

Historical Collections, Bridgeport Public Library  
Oral history project: “Bridgeport Working: Voices from the Twentieth Century” David Kelly (**DK**) interviewed by John Soltis (**I**).

## Transcript

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**I** We're doing the oral history interview with David Kelly. Mr. Kelly, when and where were you born?

**DK** I was born in Bennington, Vermont, August 26, 1938.

**I** Okay, tell us a just little bit about what it was like there, and your family.

**DK** Well, both my parents were from Vermont. We moved to Connecticut, to Bridgeport, in the early 1940's, during World War I. I'm sorry, World War II. My father got a job at one of the defense plants in Bridgeport. So I was about two or three years old when we moved to Bridgeport. So I don't remember a lot about things.

**I** Yeah, I guess not. When were you born again?

**DK** August 26, 1938.

**I** Okay, what is it that brought your family to Bridgeport? They knew about the work here?

**DK** Yeah, so apparently Bridgeport in World War II was a thriving industrial center. They called it the Arsenal Democracy.

**I** And where did your dad work?

**DK** He worked at the Aluminum Company of America which is a plant down by Seaside Park. And he worked at, I think it's Cilco Company. He worked at several different locations.

**I** And whereabouts in Bridgeport did you live?

**DK** We lived in Success Park. It was a housing project that was put up by the federal government at the time primarily to accommodate all the defense plant workers that were moving into Bridgeport. As a matter of fact, while we were living there, the rest of the housing project was still being constructed, was still under construction.

**I** Okay, and this was during the war?

**DK** This was during the war, correct.

**I** What was the neighborhood like? Mostly working class people?

**DK** Mostly working class. It was a very nice neighborhood. I grew up there. I lived there until just about the time I went into the Navy at age 17.

**I** Where did you go to school there?

**DK** I went to Edison School. I also went to Hall School after the seventh and eighth grade, and then I transferred to Harding High School.

**I** Harding High School. That's where I went. And so from there you went into the navy?

**DK** I went into the navy in 1956, yes.

**I** Fifty-six. Let's get right to your working history. After the Navy, you came back here to Bridgeport?

**DK** Yes, I did.

**I** What was your first full-time job?

**DK** I got out of the Navy in September, 1959, and I went to work. I got a job as a machine trainee at the Avco Corporation in Stratford in November of that year, in 1959. I've worked there since then, almost 40 years.

**I** Almost 40 years. Describe your first job. What exactly did you do?

**DK** At Avco?

**I** Yes.

**DK** As I say I had never run any kind of industrial machines. When I was in the navy I was a communications technician. Before I went into the navy I had worked in Bridgeport at the Hotel Barnum in Bridgeport for about two years as a bellhop. So, I had no factory type of skills. And the state of Connecticut in conjunction with Avco Corporation was running a machine training program and I went through the machine training program, on-the-job training in combination with some classroom for about ninety days on a vertical shortwave. I worked at that profession for 25 years.

**I** And what exactly does a vertical shortwave do?

**DK** Well, the company itself manufactured a variety of gas turbine engines for military helicopters, primarily. They also made components for various missiles, minute man missiles, wireless missiles. We made heat shields and Avco coating for all the space vehicles. The vehicles were all coated with this so they wouldn't burn up when they reentered the atmosphere. It was a long...they had a huge machine shop. Vertical shortwave is primarily a machine that you would put a part on the machine, a casting, you would cut it to certain specifications and dimensions. It would go down to the next operation.

**I** So that was your position for about 25 years there?

**DK** Yes. With the company and I eventually became an inspector. I would inspect the parts.

**I** Okay. Did you have a union there?

**DK** Oh, yes, yes, the United Auto Workers Union, Local 1010.

**I** And they were there from when you started?

**DK** They were there when I was hired. They were organized when the plant was opened in 1951. The plant was opened by Victor Emmanuel who was an entrepreneur during the Korean War. The plant had been there actually since the 1920's. It was originally a Sikorsky facility. In 1943 Sikorsky moved to...Sikorsky was part of the United Aircraft Corporation. Sikorsky moved the helicopter production to Bridgeport. Chance-Vought was a division of the United Aircraft Corporation and they made corsair engines, corsair aircraft, for World War II, navy fighters. And that plant was closed in 1948. In 1951 the plant was reopened by Victor Emmanuel, Avco Corporation. The union organized the work force there, production work force, and I became a member of the union sixty days after I was hired.

**I** So it was a union shop?

**DK** It was a union shop, yes.

**I** Do you recall any, well, I guess first off, describe some of your co-workers. What was the racial or ethnic makeup?

**DK** In the factory it was mostly white male, predominantly white male. Very few women were in the factory. Not very many minorities at all. It was mostly, as I say, white males. It wasn't until sometime, probably in the 19...during the Vietnam War, that women were, because of the shortage of manpower. The plant was very busy at the time, and in fact they had about 12,000 employees working three shifts seven days a week around the clock. I was a steward at the time and women started to come into the plant at certain entry level jobs, reskilled jobs, light work, machine jobs. They had the seniority. We started, the union started pressing for opportunities to get them promoted. So eventually that sex barrier in the machine shop was broken down. But it didn't occur until the late...the middle of the 1970's.

**I** You say, at that time, during the Vietnam War there were about 12,000 people there?

**DK** Yes.

**I** When you first started there, about how many people worked there?

**DK** When I came to work in 1959, Avco had a total work force probably of about 6,500 employees, as I recall. There was some... there had been major layoffs from what I understood in 1957, '58 after the Korean War. John Kennedy was elected in 1960 and shortly thereafter Avco started getting busy. They were making the products, Kennedy started spending money in the defense for helicopters. They believed in counter insurgency warfare and they used the helicopters in Vietnam, the Huey Cobras and the Bell helicopters. We made all the engines. So we made about 350 engines a month which was a huge output of engines. The engines would come back during the Vietnam War sometimes, there were bullet holes in them and everything, for overhaul and repair. There was a slight layoff in 1963. By 1964, however, with the beginning of the escalation of the war in Vietnam, Avco started to hire again and got very busy. Its peak was in 1969. There were about 12,000 employees.

**I** Were there three shifts?

**DK** Three shifts, yes. On the third shift I was the steward, the committee man on the third shift. We had about 1,000 employees just on the third shift. It was quite a place. I mean, a very busy place.

**I** I can remember I was a teenager back around then. I can remember there was always stuff happening over there.

**DK** Like wildcat strikes<sup>1</sup> and things like that (chuckle).

**I** We'll get to that. On the whole, well...we'll get you to that right now. What was the treatment like by the bosses there?

**DK** Well, the relationship, labor management relationship was a very rocky relationship for many years. When I first came there, Avco Corporation was probably, in relation to other aerospace companies nationally, the wages were somewhat lower, considerably lower. They did not have the kind of benefits that were typical of aerospace. Our international union based in Detroit representing a lot of aerospace companies around the country, they did a lot of research. There was a very intense, very militant, confrontational type of relationship for many years. It was characterized by numerous wildcat strikes, rank and file strikes, particularly on the night shift.

**I** Tell us in some detail about that.

**DK** These strikes were, as a matter of fact, I think we hold the record, we've held the record for wildcat strikes than any local union in the country. They used to point to a factory out in Ohio where they had a militant rank and file, but ours, in its own quiet way, was...I think we had over, well over a hundred wildcat strikes. The problem with that was essentially anarchy, industrial anarchy. There was no functioning grievance procedure. It was felt that out of frustration the only way they could get a problem resolved was by taking this direct action. Eventually the company in late 1966 was able to get a permanent restraining order, an injunction against the local union and a lot of the individual officers and members, permanently restraining us from engaging in wildcat strikes, which were illegal under our contract.

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<sup>1</sup> a labor strike that has not been called or sanctioned by the officials of the union.

Also called outlaw strike, quickie strike. 1940-45, Americanism. [Dictionary.com as of 2/7/2014]

But that in itself was a bit of, I think, legal precedent, I don't think anybody...

**I** Were these bread and butter money issues?

**DK** Absolutely, most of the time, most of the time. I can remember specifically the type of issues the company would.... There were different classifications and in the plant at that time you had in the factory perhaps 4 or 500 separate job classifications. There was this finite fragmentation of jobs and it seemed that only a couple of them were at the higher labor grades, and the bulk of them were in the mid to lower labor grades. So what the company would do in particular, in example, the labor classification had A, B, and C. The A would be in the highest labor grade which was 4, B would be in labor grade 6, and the C would be in labor grade 8. So what the company would do, they would declare a layoff in a department, and they'd lay the A operators off and the A operators would go down to the personnel department and they'd say "Well, we have some openings here in this department as a B, two labor grades lower." The employees would come back to the same department right after lunch and fill in the same job, the same work, two labor grades lower. And it was that type of stuff that caused a lot of the wildcat strikes. The local union itself was, I'd say, a very politically active local union. Local union politics and different large factions and caucuses, and that was a factor in it as well that led to some of the wildcat strikes. The union was not actually blameless, but you know the wildcat strikes finally came to an end I would say in 1967, '68. We had a new, elected administration running the local union and it seemed that the rank and file, at that time we had about 5,000 members, pretty much were tired of the anarchy in the local union and felt that the real enemy was the company and the union had to get together and it was in their best interest to support a good, solid local union administration.

**I** Again, on the wildcat strikes, the mechanics of it. How would it work, let's say, on a typical shift? You would just pull the whole shift off?

**DK** Sometimes that was the case. Sometimes it was just spontaneous. A small group of employees would walk out, perhaps on the second shift, around lunchtime, for whatever the issue was. Maybe they felt someone was disciplined unjustly, or the company tried to fire one of

the shop stewards or something like that. As I say, I was a third shift committee man. My shift started at eleven o'clock. I would usually get a call around ten o'clock by somebody on the second shift and they would tell me, "Well, Dave, there's a wildcat going on at the plant and we would appreciate your support." And I would try to find out what it was all about. So I would get there a little early before the shift starting time. The people that I represented would come to me and my steward would say, "What should we do?" I would say, "Well, just go on home. Don't cross the picket line." There was a very strong tradition of not crossing the picket line. Even on a wildcat strike. Usually the third shift always took the brunt of these wildcats. We would lose the whole shift. And sometimes they would just last the shift. Sometimes they went a little longer. They last three or four days and many times we would end up with a long laundry list of fifty or sixty or a hundred issues and all the frustrations sort of boiled over and that was an opportunity. Everybody came forward to put their issues on the list. Okay, take care of these.

**I** Would that force management to sit down and bargain with you generally?

**DK** Yes. Management, was, I believe...what contributed to the problem was a very political management style. A lot of cronies and different factions within management. For instance, the manufacturing management would be rivaling with the quality control management, and the night shift would be competing with the day shift. Within management. Within the various management structures. They were very good at playing off and manipulating the bargaining unit people as pawns in this kind of rivalry. The labor relations department was at war with everybody. It was always a game of kind of one-upmanship, so I think that if a supervisor or a superintendent would resolve a grievance that was favorable to the union, his rivals or somebody would attack it. So there was always this, we had this very intense environment within management which I believe contributed to a very large extent to the anarchy in the plant, until they got in a different management group that was more responsible, that was willing to take a position and stick with it and be able to enforce it plant wide. That's when the wildcats started.

**I** And this was primarily in the first half of the '60's?

**DK** The mid-60's. We did have probably the highlight of the confrontations that the union had with the company was in 1967. We had one of the last, the last Taft-Hartley<sup>2</sup> injunction in the country. It was at the height of the Vietnam War. The local union had been in bargaining for a new contract. The contract expired on, was due to expire in April, the middle of April, April 15<sup>th</sup>, and President Johnson signed a fact-finding, a Taft-Hartley Act. He was down in Quinta del Este in Argentina [sic: Punta del Este, Uruguay] or somewhere in South America for Alliance for Democracy or Alliance for Progress conference. And he signed the Taft-Hartley injunction putting the local restraining order or putting us back to work after about four days, and so the bargaining then was transferred down to Washington, D.C. It was very intense, high level government involvement for the next three or four months. The contract was finally signed, finally resolved almost at the brink of the expiration of the 80-day, the so-called 80-day cooling-off period. It came down maybe about three days before that. Congress was poised to legislate new no strike legislation, to put or force the local back to work. And it was basically, the issues were basically, as I say, a catch-up contract. The union felt we were far behind most other aerospace companies in the country. A lot of other companies in the community, we were way behind them in terms of wages and benefits and things like that. And this was the best opportunity we were going to have to rectify it.

**I** What did the average, there were many labor grades, but what did the average entry level employee make there, let's say in 1966, '67?

**DK** As a matter of fact, just today I was looking at an ad that was in the Connecticut Post for different types of machine operators and their hiring rate was somewhere around between \$2.50 and \$3.13 an hour. At that time that was a very good rate. As a matter of fact, Avco Corporation, the reason they published the rates, was because they were at the top of the spectrum in the southern Connecticut

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<sup>2</sup> (1947) U.S. legislation that restricted labor unions. Sponsored by Sen. ROBERT A. TAFT and Rep. Fred A. Hartley, Jr., the act amended much of the pro-union WAGNER ACT (1935) and was passed by a Republican-controlled Congress over the veto of Pres. HARRY S. TRUMAN. It allowed employees the right not to join unions (outlawing the CLOSED SHOP) and required advance notice of a labor strike, authorized an 80-day federal injunction when a strike threatened national health or safety, narrowed the definition of unfair labor practices, specified unfair union practices, restricted union political contributions, and required union officials to take an oath pledging they were not communists. [www.merriamwebster.com, *Encyclopedia Britannica Concise*, as of 2/6/2014]

community for that particular type of work. We did have one other very interesting contract strike in 1964. 1964 was a short strike, but it was very intense. The union decided to mass picket the plant. They surrounded the plant with as many as over a thousand pickets, two thousand pickets, and kept the whole plant shut down for ten days. We had a couple of hundred pickets were arrested. The Stratford police would take them down, would pull them out at random out of the picket lines at the plant, and take them down to the police station on Main Street in Stratford. We had a bail person down there bail them out. We had a shuttle service set up to bring them right back to the picket line and start all over again. One guy got arrested like that three times in one day.

**I** Where was the, this is primarily the wildcat strikes, where was the international...?

**DK** The international was horror-stricken. They – we were a problem child of the international union. They always immediately disavowed the local union and sent telegrams ordering us to go back to work. And they went on the air, on the radio locally, with announcements that the strike was unauthorized. Of course, we all knew it was. We had problems for many years with our international unions. In the aerospace industry, particularly here in Connecticut, the United Auto Workers' main focus was in the auto industry. We always felt that the aerospace industry and plants were sort of the stepchildren, so we decided to take matters into our own hands.

**I** Now you were obviously very active in the union. Did you experience any personal discrimination or harassment?

**DK** Oh, yes, many times. I can tell you that many people in the company, representatives, had a very strong, justifiably, dislike for me because I was a militant. I wrote a lot of grievances and tried to enforce the contract. I was involved with instigating and organizing many of the wildcat strikes and in several of them I was an issue. It was “the reinstatement of Steward Kelly” who had been terminated for something rather, perhaps the night before. And my constituents and I had a very good support, a very good rapport with the people I represented. They decided they weren't going to let me hang out there, so they threw up a picket line. So I had over the years, I was

terminated, very short term, a day or two. The company tried to get rid of me, a few others, for one thing or another.

**I** Because of the solidarity, your fellow workers, they basically threw up a picket line?

**DK** That's it. Of course, the product was absolutely necessary. It was the sole source, the producer of the engines. The company would always try to hide behind, wave the flag, and say well, you know, this is very unpatriotic. But the majority of our workers, many of them were themselves veterans, ex-servicemen, and we resented that. Don't wave the flag at us. You know we served our country. We're not on strike against the military. We're on strike against Avco Corporation. They were making extremely high profits throughout this entire period. We just wanted a little redistribution of the goods, that's all.

**I** Sounds right. I'm supposed to be unbiased here. So, obviously now Avco, it's not even Avco anymore, doesn't employ anywhere near the number of people. What happened after the Vietnam War?

**DK** Well the plant went down, as I say. Now I'll talk about the total plant. That's union and non-union?

**I** Yep.

**DK** From about 12,000 employees in 1969 and early 1970 to about a little less than 3,000 in...., by 1972. There were mass layoffs. As a steward, at this time I was on the day shift because they had eliminated pretty much most of the third shift so I came on the day shift and I became a steward. As a steward we would go every week, we would get layoff sheets of two or three hundred employees every week. It was just a very, very difficult time. There were people with 25 years service. They were hired in 1951 and in 1976 [1956]...and these were toolmakers, these were very highly skilled people, that were being laid off. And the best they could do, perhaps, was to bump down to a job as a sweeper. There were no other jobs in southern Connecticut. By then many of the large factories, such as General Electric and all the employers had closed and moved out of Bridgeport, so there weren't that many jobs.

**I** It's not like they could just move to another factory or something like that.

**DK** Right. For many years up until the end of the Vietnam War, then there were layoffs, people would get laid off, employees would get laid off at Avco. The next week they could go to Bullards, they could go to Carpenter Steel, they could go to General Electric. There was Bassicks. There were just dozens, scores, of employers where people with factory skills could get work. But by then there was really nothing left in the southern Connecticut area, and eventually throughout most of the state, except for Sikorsky and Pratt & Whitney.

**I** So that gets us to the '70's. Could you maybe take us up through to the...

**DK** As I say, these were very lean times. By 1970 I went on the executive board, in 1970, in the fall of 1970. And I think I had started to grow up a little bit or mature and settle down. I wasn't quite as crazy as I was. I guess it happens eventually to most people. I had myself gone back to school. I had a GI bill and I graduated from Sacred Heart University. I had a bachelor's degree in 1975. But I stayed on with the union, with the bargaining unit, as I say, on the executive board as the recording secretary.

**I** Okay, if I could interrupt for a second. That means you were a full-time union employee?

**DK** No, I, well, I was employed by the company. I got my paycheck from the company, except for times we would, we had offices outside, off premises. The union had its own offices. So when I was cleared out on what we call lost time, the union would pay for that time. But all this time, as of today, I'm still an employee of the company, which is more or less typical. Although when I'm in the plant now as the recording secretary on the executive board, my duties are such and my responsibilities are such that I'm full time in the plant, full time with union business because I'm dealing with pensions. I was on the pension board administration. I handled the benefits. Kind of like a benefit representative. We had more and more retirees now. By 1976 we had about 600 or 700 retirees. Today we have about 1500. We have a pretty large group of retirees. But there were no jobs at all. There were a lot of people who were on short work weeks during that period for several years. A lot of them had short-term layoffs where they might work two or three months out of the whole year. Laid off

and recalled. Constantly laid off and recalled. The recall rights last for two years after the date that you were laid off. So if you were recalled you could come back and have all your seniority and all your service. The only thing you don't get is that time when you are laid off toward your pension. At any rate, during the mid 1975, the company was developing a new engine for the Army tanks. The Chrysler Corporation won the competition to build the new Abrams, the main Army tank, the new battle tank for the Army. And we got the exclusive contract to make the engines in 1976. So that began then the turn around. Starting in the late 1977, '78, the layoffs stopped, the company started recalling and rehiring people. When the plant was busy, I mean it was very busy up until, primarily on tank production, until the early 1990's, 1990, 1991, when it started laying off again. For the first 25 years, Avco, and later Textron, did not have any commercial products. It just was exclusive military products. In the late 1970's, Avco Corporation had developed a commercial version of the engine it made and it worked out an arrangement with the Army, because the plant was a big plant, a 2,000,000 square foot plant in Stratford's south end. It's actually owned by the Army. It used to be owned by the navy during World War II. When it was reopened in 1951 it was an Air Force plant. Then when they went into tank production in 1978, the Army took it over and they called it the Stratford Army Engine Plant. But the commercial operators did just that, they operated the plant for the military. In 1979 they started developing commercial engines. They started in a very slow period in the early 1970's. They started selling some of the helicopters to commercial, like logging companies, places like that. So they did start to get a small commercial market. They worked out an arrangement with Avco, worked out an arrangement with the Army, to lease, pay the Army rent. Eventually it got to be about \$4 or \$5 million a year to use the Army's facility and the Army's equipment to make commercial products. So there was some that had a tendency...we really hoped that that would stabilize, you know, smooth out some of the peaks and valleys of being exclusively a military contractor. During the height of the tank production which was probably in the late 1980's, the plant was producing about 120 tank engines a month, as well as a variety of other engines for other military and commercial operations. And one of the things about the company...let me tell you a little bit about the company.

**I** Sure.

**DK** The company, Avco Corporation, was run out of Greenwich, Connecticut, where their corporate headquarters were. They got involved two or three times, they got hit by this greenmail, where some investors would come and bought a small percentage of their stock, about 5% of their stock. This was a common practice in the late 1970's, early 1980's and Irwin Jacobs an investment group in California called Lucadia bought about 5% of the Avco stock and they threatened to buy out the corporation. Avco Corporation panicked. They bought the stock back. The investment, the speculators, made about \$50 million on that. This happened twice within about a year and a half. In 1984, what happened Textron Corporation of Providence, Rhode Island, another conglomerate, bought out the entire Avco Corporation. And this was sort of a white knight to try to, because there was another group that had just made a run at Avco Corporation. They made about a \$50 million profit. They also had an agreement that if the company was sold at a higher stock price within a year, that they would get the difference, a premium. So they ended up getting about another \$50 million for nothing after Textron bought the business. So in 1984 the company went from, was taken over by Textron Corporation. Nothing changed. The contract, they recognized the contract. Everything was pretty much the same except the corporate office now was in Providence, Rhode Island, rather than Greenwich, Connecticut. Textron owned and operated the business until 1994, for ten years when it finally sold the business, not the plant, but the business, to Allied Signal. Allied Signal Engines. That was the beginning of the end for us, a very sorry chapter. If you'd like, I can...

**I** Well, if you'd like to, sure.

**DK** Well, yeah, I'll tell you a little bit about that and what happened. It all started actually with the change in the international relations with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The Army up to that time could not get enough tank engines, we couldn't make them fast enough. They looked at the military plans, looked at the Warsaw Pact and said, "My God, those commies, they've got 60 or 70,000 tanks and we only have 5,000 so we need more tanks. As I said, the Army couldn't get enough tanks and they were planning to build a next-

generation, even a better tank. You know they always have on the drawing boards future models of military weapons. It looked like there was going to be a long-term, secure future there. And that all changed or began to change with the decline, the fall of the Berlin Wall and the end of the military threat in Europe. Congress started cutting back on the budget. We in the union were trying to push management to focus more on the commercial work to try to stabilize employment there. During the peak production of tank engines, the Army, because it owned the plant, they were able to dictate the production schedule. They said our engines are priority. Once you get our engines built and go over it every month, then if you want to make commercial engines, that's fine. The plant was always in a production deficit. In other words, they were always panicking, running at the end of the month to try to meet their quotas for the month. When the Army work, in response, what the company did to try to...the Army was threatening to take away, to develop a second source for their tank engines. And that would have hurt the business and caused a lot more layoffs. There was a big political fight with the congressional delegation from Connecticut to try to stop the Army from developing a second source for tank engines. The union and the company joined together. Obviously we were looking for jobs and they wanted to keep the business. And we lobbied with them in Washington. One of the things that the company had agreed to was to offload, send out all the commercial work. So all they did, they did the assembling and the test of the engine, but the manufacturing of those commercial engines was done all around the country by vendors around the country. So it was our feeling now as the tank work started to slow down, that the company should start this commercial work, you know, to take up the slack. Then in 1994 we had mass layoffs started again in 1992. We had perhaps, the union never did get back up to our peak from Vietnam. The plant went up to about 7,000 employees. Usually it was about 50-50. We had, I think the peak of Local 1010 was about 2,800 members. That was in the mid-1980's, then gradually the layoffs began. And in the 1991-92 time frame they began to really accelerate where we got into mass layoffs again. Several hundred or perhaps almost a thousand Local 1010 bargaining employees. We went into negotiations in 1994 with Textron Corporation. There was a lot of speculation about what was going to happen to the company. Midway through negotiations the

contract expired on May 30<sup>th</sup> of 1994. On May the 12<sup>th</sup> or May the 11<sup>th</sup>, there was announcement that Allied Signal and Textron Corporation had signed a memorandum of understanding that would eventually lead to the acquisition, if all things went well for both corporations, would lead to the acquisition of the business by Allied Signal Engines. Textron said, well, we want to get out of the business and Allied said well, this is compatible with our business. We have another aircraft engine manufacturing plant in Phoenix, Arizona, which was non-union, and other facilities around the country. So we, during our negotiations, we intercepted some confidential company documents that indicated very strongly that Allied Signal was planning to close the Stratford plant and move manufacturing to Phoenix, Arizona, after it acquired the business. So they had a clause in this memorandum of understanding between the two corporations that Allied would not buy the business unless Textron negotiated a contract that was acceptable to Allied. So basically Textron wanted to sell the business and Allied wanted to buy, and essentially we had a veto power, so all of a sudden it changed the leverage of the 1994 bargaining from a very weak position that the union had, now we found ourselves in a very strong position. We were not on strike. Instead the contract expired May 30. We continued to work, which is unusual for us. The first time we've ever done that. Our tradition had always been if we do not have a signed agreement as of midnight on the date that the contract expires, we're on strike, whether it was for a day or two. The longest one was in 1970. I guess at Avco Corporation we were on strike for about ten weeks. So we continued to work in 1994 on a day-to-day contract extension. Nothing changed. In other words, the wages, benefits, everything stayed as is. Allied was in the backroom because they were prohibited from sitting directly at the bargaining table with us, because they didn't own the business. The rules of the Federal Trade Commission told them they had to sit at arm's length until the acquisition was consummated. We were negotiating with Textron management and our big issue was job security. We said "Listen we feel, we're not going to sign the contract with you and you're gonna give us all these nice things and a year later we don't have a job, so that would be a fool's bargain, you know." At any rate, near the end the company finally did agree. They said, "Listen, Allied Signal is going to need some help from the

union to get some funding because the Army has set up what they call a blue ribbon task force in Washington to evaluate the future of the Stratford plant and the way they could preserve the tank engine industrial base that plant represented. It was unique. It wasn't duplicated anywhere else in the country. So the blue ribbon panel had recommended that they could preserve it by doing several things. One is to bring more commercial work back into the Stratford plant. The other is they would come up to, to downsize the plant they would fund a package of funding proposals. Part of that was \$6 million to downsize the plant. The plant was really a big, 2,000,000 square feet. It wasn't really very efficient or economical and the volume of production made it a lot of overhead. So that was another of the recommendations. And the other was, they had a program to overhaul all the tank engines and they wanted to do it in Stratford. These were particularly difficult engines to overhaul. They were real problems. So Textron said Allied would like to stay here in Stratford. They're going to commit. But they're going to need some help from the union. And they will agree to work out an agreement with you to keep this work here. There were six engines, different engine models. They would keep them here for at least the three years of the contract until 1997 and then we will work with you, and if we can make the plant viable and change the methods of manufacturing, we'll stay here long-term, indefinitely everybody it will be a win-win proposition. But we also need your help, and politically in Washington, to help us get Congress to release this funding, approve this funding. Which was fine, we agreed. We signed a contract with them in July of 1994. July 21<sup>st</sup> it was ratified by the membership and we had a side agreement, a comprehensive one too. One was what we called an effects agreement that dealt with problems that were going to fall from the continued sale of the business from Textron to Allied. We anticipated that there would be further layoffs in 1995 when the Army procurement of tank engines was due to stop altogether. Allied and Textron had been trying to develop some foreign market sales of the tanks. Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The last eighty tanks went to the government of Kuwait. We had agreed to sign what we called a competitus agreement. It was basically a revolutionary document as far as we were concerned considering our history, the militancy, the confrontation, the wildcats. We had agreed... during this time I was the Vice President by the way. I became Vice President in 1976, Vice

President of the local. My predecessor, Joe Sussi who had been President since 1976, when I became vice president. He had some very serious health problems. And eventually he passed away in 1994, October 1<sup>st</sup>.

**I** Okay, so you were saying you became president of the local in 1994?

**DK** Yes, in 1994, October 1<sup>st</sup>. The sale was consummated on October 28<sup>th</sup>, 1994. Allied Signal then took over the Stratford business. They bought it for \$375 million from Textron. And as I say, we had signed this competitus agreement with Textron. Allied had assumed all the contracts including this competitis agreement where we committed to do a lot of things. Our experience was that the plant manufacturing was not very efficient. And we worked with management. Basically, they asked us. They said, "Listen, you guys know this business, we don't. We really need your help if we're going to be successful here." So we did. I set up a lot of committees. I got joint committees, with the company representatives for reload, for quality, for cross training of employees, safety, a lot of things that were of mutual benefit. One part of the business that the company was planning to move to Phoenix was the repair and overhaul of the commercial engines. They had decided we're going to move that, we're going to keep everything else but we're going to move that to Phoenix. The union got an agreement in 1994 negotiations that they wouldn't move it for a six-month period. During that six-month period they agreed to work with the union to see what we could do to make this more competitive and keep that commercial work here in Stratford. We looked at it and they had a facility. Textron and later Allied acquired a facility they had in England where they overhauled. They also had an overhaul center for commercial engines. The commercial engines we were using were for a British plane, the Avril RJ, regional jet made by Avril whose predecessor was the British Aerospace Corporation. Each one of those planes used four of our engines. A million dollars an engine. It was a substantial business. The regional jet business is a very fast growing part of the commercial market. Planes usually carry about 70-80 passengers and the engine as I say was a very good engine. We were not very competitive at all with the facility in Luton England or Phoenix, Arizona. The operators would send the engines back to the factory periodically to be overhauled. What's crucial to them is the time it takes to overhaul. When the

plane is on the ground, they're losing money. They did a study and they come in and they say, listen, Luton, England and Phoenix, it takes them about 60 days to get an engine back out to the customer. It's somewhere about 500 hours of labor. It took the Stratford plant, the average was 105 days and about 800 hours of labor. So we set up a committee, a joint committee, to go through it with management. We went through it and we got a lot of data. We basically told them why they had these problems in Stratford and we showed them how to fix it. And as a consequence they got the turnaround time on an engine at Stratford down to about 30 days and to about 250 hours of labor. So it was substantially under the competitors. An example, what they used to do, an engine would come to Stratford. They would disassemble it, our mechanics would disassemble it. They would take the parts, the components. They were sent down to a subsidiary, a division down in Greer, South Carolina. Greer in turn would take that part and actually send it to a vendor up in Hartford, Connecticut, to do the actual work on it. So when they got up there, a lot of time the plant in Hartford would call down for an engineer to go up and kind of give them some advice, technical advice, what to do and how to fix the part. Then after they fixed it, they would send it back to Greer. Greer then would send the part back to Stratford.

**I** Yeah and you're like 50 miles away! (chuckle)

**DK** Right! So these are the kinds of wasteful business practices we helped to straighten out. As a consequence there was a lot of, we were able to save jobs and we got much more work, repair and overhaul work, than we had been getting in the past. So that's where we thought we were on the right track. In February of 1995, I got a call from Senator Lieberman's military aide in Washington. He said, David, I'm going to give you some bad news. The Army has placed, is going to release the BRAC [Base Realignment and Closure] base closing list tomorrow and they're putting this facility on the list. And there was no prior inclination that this was going to happen. So again we set up. We had a lot of meetings. We had meetings at the Stratford Library. We formed a committee of citizens, from the governor's office, Congresswoman DeLauro, Congressman Shays, Senator Dodd, Senator Lieberman, the union, the utilities, like the United Illuminating Company, to try to do what we could to make a presentation to the Army, to the BRAC Commission, a public

presentation on May 5<sup>th</sup> in New York City. It was on the carrier Intrepid Museum where all the facilities in Connecticut, New York, and New Jersey, each facility had an allotted time to try to argue to get their facility off the list. At any rate, the commission, BRAC, voted on June 23<sup>rd</sup>, after about less than one minute of public debate, to close the Stratford plant. They said it was going to cost the taxpayers \$2 million, and over a 20-year period they were going to save \$80 million, and they were going to take the production capabilities Stratford had and transfer it to Army depots in Anderson, Alabama, for tank engines, and to Corpus Christi, Texas, for helicopter engines, and they could do all this for \$2 million. In the meantime, Allied Signal said, well what are you going to do? Because there's an option, a provision in the BRAC law for these facilities to be privatized. As a matter of fact, the Army and the military services encourage the privatization, that's the whole process of turning these facilities over to private use. So we asked Allied Signal, we're prepared to work with you to work out a new lease arrangement with the local reuse authority because the plant would be turned over by the Army to the town of Stratford. Allied took the position, well, no, we're going to close Stratford. We're going to move the production to Phoenix, Arizona. We're sorry, but we can save like \$30 million. I said, well wait a minute. You have a contract with us. You're committed to keep this work here for at least three years. You can't even make that decision until 1997. They said, we don't think we have a binding contract and this is not what they call a mandatory subject for bargaining. We don't even have to talk to you about it. So I filed a charge with the National Labor Relations Board [NLRB]. In late 1995 the company said we're going to close, and they were planning to work with the Army to close and start beginning the closing, they were planning on working with the Army to close the plant. The case went to trial. The National Labor Relations Board issued a complaint of July, 1996, that the company violated the law because it failed to bargain with the union, and it had to bring the work back from Phoenix to Stratford. The company did not agree with that, so we had a trial. It was a very lengthy trial. As a matter of fact, it was one of the longest trials of the National Labor Relations Board in Connecticut, in the National Labor Relations Board office up in Hartford before an administrative law judge, from September to the end of December, 1996. The judge issued a ruling a

year ago in April, 1997. He ruled basically in our favor, that the company had violated the law because they had refused to bargain with the union over this issue. It's a mandatory subject for bargaining and they had to bring the work back and recall all the employees and pay them full back pay and then bargain with the union. The company just issued a proclamation of innocence and said, as far as we're concerned, we're not in violation of the judge's order and we're moving anyhow, which they did. Layoffs began. Mass layoffs began in 1997. By the end of 1997, the local was down to about 130 people. The company, with the support of the Army and the Army by the way, what we have found out subsequently during the trial, we came across confidential company documents. And one of them in particular, is what we refer to as the Culligan memo. Culligan was a vice president of Allied Signal Engines, Thomas Culligan from their Washington office, vice president of government affairs, or something, sent this memo to Larry Bossidy, the CEO of Allied Signal and a couple of other high-ranking Allied Signal officials. This memo was dated February 28, 1995, the day before the BRAC notice. It was almost gleeful. We found out that we had been put on the BRAC list and this was going to give us an opportunity to close the Stratford. For political cover. We can use this phrase, this will provide us with political cover to close Stratford and relocate production to Phoenix, Arizona, and get the Army to pay for it. Now keep in mind, Congress and the President and BRAC said we're going to close this for \$2 million, and we're going to move it to the Army depots in Anderson, Alabama, and Corpus Christi, Texas. Nothing about Allied Signal's plant in Phoenix, Arizona. But that's exactly what happened. They totally circumvented the law. I wrote letters. Rosa DeLauro wrote letters. It was interesting in the BRAC memo, in the Culligan memo rather, he said we're probably going to be contacted by Senator Dodd, Senator Lieberman, and Congresswoman DeLauro about ways to get the plant off the BRAC list. And our response is to say nothing more than we are surprised. And he put surprised in quotation marks. This was a smoking gun. This was the whole plan. And we introduced it during the trial and the company president they brought back from Europe. The lawyers asked him about it. He turned red as a beet. He was totally flabbergasted. He denied it and then he had to read it into the record. That was just one of many, many incriminating documents that we uncovered. Our agreement, this competitus

agreement, when the company asked us to support their request for funding, that was their only out. There was a clause in Section 6 of this agreement, that if they did not receive the funding, the stand-by funding for tank engine production in the next federal budget hereafter enacted. Now that was signed in July, 1994. The next federal budget begins October 1, 1995. We were clearly talking about the 1995 budget. Congress did approve \$47.5 million. So we filled all the commitments of the contract. We said to the company, you have no basis for terminating this contract. The company tried to argue, they did argue, during the trial that well, it wasn't just one year of funding, it was any year. Unfortunately, in that particular part of the case, the judge, as sometimes they do, said that both sides, both the union and the company had an equally plausible interpretation of Section 6, so I'm calling it a draw. Our lawyers and the government lawyers were absolutely flabbergasted, and that's being appealed by the National Labor Relations Board.

**I** Yes, it's a draw, but it lets them do what they want to do.

**DK** In the meantime, what we did, we got into bargaining last spring for the contract which expired last June, June 1997. Starting in April the company came to the bargaining table with a new argument, very ingenious. They said, well, we have made a tentative decision to close Stratford and relocate production to Phoenix. Not a permanent decision, we're prepared to bargain with you over this decision. Well, does this decision have anything to do with the case you just lost? Oh no, this is new, this is totally unrelated to that. This is because we have discovered that we have excess capacity, not in Stratford but in Phoenix, and we could consolidate all this production under one tent in Phoenix, Arizona. The non-union plant, lower wages, lower benefits. We had documents showing there was at least a three or four dollar an hour wage difference, to say nothing about benefits, pensions and things that we had and they didn't in Phoenix. So the company during 1997, we bargained with them, attempted to bargain with them. The law requires all parties to bargain in good faith in order to try to avoid being charged with unfair labor practices. So they went through the motions. It's like telling us, listen, we're moving because we don't like the traffic on I 95, but we'll be prepared to bargain with you over that issue. If you can do something about that, we'll reconsider this so-called tentative decision. And that

was the sophisticated evasion of the National Labor Relations Act. They went through this farce for two months and finally the contract expired last June, June 6<sup>th</sup>. June 13<sup>th</sup> they marched in. That day in the afternoon they were supposed to have a meeting to discuss the economics. The union had made proposals, concessionary proposals. They said listen “we can, up to as much as \$25 million, show them how they can save by staying here in Stratford, including wage concessions, substantial wage concessions, things like benefits.” But we knew no matter what they did, they were not going to stay. They were just a farce. They were not interested in staying in Stratford because they got the Army to pay up to \$100 million to pay for the relocation of this business to Phoenix, Arizona. They came in, marched in on June 13 last year, and said, “Well, Local 1010, we’re no longer going to talk to you about his decision, bargaining anymore. Our decision is now final. You have not been able to address our needs of excess capacity in Phoenix, so we’re declaring, the bargaining is over, we’re at a bargaining impasse. We’re just going to implement it and we’ll see you later.” (chuckle) So we tried to get, under the law, under the National Labor Relations Act there’s a provision in Section 10J, we filed for an injunction with Washington, with the General Counsel last June. Within a couple of weeks after that, I went down in October 1997, I met with the General Counsel of the National Labor Relations Board in Washington with our attorney and the regional director of the UAW here in Connecticut. We met for about three hours. We went over the whole case. They grilled us. They put us through the paces. We told them what it was all about. And it seemed to be very, very supportive of us. They knew we had gotten screwed. And we were able to prove it. We were able to show by documents, company documents, Army documents. But there was a lot of political pressure on the Board to back off, by these various corporations that were putting on political pressure through the Republicans in Congress, Gingrich [US Congressman, GA, 1978-1999] and the crew. As a matter of fact, the year before they had cut the National Labor Relations Board’s federal budget by 30%. That was trying to get them to back off using injunctions against employers, some of the worst employers, Caterpillar, the Detroit newspapers that had a long strike. As a consequence they were able to checkmate the union. And the Board, because of the kind of pressure, the General Counsel did not act. We

went down again in December of last year, and basically what the Board was trying to do was to avoid making a ruling on this case, obviously reluctant to do, trying to broker: “Why don’t you and the company, the union and the company sit down and work something out?” We said “We’ll be happy to, but they have already closed the plant. Our bargaining leverage has been totally eroded which is illegal.” The Board says “Well, what do you want from us?” As a matter of fact, there was an article in the paper about two months ago where the General Counsel submitted his letter, he withdrew his nomination to President Clinton for a reappointment of General Counsel because of the political pressure by Trent Lott [US Senator, MS, 1989-2007] and all the Republicans that were responding to the employers to get them to back off of injunctions. So that’s where we’re at, the company with that, the case is still pending on appeal. The company, to ratchet up the pressure on the union, affects a bargaining agreement which we had negotiated in 1994 that provided severance pay, 45 hours pay for each year of service. It provided six months of medical for anybody laid off. It provided for two years of tuition assistance for people laid off or were retired. They cancelled that, in June. We’ve had about 500 Local 1010 members laid off since last June without any severance, without any of these benefits. The company said, “if you’ll withdraw your legal case, we’ll be prepared to consider reimplementing this or something.” So last September, this past January I said, what are you prepared to do? Tell us what you’ll do and we’ll consider it if we can negotiate a settlement. So they said, well you withdraw your case and then we’ll talk about. It doesn’t work. Put something on the table that I can take back to the membership. So we’re at a stalemate over that right now.

**I** So essentially they’re saying, withdraw your case and we’ll talk to you -- and maybe we’ll talk to you.

**DK** Yeah, trust us, trust us, we already screwed you. It’s true, there was an audit by the Army in 1996. The Inspector General audited the BRAC process because of Rosa DeLauro [US Congresswoman, CT, 1991-present/2014]. We provided Rosa with all the information. We said, Rosa, they’re stealing this factory from Stratford, Connecticut. They ought to be in jail. We provided all the documents to Congresswoman DeLauro. The plant was in her district and she

worked with Senator Dodd [US Senator, CT, 1981-2011] and Senator Lieberman [US Senator, CT, 1989-2013] and they requested an Army audit. The Army came back and substantiated that the Army, basically, most of the claims that we made, although they really low-balled the cost. They said, instead of \$2 million, it's \$9.8 million. Allied never submitted an estimate of the cost to relocate. They had never, ever dealt with the issue of where this work was going. It wasn't supposed to. Congress didn't approve it to go to Phoenix. When that came out, as critical as that was of the Army and Allied, it wasn't enough. So Senator Dodd, Senator Lieberman, and Rosa DeLauro sent a letter to the Department of Defense, Inspector General, which was another, higher level in the military bureaucracy. They asked for another audit. The Department of Defense said, yes, we agree with you. But nothing was ever done. This was over a year ago. The Assistant Secretary for Defense finally sent me a letter, because I had sent a letter to Secretary of Defense Perry. He said, through the chain of command, some Assistant Secretary of the Army sent me a letter in October, 1996. He said, well, our cost estimates are now \$23 million which is ten times and he disregarded that. We know that the cost was well over \$100 million. And then where the Army used to get \$4 million a year rent for production use of the factory, the machinery and the plant, after they vacated it, Allied found that there was another little goody there. They got what they call an idle facilities contract. The Army paid them \$4.25 a square foot for all idle space to, quote, "maintain it." They were getting, instead of the Army getting money, now they were paying Allied Signal for over 700,000 square feet, about \$3.5 million a year. So Allied said, listen, the quicker we get out of here, the more we can make money out of it. We're getting money from an empty factory in Stratford and we've got the Army paying for their total relocation. The Army built them a brand-new facility. One component of the tank engine, what they call a recuperator. Every engine needs one. They're a critical part of the engine. They recirculate all the gasses. They had a special building was housed in Stratford, Building 10. It had a huge [unclear] press, big, big press with laser welding machines, a very complicated, involved process. Allied got the Army to build them a new factory, a new facility, down in Anderson, Alabama, for their exclusive use to relocate. And the Army paid about \$15 million to build and transport all that production equipment

for the recuperators down in Anderson, Alabama, which was in violation of the law, the BRAC law. The Army also agreed to turn over all the tooling, hundreds of millions of dollars of tooling, for all the engines, the tank engines, the helicopter engines. Just gave it to Allied Signal. And that tooling, particularly the helicopter engines can be used to make commercial products, the commercial engines. So at any rate that's where we're at right now.

**I** That's where we are as of right now?

**DK** The plant we were down to about 30 Local 1010 employees, including myself. The plant will be totally closed. It's anticipated by the end of September. Right now there's no production, all the machinery was sold at auction the first of the year. The plant's a huge empty building. It's very depressing to have to go in there every day, a lot of ghosts, a lot of years, a lot of people.

**I** Maybe on a slightly more upbeat tempo, I'd just like a little bit of, while you were doing all this stuff with the union, you had mentioned earlier that you'd gone back to school. Can you tell us a little bit about that and your experiences outside of the shop?

**DK** Yeah, I was married, I have three children. Two daughters and a son. I lived in Stratford, well my wife, she was, worked off and on. Not too much, you know a job for a year here, most of the time she stayed home with the children, raised the children. During the, I was entitled to the GI Bill so I went back to school, Housatonic Community College, I think in 1968. I started out, I think I was getting like fifteen dollars a month under the GI Bill, but by the time I, by 1973, '74 with all the increases because of the war in Vietnam and actually by the time I graduated in 1975, I was getting about, a little over three hundred dollars a month. Now during this period of time, there was no overtime at all in the plant. So this almost became like a part time job, I'd use it to live on and I did get, I graduated from Housatonic in 1972 and I transferred to Sacred Heart and I graduated. I got my Bachelor's Degree in history at Sacred Heart in 1975. We had in 1992 we had negotiated a tuition reimbursement plan with Avco Corporation and very, very few of the bargaining people took advantage of that. They were working good jobs, making good money. Not too many of them were motivated to go to college. In 1985 negotiations the company had come to us and said listen

“nobody’s using it, this benefit plan, unless they really use it we’re going to take it away, we don’t think you need it”. We says, “Oh, no you’re not. We’ll guarantee you, you’re going to get some utilization” and I had been talking to a professor up at Yale, someone had told me to go see this guy. A fellow by the name of Dave Montgomery, in Labor History and I had been thinking about going back to school for a Graduate Degree. That’s what I did, I went back and I got accepted into Yale and I got my Master’s Degree in History in 1989. I’m an over-educated unemployed Local Union president. (laughter).

**I** I want to thank you for this, this is extremely interesting. I guess before we wrap it up, as I mentioned earlier, this is going to sit in our archives forever, if there are any words of wisdom or to posterity or your grandchildren, you’d like to leave us with?

**DK** No, I can’t think of anything [**tape on/off**], just my personal feelings, as I say going into the plant every day, an empty plant. I’ve been there for forty years, it’s very difficult when I know it happened, when I see what happened. Some people ask me well you lost the battle how do you feel about it? Of course I don’t feel good but I think my whole life has been struggle, fighting. And you never lose the fight for the things that you believe in and I’m sure at some point I have confidence that somewhere down the line that we will prevail. It’s just that it’s a long frustrating process and that’s just the way things are and I will hold that this country is, will not turn its back on triggering a movement in such a ways of what’s going on today with the corporate profits and stock market booming and everybody thinks that unions are irrelevant. But in my opinion they’re needed more than ever. And I think I’ve had a life well spent in the, ---they’re very rewarding in the trade union movement.

**I** Thank you!

**END OF INTERVIEW**