeah, that's Charlie over there. He's the one I had on the pool table in Split Oaks on the 25 Highway when I didn't think I was going to make it, and I didn't, to the hospital." And they'd talk about the family sacrifices. As I praise my situation, my wife having contributed so much to our family and all the support she gave. And those are the things that people do out there is that you can get all fired up and I want to go this, and I'm going to go pound my chest and look at the sunsets. But you've got a family and children, you've got to have everybody go. And then, man, the schools are not so good out here in the middle of the pines. Oh. Okay, we go back to the city, and then he's unhappy, and the kids are getting educated. That's the realm where the short hairs are to get people to work for an organization that is so widespread. And you could get, you know, you could get stationed on that island with the cannons in the Caribbean off the tip of Florida. (laughs) Yeah.

Lu Ann Jones: Well, I know it's always dangerous to ask people about their favorite parks, but are there, or favorite assignments that you've had that just spoke to you, or offered a particular challenge that you really remember?

Dave McLean: When Dick Hoffman and I went to Bulgaria and it took us three days to get them to translate silkscreen into "[situ?] print." Okay, we got it, finally. Now we can talk about, no, when I did the work with Hartzog and

then was sent to Alaska for the first time with the teams that were coming up there. Bob Nicholls, what's his name Richardson. All these people that had been in the Park Service. And we went to Brooks Camp in the Aleutians on the way there, toward the Aleutian Islands, toward Kodiak. It was like one thing after another. We finally, Bob came back from doing the Noatak River for two weeks in a canoe. They had to go and look at all the lands that were going to be either given to or taken away from the Native Alaskans. We flew from Anchorage to King Salmon in a regular commercial airline. Not real big. And we got off and this is the whole favorite park thing. There was a little bark-covered building off to one side. And the door would open every once in a while. A guy would get out and he'd take off his hat and put on an airline captain's hat. And then he'd walk out when a plane would land, and he'd take all the luggage off and he had rollers.

Dave McLean: But, and then later, you know, these guys were all camped in the fields. There was all these troops out there. What the hell were they doing? And suddenly, they rolled out of this funny little building like an F80 jet combat fighter. And this little guy comes out, they strap him in and pull the canopy. And we're all standing around waiting for the plane to come. We're going to the Katmai. And this little runway, and everybody's putting their fingers in the ears. And this thing turns cherry red. It must have been this much cherry red from, pop the jet was wide open and he kicks the brake, goes a short distance, and just, I mean, he was gone. And it was this wilderness we were in. And the guys in pup tents over there.

Dave McLean: And then here comes this 1941 Grumman Goose with a hull-like fuselage, you know. And it is lumbering in. You hear it coming in, you hear it coming in, it's that great sound of the radical engines. And it lands. Half the plane opens on the side of that door that's cut into the side like this. The pilot gets out, and he takes all the cargo out himself. A few of the people get out that came in. And then he goes over, talks, and they get the tickets and stuff. We walk out and get on this thing. They put a net behind us, and they put all this cargo behind us. And then this thing lumbers down the runway. Are we ever going to get off, you know? It was just roaring and deafening. And finally, at the end, we got off just above the treetops. "Oh, we do it all the time. No problem." You know, the guys, you can hear the pilot (sighs) pulling up in their seats.

Dave McLean: And then we flew and flew for about a half hour just above the trees. We can see moose. I mean, I've never been in Alaska before. We're looking down at this place. Yeah, did you see another pretty lake? Suddenly we come to this enormous lake. And we're up, we must be at about three thousand, four thousand feet. Looking down and there's a beautiful

foaming river coming into it. And there's red things, all this red going up the river. I said, "What is that?"

Dave McLean: He said, "It's the salmon spawning. They're all cutthroats."

Dave McLean: We landed after a while. Everything was quiet and you hear this clunk clunk, clunk clunk. I said, "What is that?" And we heard this muffled thunk. And they were throwing a lasso over the tail of this plane and rowing it backwards into the rocky beach where Brooks Camp is. (laughs)

Dave McLean: And we got off, you know, we got out. There's little cabins they have there, and the one little, bigger house. They said, "That's where you'll have dinner. Go on in and change if you want to." These little cabins. And outside the cabins were these footprints of grizzly bears! And over that stream we saw, there were grizzly bears catching the fish.

Dave McLean: And we could stand back and watch them! I thought, this is the craziest place I've ever been in my life! This is wild! I'm in Alaska.

Dave McLean: That evening we went down. They let 50 people in the park at one time. This was in 1927, '75. And that night, all the guys caught salmon over there [and won?]. But the grizzly bears got their own salmon. They cook them for everybody. So, you have all the food you want in this great lodge and then you go to bed.

Dave McLean: And then the next morning we get up, it's early. They said, "Hey, we're going to take you for a boat ride." They got this 25, 30-foot long open aluminum boat like a skiff. So, everybody gets in. It's got this old cranky motor on the back. And he said, "Look across there." When glaciers move the earth, it's called a moraine. And the moraine was in the middle of this lake. And there was a break. It hadn't filled all the way across. The glaciers had gone away a long time ago. So, there's this little mound of land that you could see it. He said, "Look real hard. Do you see that dot?" He said, "That's a grizzly bear. He's halfway between that end and this end." We got in this boat and we went across. Came up right next to the grizzly bear. We're going along next to him. Ah, it was just amazing. And you could feel him breathing. He would get mad every once in a while. He'd come for us with these great big paws. We followed him all the way into the beach. And he got out of the water with those big eyes, big whites showing, and just was tearing down two and three inch in diameter sapling trees as he got going, you know, he was mad. He'd been caught off in the water.

Dave McLean: And then we went up a little bit further and there was this big stone. Big, huge rock sticking out of the water. But nothing, you couldn't get on it. Up on top was a bunch of sticks. Up above was an eagle, a bald eagle,

circling. And another one was circling. We realized, that's an eagle's nest that's on top of the rock. He said, "Go over there. You can climb up and take a peek." And I looked in. first time I'd ever seen an eagle. (laughs) And there were the little baby ones sitting right there. So, get down, and got in the boat.

Dave McLean: The next day they flew in a, what they called a Porter Stoll aircraft. A short takeoff and landing. The nose is about ten feet long in front of the cabin. And it's got this turbine engine. It's got these wings that articulate. So, like when a duck lands, he puts down. So, the airflow of the engine, it's big props. And got great floats. The next day, this thing landed. They said, "We're going to take you out of here, over to the Valley of Ten Thousand Smokes." That was where, in 1909, the volcano exploded and put up so much ash that it dropped the temperature of the earth one degree for one whole year. That much darkness.

Dave McLean: Said, "We're going to fly over to this area." So, they put us all on this thing. He just goes it a little bit, brings it up. We don't have to get our feet wet this time. And then he reverses the engine. We back in. And within 50 feet, we're up off the water. There's none of this straining and speed. We just kind of floated up. We went out and we flew inside the volcano. Inside, smelling the sulfur.

Lu Ann Jones: Wow.

Dave McLean: I mean, this was the wildest thing. This was my favorite park experience. And then we went out opposite Kodiak Island and went up this little river with this huge waterfall coming down at one end. He parked the plane and we got off. He said, "Walk up that trail next to the waterfall." We were about halfway up.

Dave McLean: I said, "What is all this mud? What is this slippery stuff? It smells kind of bad up here."

Dave McLean: He says, "It's bear scat." He says, "They're just on the other side of those tall bushes. Keep making noise." (laughs) So we did. We came down. We got on the plane. That night we had salmon again, back at the lodge. But that was the wildest thing. That was an incredible experience. My first shot to go to Alaska. So that's what you need. A couple of times, get contractors, you want to get designers hooked? That's the reward of, more than sunsets. Of course, it didn't have a thing to do with the fact when they want to send me to do the Arizona Memorial, I could surf in Hawaii. (laughs) Go down, rent a board. No, it's been a joy. If you want, I'll show you through some of the stuff, the pictures, and all that, if you've got time.

[Everyone looks at photos together. Consult audio for commentary and files for images.]

END OF TRACK 7

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