

Duane Sewell

Sewell talks of Professor Lawrence's enthusiasm and determination that resulted in the opening of the Laboratory. The Materials Testing Accelerator project was still in its early stages when the Lab opened.

I was exposed to Ernest's decisive nature after the war, when I was working up on the hill in Berkeley at the Radiation Laboratory. We had started building the cyclotron, which was then the largest so-called "atom-smasher" in the world. One day, Ernest came to me and said, "Let's go talk." We went out and walked around the cyclotron building three or four times. Lawrence wanted to know what my plans were. I actually was planning on going back to school and getting my Ph.D., because I'd taken all the courses that were necessary for the degree. I still needed to pass the prelim exams, and do my thesis.

"Well, I've got an alternative to offer you," Ernest responded, "but you have to make the decision. You can go back and do that. But you're good at managing and running and building things. If you want to, you can stay here and continue to work for

me. If you want to do that, I can assure you—as much as I can assure anything—that you'll have a job for the rest of your life."

I thought for a minute—I'd been married in the meantime during the war—and made a snap decision that I have never regretted.

So in 1950, I came out to Livermore to be a liaison between the Berkeley Laboratory and California Research and Development (CR&D), a subsidiary of Standard Oil of California, which was the architect-engineer for the Materials Testing Accelerator (MTA). The MTA was the first thing that was built in Livermore.

Ernest's philosophy was that you shouldn't waste your time on unimportant things. After I had been in Livermore for a couple of years, he came out to talk to the



Duane Sewell speaking to the press at Site 300.

president of CR&D and told him to close down the MTA project. The discovery of large domestic deposits of uranium ore had put the whole purpose of the MTA into question. Ernest told the president, "What was important yesterday is not important today. Why work on something that isn't important?" And boy, he sure meant it, and he never changed.

Later on, I watched him close other things down, and people's jaws would just drop.

In the spring of 1952, Bob Thornton, who was Ernest's right-hand man, came out here one day and asked me if I could spend some time talking with him. I remember very clearly that he and I got into my old 1949 Dodge and drove down to the end of the old airbase runway, where the garbage dump was located, and sat in the car for about a half-hour. Bob told me that we were going to form a new Laboratory out here for doing

nuclear weapons measurements, and he wanted to know if I'd come to work out

here. And I made another snap decision and said "Sure, sounds good to me!"

So Herb York took all the scientific work in leading the Lab, which was the key position, and I took everything else. Ernest couldn't tell us what the job was in terms of how to organize it. All he said was "Well, set up a lab." That was about the only instructions we had, which was typical of Ernest. He made the decisions and then picked out young people to do the actual work. But he was very good at picking them, because they ended up doing a lot of great things.

"Well, set up a lab."



Materials Testing Accelerator (MTA) under construction, built by California Research & Development (CR&D). MTA was the first building built at the Livermore site after being taken over by CR&D.

One Man, Many Hats

Bob Becker

The Lab's first "Security Department" operated out of a former Navy shower room.

When I started, about six weeks after the Laboratory opened, the Laboratory occupied only one building, which was the old Navy hospital. Everybody was in that one building—Edward Teller, the physics people, the chemistry people, the stores people—so the whole function was in that one building.

They didn't even have a security department. Because I had been an FBI agent and worked in national security matters, I became the first and only security officer. We were given three or four police officers from the University of California Police Department who had been working in Berkeley and brought them out. California Research and Development supplied the guards.

In total, I had three jobs that weren't very well defined. One was security. The second was being the safety person, because I had worked

for the Department of Industrial Relations for the state of California. Finally, in my spare time, I was also supposed to help Oke Ransome who was in charge of facilities. So my first job was really three jobs. Now the Lab must have 1,000 people doing those three functions.

My second office was in a former Navy shower room. The drain was still there, and the floor slanted down toward this drain. If I wasn't careful and took my feet off the floor, my chair would roll down into the drain.



It took great determination and creativity to develop a nuclear weapons lab from the existing abandoned air field. Left: Livermore Naval Air Station hospital building.

Wanted: Girl Friday

Cecilia Larsen

In 1951, I was a widow with two children and teaching school in San Jose. My sister happened to read an ad in the *Oakland Tribune* that said, "Wanted, Girl Friday for a small lab to be operated for the University of California." I thought, well, it would be better than commuting. So I applied for the job. I think I was the only one that applied. The application form was only one sheet at that time, and on the top of the sheet it said "University of California, Berkeley." The interviewer scratched out "Berkeley" and wrote in "Livermore."

I started working in a two-story building that eventually burned down; it must have been spontaneous combustion, it was so darn hot that summer. All those buildings were miserable. The building had a little swinging gate when you came in. I would stand there and just look at people's badges when they came by, like a security guard. I was everything: a Girl Friday, badge security officer, everything rolled into one.