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Interview No. 40  
Southeast Asia History  
Nick and Pearl Davis, Alden Jones  
July 18, 1977

Jones

This is Interview #40 for the Southeast Asia History writeup. Today is July 18, 1977. I'm here on Alpha Drive with Nick and Pearl Davis. We're going to talk about Milbuk and Southeast Asia.

Nick, what do you remember about your first contact or your first involvement in anything to do with the company's activities in Southeast Asia?

Davis

Well, the first contact was when Bill Sim caught me at a grocery store in Snoqualmie and the last day that I was recovering from a heart attack. I was going to work the next Monday and he says, "I want you in Milbuk." And I told him I didn't believe him. And he said, "I do." And I said, "Bill, I don't know. I'd like to think it over and I'd have to find out what the situation was, you know." And I let it go at that. But the following Monday at work I was called to the office and told that they were interested in me going. Of course, after a heart attack, which was a mild one, they were skeptical and required that I go to Tacoma to their doctor, company doctor, and give me an examination and be passed on. Which he did.

Jones

That was Dr. McGill?

Davis

Yes, Dr. McGill, right. And that ended my work at Snoqualmie. They immediately sent me back east to Marshfield, Wisconsin, and to go to a mill to examine the products being made at the plant, that came from Milbuk, Philippines. This was a veneer plant making core veneer to be used in high-grade plywood. They used very thin overlays and they had to have an awful fine grade. The product that they had sent to date had completely failed. Every shipment.

Jones

What was the problem, Nick?

Davis

The problem was, they told me, it was thick and thin veneer. But I diagnosed it as poorly edge-glued product and something that I could correct in a real quick time, when I got there. Thick and thin was indeed a problem but minor to the edge-glue trouble. Well, it was the last week in January before

we got away. It was 1970. And we arrived - I think, we went to Hawaii to visit our son for a couple of days. And then they had some problems in some of their product in Okinawa, at a Japanese plant, and they wanted me to go there first, which we did. And I had seen the same problem they had, that they had back in Marshfield, and so I just double-checked my thoughts about their problems.

From there we went on into Hong Kong and met Bill Sim and a number of the officials there and ended up by us going through Manila and on down to Milbuk. Anyhow, I started - went down to the plant the first day of February and I walked into the veneer plant, walked by the operation, noted they were making all reject veneer and I went on into the office and met their superintendent. Raleigh Sabali was their superintendent at that time.

Jones

What was that name, Nick?

Davis

Raleigh Sabali. And, he was a great talker and used a lot of hand motions like I do. We talked awhile and got acquainted a little bit and I said, "You know, I came over here for the purpose of finding out what was wrong. And I want you to know that you're making all reject veneers." That was pretty point blank. He said, "What should I do?" I said, "Shut it down."

And then we went out and, of course, I went over the product with him, showed him what was wrong. To make that you have to explain the veneer. All the veneer was made into 101-inch-length sheets and 50" wide. Now the length of the veneer, lengthwise of the grain was crosswise so it was all edge-glued. Narrow veneer and cut into lengths by a clipper operation. Made them 101 inches long. And then they put them through an edge-gluer - well, a jointing operation and an edge-glue operation - just put the glue and assemble the joints. I took him behind this edge-glue machine - I took a sheet and just waved it a little bit and it all fell to pieces. I said, "See. Nobody can use this in all narrow pieces."

So, we shut the plant down and called the millwrights and I explained how they could - what was causing the problem was the jointer and the edger. They were not jointed parallel along the length of the sheet, leaving just one point of the edge with contact. About 90% of the edge was not making wood-to-wood contact. Which you have to have, wood-to-wood contact, to make a good glue joint.

Jones

It was leaving gaps, then, in the joints.

Davis

Yeah. So we called the millwrights and we explained what was wrong and I showed him how to properly tell when they had a square joint. And 24 hours later they had it all back in shape again and that ended the problem of veneer, as far as making a quality veneer. We did have to improve on some of the grade and we had to improve on some of the thick and thin veneer which we did but that was a minor thing compared to the joint. They had a warehouse full of veneer which had to be all remanufactured.

Well, the funny part of this whole thing - I was there one week - I started on Monday, Saturday the superintendent took off for Manila. He was sick - he got suddenly sick and he was gone two weeks. Well, this put me in charge of veneer mill, really. I was the only one there. I suddenly became manager of this veneer mill, after one week. Well, I immediately shut the lathe operation down and put the whole plant into a remanufacturing process which took two weeks, to take all the product back out and put it back together again. And then I notified the company we had good usable veneer on hand so they could depend upon it. The superintendent came back in two weeks. He came back and the manager immediately fired him.

Then again, this left me in charge of the plant with nobody to draw from to put - no Filipino supervisor to draw from, you see. But there was one man, the green-end foreman. He took the bull by the horn and he did this and he did that and helped. I said, "You're the superintendent." And that was Joe Calendro and he was superintendent, till they closed the plant here, just recently.

I reorganized all the supervisory staff. We discovered - I told the superintendent to go out and figure how many they needed to operate the plant and I told him I'd do the same thing and we'll compare notes. And lo and behold, we came out exactly to the same man. Just about 50 people less than what we had, and planned. So then, of course, we had to pull the crew down to the operational crew that we needed to run the plant, which meant a lot of layoffs. And, of course, this is a very tough thing to do to the Filipino people because they needed the jobs so very bad. And anyhow, this was accomplished.

And we got the plant running and then the next problem was the recovery of high-grade veneer out of the logs. We were not getting a very high grade recovery. Something around 50% was going into A grade product.

Jones

But you did have good logs?

Davis

Well, our logs were the lowest grade logs they had. All top grade logs went to the log market. We took only the poorest of the logs they had. But regardless of that, we felt that there was more high-grade veneer in these logs, than we were getting. So then we started working on this program of recovery of high-grade veneer. And at the time that I left, some 14 months later, we had 83% A grade compared to 50% when we went there. And that was about the peak of our performance. And, of course, this meant a lot of dollars to the company.

Then because, we were half the world away from the United States where the product was used and it went by boat, we had to be able to guarantee that we could supply a certain amount of veneer at a certain time, of a certain grade. And this was something they hadn't been able to do up to this time. Well, with the program we set up of manufacture and production and the grade we were getting, we were able to tell the company exactly what we could furnish at a certain given date and have it there on the spot, which they could depend upon having a boat come. And we never failed this, ever, all the time. We always had that volume there.

Well, it was just a real fun deal for me and, by the way, this is where I ended my career with the company, and it was a good sendoff for my retirement.

Jones

Well, that's a real good summary of your experience over there, Nick.

Davis

I might add one thing. I've been receiving letters every Christmas back from the people in the mill and that they have never had a claim from the day I got there, to the last letter I received from them. All the products - and they've had complimentary remarks come back. They also have sent the superintendent, Joe Calendro, around to other plants in the Philippines to show them how to properly make veneer core.

Jones

Well, that's an interesting sidelight. You must have done the right things.

Davis

Well, evidently. Of course, it was a real challenge to me. I went over there for the purpose of correcting the quality and it just took 24 hours to do that. The matter, then,

was to keep it in line and then the problem of production, the volume, the guarantee that we could have something on the spot and the increase in volume of the top-grade veneer - these were real challenges to us. We had a great many problems, mostly in power - steam and electricity. We couldn't run the plant about half the time, because we were either out of steam or out of power, and which threw our production schedule off. But we always managed to bring it back in line again, some way or other.

Jones

Was the plant operated entirely by steam? Or part of it by -

Davis

Electric and steam. They had a steam dryer and all the equipment was run by electricity. And they had their own powerhouse there, which was made there, and which they were having a great deal of problems with and kept our power insecure in that we didn't know when we could operate or not. Many days, we'd just be down and then we'd have to work overtime and anything else to make up the volume we lost.

We had a policy - I set a policy up that the first day of the month we started producing at the top volume and get our production completed, before the end of the month. Normally at the mills, where I've already worked in the past, that you work like the devil the last of the month, you know, and then you ease off the first of the month because you're tired from the last month. And at the end of the month, you have to work like the devil to catch up again. I didn't want that to happen down there. It never happened.

Jones

You turned it around, huh?

Davis

I might add one thing. I was told that I could never get the Filipinos to do it.

Jones

You what?

Davis

I could never get them to follow through, when I went over there. They said as soon as you leave, they'll drop back. And I told them that, if I left and they dropped back, then I have failed my job. And all reports I got back, they kept following right through. So I guess I got the point over to them.

Jones

Evidently.



Davis

It took - it actually took about 12 months to do it. I'd go out on 59-day visa and the production would drop off. Then I'd have to get them back again and go through the whole thing again. And then the last two times I went out, before we left, I came back and everything was right in line. They had got the principle of the thing and they followed through. And because I was able to point out the deficiencies to them, so plainly, they understood what they were doing. To understand the mistakes they made and things they couldn't keep doing, and it was really nice. I was very pleased and I enjoyed it completely and I liked the people.

Jones

Well, let's think about some of your experiences with the people. What were some of the things that you did over there, that were part of their way of doing things that you liked? Meeting with them, visiting with them . . .

Davis

Well, I liked their system of visitation. It was warm. It was on the Celebes Sea. We had our patio porch there and we lived on it most of the time. And they would come and visit in the afternoon or in the evening and/or you'd go visit them, and they would always walk you home. No matter what. If you went to visit them, they would walk you back home. Of course, that got us into the habit of walking them back home and it was a real nice thing to do. I don't know - we had so many experiences that . . .

Jones

Can you think of a couple examples of occasions, picnics or anniversaries or something?

Davis

Oh, yes. I had my 65th birthday on the 26th of March. I worked over till the first of July. Of course, I was to retire the first of April but I worked a little extra time. So, we were just going to have a little small gathering and we had bought some ice cream - two, three gallons of ice cream and I had it shipped in to us. Pearl had made a couple of cakes and we just invited a few friends but lo and behold, here came about 20 families of Filipinos carrying a pig, a roasted pig, and cakes and stuff. So we had, really a full-fledged dinner. We had roasted pig, cake and ice cream.

Of course, they brought their guitar along and stuff and the men all sat out on the veranda and the women all in the house. And the men all drank - we had plenty of beers and liquor, you know, and so they were all out there sitting drinking beer and what-have-you and singing and talking

and it was a fun festival. But the women all sit in the house drinking Coca-Cola, you know. And they were quiet and this in comparison between how the women separate off, being quiet, and the men out here, noisy as all get out, you know. It was real fun. We had a great time that night.

Jones

This is typical the way parties went, huh?

Davis

Yeah. We did the same thing. At one time, I gave a party at the guesthouse for all the mill foremen and their wives, and also the superintendent and his assistants and then their lead men, and anybody that handled people. And we had about 40 and, of course, I had a dinner for them and we had liquor and stuff like that and we had a little orchestra come in and play and they danced and that was another big fun night.

But I had another experience, with the very first weekend we were there. Anyhow, they had a Saturday evening \_\_\_\_\_. They had a playfield and at this playfield, made up of a place where they played softball and other games on the grass and they'd also show movie pictures out there. Everybody all sat on the grass, on the movie picture night. Then they had a tennis court and they had a basketball court. By the basketball court, was a stage. Nothing is covered over, but the stage had a lean-to cover to it.

And the first night, they had a recital and they were going to have a dance afterwards. And so, they got this recital over and then they wanted to dance. So they put seats up on the stage and Elmer Renken, the manager, and his wife, Norma, Pearl and I and Bob and Ruth Zile and the Andersons, and we had to sit up on the stage. We were spotlighted on the stage, under that cover. It began to rain a little bit. You know, quite often it rains. And so they had the orchestra play and, of course, the Filipinos danced and so we decided we wanted to dance, too.

As soon as we got down to dance, all the Filipinos walked off. They felt they weren't good enough to dance with us. This is the actual feeling they had. So that told us the story right away that somehow we had to let these people know that we weren't the kings and the rulers. That they were equal in many, many ways and in most every way. We thought they were equal. So I went over and got a Filipino girl to dance with me, I think it was Charlene and so did Elmer.

By the time we had left the Philippines, all the Filipinos danced with all the wives. There was no feeling of inferiority, as far as, in that category. They had one inferiority complex

and that was, they would never call you by your first name. They'd call you "Mr.", "Mr. Nick", or "Mom Davis" or some - they would never, never say "Nick". But finally Pearl and I, we solved the method, so we'd break that "Mr." down and "Mrs." down. We got them to call me "Uncle Nick" and her, "Aunt Pearl." And that became the standard. That was an easier way and eased up problems a lot. They were so kind to us and just couldn't do enough for us.

But one thing though, if you had a piece of candy and you give one kid a piece of candy, you'd better have a whole box full because you're going to have about 50 kids there, in a few minutes.

Jones

Word would get around in a hurry, huh?

Davis

Yes sir. So we just didn't do those things. We found out some things you just don't do. You just don't start dishing out candy to kids. You don't give individual gifts to one kid and not have something for another and so we were just very careful how we handled ourselves in this manner.

Jones

Okay. I don't suppose you ever had any language difficulty over there?

Davis

Well, the language difficulty in a sense. They all spoke English in a different role. It was hard for us to understand their English and it was hard for them to understand our English, so we just had to be very careful. And, because I'm a fast talker, I had to slow down and very deliberately say my words, and listen very carefully but we managed very well. It was really no problem.

Jones

Did you run into any of their local sicknesses over there?

Davis

Well, the one that you're talking about - Montezuma's Revenge - only once and Pearl never did get it. We were very careful. Every Sunday we took a pill for malaria - took a malaria pill every Sunday and we boiled all our water. Our water was all rainwater, coming off the roof, and then we boiled every bit of water we used. We boiled 20 minutes. Even to wash our teeth. We never washed our teeth, unless we took this water. So we were very careful to do this so we got away from a lot of this stuff and, of course, we had very modern fixtures. We had deep freeze, a refrigerator and an electric range and stuff and a modern house. We had air conditioners and ceiling fans so we could keep reasonably comfortable and we actually lived pretty doggone good.



Jones

What about the awareness of hazards and dangers, by the workers in the mills? Did they work safely?

Davis

Yes, they did. We had very little - I think one fellow got the end of his finger pinched off one time. But we had very few injuries in our mills and we worked on a safety factor and very carefully see that the people operated safely. I thought real good, as far as the mill was concerned.

Jones

Was there a change in the managers, while you were there? I seem to recall that they quite frequently would have a new man come in and take over.

Davis

No, Elmer Renken was manager when I got there and he was still manager when I left. There was a wood manager there, that changed several times but Bob Zile, our road engineer man. He was there all the time. But there were two positions there that were changed usually and that was the logging managing end of it. There was only four of us there - four couples of white. All the personnel was and everything was operated and run by the Filipinos, by themselves. We had some very good ones. We felt that some of their people were equivalent or better than a lot of people we had here in the States, operating it.

Jones

In what way, Nick?

Davis

Well, the electrical engineer, for example, Herman Tubungbanua, he constructed a device to measure the thickness of the veneer and to automatically mark, with paint, any sections which exceeded the tolerance for thick and thin. By god, he was a good electrical engineer. We felt that he could match the job over here. Of course, generally all the jobs - you rate them a little less than what the qualification was in the States, most all the jobs. But I didn't find was in the States, most all the jobs. But I didn't find that. I found our lathe operators very efficient, very good and they were all very - they wanted to do their job right. They tried to do their job right.

Jones

They had a good attitude?

Davis

They had a good attitude about it - yeah. You never had any problem and of course they had, amongst themselves, off the job, there was the Moslem-Christian problem, you know. And I'll tell you of an instance we had. This is

the beginning to - while we were there - the beginning of the Moslem uprising. It was just beginning. And you'd hear that somebody's getting shot over here or somebody getting shot over there and one day a rumor came into the plant - into Milbuk in that little community we had there - that some farmer up the line had got shot. And suddenly, one afternoon, here came a whole bunch of women with their children. They stormed into the plywood plant and into the shed and shut us down. They were scared to death. And they couldn't leave until they got assured that everything was all right. They just flooded the plant cause this is the safest place to be - was in the veneer mill.

Jones

Now, where did they come from? From the village right there?

Davis

Yeah, from the village - and they come in from there. Just dozens. I don't know how many there was. We didn't count them, of course, but they shut the mills down. We just couldn't operate with them and their children running round and this was the safest place for all to be because we had high stacks of veneer there and it was under roof and they had a place to hide. They were scared, real scared.

Jones

What had spooked them?

Davis

The rumor that somebody got shot by a Moslem. They thought that they were endangered down here.

Jones

This occurred up the coast there somewhere?

Davis

Well, up maybe four or five miles up in the coconut groves. And whether it was true or not, we don't know. We did have some shooting. We did have some Moslem shooting in that area before I left and it was getting pretty dangerous actually. Of course, afterwards, they did have a lot of problems.

Jones

But that may have been one of the early indications of the trouble that was coming?

Davis

That is correct. It was already in the making. They were having a lot of trouble, over in the other parts of the island. We were on Mindanao and over at Zamboanga in that area and on the western area they were having more and more trouble. And also over on Basilan Island. I think one of their guards was shot in that area.

Jones

One of the compound guards there?

Davis

Yeah, compound guards. But that was the beginning of that uprising.

Jones

Were there any other indications that you recall, while you were there?

Davis

Well, the only thing that we could tell was the fear of the people themselves. Even in our own compound. See, our compound wasn't fenced in at that time and they later on had it all fenced in. I know, we had a supervisor's wife was so scared - she had a family of about four or five children and she lived near the outer edge and she was absolutely - she wouldn't stay out there. She'd come in and stay in - well, one of her relatives was a foreman there, he was our plant engineer. She'd come and stay at their place. And we had to find her a home near the shore and bring her family down here, it was so scary. We understood that the staff houses had dugouts under them. It went this far.

Jones

Staff houses?

Davis

We had a row of houses along the beach. We had our houses and the top staff people had their houses, too. They had foxholes built under their houses. They were prepared the best they could. You hadn't known that beforehand. I had no fear. I never had any fear, when I was there at all. I couldn't see the danger. The manager could see the danger. He knew the danger, but I guess I had so much confidence in the people, I just couldn't see that they could be dangerous. They were such nice people. But that was quite an exciting thing. But when they brought their children in the plant, that really set it off. The people were awfully scared, you know. And, of course, after we left, they had a massacre up at the, you know and -

Jones

It got real rough after that - up into 1974, I guess.

Davis

Yeah, it got real rough a couple years afterwards and they killed some of the Manobo tribes up in the hills. They didn't hurt anybody.

Jones

They were timid little people, trying to be friendly.

Davis

It was interesting to see these hill people come down, you know, and in their costumes and their collar rings and rings around their ankles and wrists and rings in their ears and stuff. It was real fascinating.

Jones

With their bows and arrows.

Davis

Bows and arrows, that's right. I know Christmas came and we had made up a bunch of packages to take up to the Manobo tribes. They had it up at the forestry camp and we all went up there with these packages, and of course the Manobo tribes came down with their women and everything and they danced. And for music one of the fellows broke off a stick and he took that and that was their music. They had good rhythm. They danced well. Real interesting. I think that's about all I remember of that.

Pearl

Well, we had a new maid and anyway the other one stayed with her four days to show her what has to be done to the house and dinner. And she came alone. She had problems of - I went out and told her what to cook and I had taken short ribs out of the freezer. And I said these won't be done for noon but we could have them the next day and I took a can of spaghetti and meatballs and a can of spinach and I said to open them up and warm them up or heat them. And so when we got out to dinner - Nick got out there - why he said - she had put everything in one kettle, on top of the short ribs. We had short ribs, all in one dish, and Nick said, "What's this?" And I said, "Shut up. Eat it." That was one of them. We enjoyed it.

Davis

Tell the experience about the one that got the parrots, the birds.

Pearl

Oh, I had her do some sewing for me. And she came down and measured me and was just talking and pretty soon she came down with the clothes. And she brought a basket to give me, and I paid her for her work, and she had these birds - lovebirds or parakeets. So I said, "The birds sound so pretty." And she said, "I've got a bird. You can have it." And I said, "Oh, I couldn't take a bird." And she said, "Oh, yes. I'll give it to you." And I said, "No, please don't. Because we're going to leave and I don't know what to do with a bird." And she didn't say any more but, one day, I was walking down the road and "Oh, I'll go back and get the bird." And I said, "No." I had quite a time convincing her I didn't want it. But I had made that remark that I loved to listen to the chatter of the birds next door, so that gave her an idea.

Jones

She saw that as a chance to do you a favor, right?

Pearl

Yes.

Davis

You know, our next door neighbor, Caesar Molana, who was the plant engineer, he had fighting cocks under his house. Of course, every Sunday, they had their cock fights and these doggone things would crow all night long. Those doggone things would crow and just right by our window and they also had some chickens. They had one chicken that had a foot about half off and was crippled. And she was a hen and she always had a bunch of about ten little chicks and they would be around our place, just as cute as the devil. Just as regular as they would grow up, here she'd come with another batch. Oh golly, I got some pictures of that. It was real funny. Oh, yeah, the chief of the security lived right across the street from us and -

Jones

What was his name?

Davis

Oh, what was his name? I can't remember right now. Anyhow, he had two great big vases with plants in it, made out of tires all painted. A beautiful job, beautiful vases and so one day I went over there and I says, "Boy, those are sure nice vases." And he says, "They're yours." Just like that. "Well, I don't want to take your vases." "They're yours." And lo and behold, when we left he had taken those vases and had repainted them and crated them and we brought them home with us. That shows just how kind these people were, you know. And of course we tried the best we could to repay kindness with kindness. You know, it's a two-way street, this thing, you know.

Jones

They're very friendly people.

Davis

Oh, that they were. We had one little Filipino boy that we kind of adopted and, the last night, he stayed at our house. He helped me pack and he cried and cried and cried. The fact of the matter, he had us in tears before he left to go home and the rest of them did, too. Of course, we left at 6:00 in the morning and the plane was completely surrounded by all our people, seeing us off, so it was a sad affair. I really took it pretty hard myself. I hated to leave them.



Jones

You must have had mixed feelings about it. Happy that they were there for a farewell.

Davis

I shed some tears over that.

Jones

Sorry to go away, but happy to know you had so many friends.

Davis

Yes sir. It was just one of those things.

In order to keep this plant in a stable operating condition, I wrote up a complete manual of operation. That is, from handling the logs in the pond to the grading of them, the sorting of them, the counting of them, the recording of them, on through all the operation of the mill. The peeling of the veneer, the separations, the drying, the sorting, the joining and edge-gluing operation, the sanding operation we had and the packaging of it. I made a complete manual for them to operate by and step by step, so all they had to do was, the superintendent had to do, if something was not right, was go back and get the manual and see if they're operating according to the manual and go back and get it back in operation again. This is the same kind of a program that's set here, up in Snoqualmie and later at Longview. And at Snoqualmie, I did the same thing for the plant up there, on a manual of operation. On what they call a standards of operation program. You might have heard of the standard of operation. I did the same thing there and I left that with them. And I don't know how well they use it, but from what I hear, the plant operated well and they probably did use it.

Jones

Well, you completed that while you were still there, and they were using it while you were still there?

Davis

Oh, yeah. We had it into operation.

Jones

Perhaps this contributed to stabilizing the operation there, at the higher production.

Davis

I'm sure it did. It gave them something to go by. Something they could refer to. Another thing we did, when I was there, was we - the packing of the veneer had to be transferred many times from one vehicle to another, to boats and off the boats, and then warehouse them now, and the problem then was to keep the package intact; and also, we covered

the package with a polyethylene cover. This cover had to be put on right. We had to make a platform for the veneer to be stacked on. It had to be strong enough and designed so that they could be handled, and, of course, the veneer was all packaged and strapped to these pallets.

Of course, the point was for me to get over, to the Filipinos' management, the real problem they had, in handling veneer after it left the plant, and so we very thoroughly went over this time and time again. It's loaded here, to here, to here, to the warehouse, back in the warehouse, out of the warehouse, in to the plant. It had to be something good and well done. And we improved that whole program there.

We also had a buck-buck worm. They are termites that ate wood, you know. Any termites that's found in a boat, sometimes they refused to let you take it off the boat. This was a problem, so we had to devise - we found some of these termites in our own veneer, so we had to find a way to control this.

So, I set up a program of using insecticides. Every weekend we'd go over the whole plant and put insecticide all around the plant, because this buck-buck came from a little moth-like insect. All we had to do was control this moth. If we could kill this moth before it got going, started, we could control the buck-buck. And by continuously, every few days, by just giving a shot of this insecticide, you know, or spray, why, we could control that. And we never had any problem, after that. We were having some problems with it.

Jones

What is the name you gave the termite?

Davis

Buck-buck. They called it a buck-buck termite. That's a name they had for it. If that's the official name, I don't know. But that's what they called it.

Jones

I'm glad you remembered that, Nick. That's an important step in improving the quality of things.

Davis

It's just one of those things. It's just a step by step you work in and then work out your problem. But with me in a position where I could give so much time. I didn't have to worry about quality. I just had to watch it. We had quality control men at the plant anyhow, and we just had to watch to see if the seal was properly made. And they were so proud of this joint. They were just tickled to death to go out there and they'd shake a sheet and the joint wouldn't fall apart, you know. They were just delighted, really. It surprised me at the delight they had when they could take a sheet and shake it, and it wouldn't fall apart.

Jones

They recognized the value of that improvement.

Davis

They, also, in order to see this edge-glued joint, they'd put some coloring in the glue, you know, so it would show up blue. And so I'd put the glue, I'd rub it down, I'd rub it in. And this coloring gets kind of grainy. That itself would help keep the thing from binding quick. So I dropped off the colors.

Another funny thing, funny to me at least, at the time. They had seven quality control men. And they had a regular building out here and they kept complete records of everything, you know, just beautiful records. So I think I was there about a month. Anyhow, I asked Raleigh Sabali about what this here building was.

He said, "That's a quality control building."

"How many men do you have?"

"We've got seven."

"And you're still getting all reject veneer?"

Well, somebody must not be doing their job. So as soon as I took over, after Sabali was fired, and I took over until we got the new manager to come in, I abolished this quality control department entirely. I pulled it out, and I appointed one man on each shift to watch particular things, to watch to see if that's done right. Of course, this worked successfully. We knocked off - we were wasting money, you see, on something that they weren't getting any value off of at all. Paying seven men for making reject reports but doing absolutely nothing to eliminate those awful rejects.

But the real reason why they didn't know they were making rejects, they had never gotten the proper information back from the States of what was really wrong. All they got back was "thick and thin veneer." So they had people out here measuring veneer all over the place. There was thick and thins. And nobody ever told them that the stuff was falling apart, never. And they never thought about going out there and finding out whether it would stick together or not, you know. That's just the way they were.

So, in a sense, also our management at that time - our management before Elmer Renken got there - the management there should have been able to tell himself, really. I think there was a real shortcoming in the management there. Because the management knew something about veneer. He had been in the veneer business himself. I thought he had just missed the boat, by not going over there and personally

checking himself and finding out what this problem was. Certainly, if he went over there and picked up one of those sheets of veneer, he would know, right now, that that wouldn't pass because it figured you couldn't pick it up without it falling apart.

Jones  
You'd think so.

Davis  
Yeah.

Jones  
Was that Schikofsky?

Davis  
No, no. That was Anderson.

Pearl  
He always did land - .

Davis  
I liked Anderson real well. But I thought that that was - my golly, with the experience he had, he ought to have been able to read this thing.

Jones  
It seems like that was an important oversight.

Davis  
Just a simple thing. It wasn't the thick and thin veneer so much, that they were having the problem with, but at that time back there they were. It was breaking their joints. Of course, the thick and thin was a problem but it was a minor problem compared to what the other was. We had to work on fine lines because the veneer, because it had to take thin overlays, it had to be very accurate and made within 5/1000 of an inch, you know. That's pretty fine tolerance. Well, 5/1000 plus or minus. You have, I think it was 172/1000 was a - we had to go 5/1000 over or 5/1000 under, which 10/1000 isn't very much tolerance. And we had to live under that tolerance. Of course, we had to devise everything to make it this way. We had to watch it real close.

The last of the operation was in-line sander, belt sander. It sanded one side only. And this had to be very carefully kept in line because one little - you know, sanding you could dip real easy into your veneer. But we had a way to do it and end up \_\_\_\_\_. Like I say, they got compliments back from the manufacturer back here that they were real pleased with the veneer.

Jones

What was the thickness that you were shooting for in inches, Nick, did you say 175 thousandths?

Davis

I kind of think, I think it was .172. I don't remember for sure. I think it was .172 plus or minus .005.

Jones

Now, that would be about 1/6 of an inch.

Davis

Yeah, about 1/6.

Jones

That's what you were shooting for?

Davis

It was thick veneer. We made other products. We had - if this stuff was thinner we'd sand it down to a thinner thickness and sold that to the Japanese in Okinawa, at special prices. Give them special prices on it. But we were able to work up a market for this offgrade stuff, you see. The "A" grade and "C" grade went to the States and all the other grades went to Okinawa.

Jones

But your quality control people were concentrating on the thick and thin and they were letting these other things be neglected?

Davis

They didn't recognize the problem of joints.

Jones

They just didn't know. It hadn't been pointed out to them.

Davis

No, no. And one thing about the Filipino. He's not very aggressive about finding out for himself.

Jones

He's not original.

Davis

Yeah. Not original. Then, of course, they don't have the wide range of experience in this field that other people have here. This is the only mill they ever saw. They never have seen it used and they never have been anyplace, to know what the problem was. It's a sad thing that those people - some of them can't get around and see how the end product is used. To see how it is put together, to give them an idea of how accurate and good it has to be. And,



of course, the grade was very high grade. You couldn't have defective. It was top grade veneer for top grade plywood.

Jones

On another subject now, we spoke of the Andersons a moment ago. Mrs. Anderson got involved in a religious program over there. Had a new little church building built there. How did that work?

Davis

Well, it operated for a while, after they left. It was still operating when I left, but I don't know. I think that probably it, generally, it originally - they would give up on it. Because they had to have some real leadership to keep it going, you know. And trying to start a new religion in an area like that. I thought it was all wrong myself. I think that they were already confused on religion anyhow and why break it all up in more pieces, you know. They had their Christian religion, they had their Catholic religion, and most of them were Catholics, of course, and these few over here, some other religion. Maybe made a lot of noise and got them all excited and stirred up, you know, which is not really good for them. They are nervous people anyhow. I'm not sure that was all good for them. My own feeling was all the time, was leave them alone. We're confusing them too much. I always thought that myself, you know.

Jones

What was the name of the faith or the group that she was involved in?

Davis

I really don't know. Do you remember what that faith was?

Pearl

No.

Davis

I know she tried to get us involved and I just told her we weren't going to get involved in it, and that was it.

Jones

Do you happen to know where they are?

Davis

Yeah. He's up in Mindanao. It's on the northwestern area. He's managing a plant up there, a plywood plant.

Jones

It's on up the west coast, about Zamboanga then?

Davis

Yeah. It's way up on there. I think it's up on the north shore, the north side of . . . I don't what the place is. I know some other people went there.

Jones

He's in another plywood mill up there?

Davis

He's a manager up there in a logging operation, I guess. I don't know. Well, he's an awful nice man. I liked Erwin Anderson and I liked her, but I don't mean this when I say that I thought he missed the boat by not correcting the veneer. I don't mean to say that he wasn't capable of being a real top manager, you know. A logging manager. But, I thought that he had operated veneer plants in this country, and why shouldn't he know something about it? And why couldn't he go out and give them a hand. He didn't take enough time.

The problem there was that they were losing a half million dollars a year on this plant, or more; I don't know how much they lost, I know it went into a heck of a pile of money. When you take one shipload of veneer and send it clear across, and ship it to the United States and travel across the United States on train and unload, and unload, and float it, and put Weyerhaeuser back, well, you spend a lot of money, you see. They had told me that they had lost, I believe, a half a million dollars every year. We stopped that.

Jones

While I was over there on one of the trips to Milbuk they told me of a little incident that happened over there in the barrio. I don't remember who told it to me, but it involved a potential problem. It seems that there was - and I'll relate it to you to see if you recall anything about it. It seems that there was kind of a leader in the barrio, where they had the stores, where the little village was. He was some kind of a leader, but he was kind of a radical.

Davis

Oh, yeah. He worked for . . . he was head of the union, he was trying to get to be head of the union. He tried to start a new union. A bunch of the fellows, even from the veneer mill, went to him because it never went over, he couldn't make it. I know he went over it with Renken, the manager, over in the office a number of times. He had him over there. It was a really dangerous thing. In fact, Renken's life was in danger because this fella was a radical. He was unstable, we felt.

We know of one incident where he beat up a woman school-teacher, for some reason, you know. Of course, she couldn't do anything about it. He had so much power there that she feared for her life. These fellows, they shoot one another, you know. They're bandits. Finally, this went on for several months, and I know that Elmer was very cautious. He had the guards watch Norma very carefully. They were putting in a lot of time in guarding their place. And Elmer himself was very cautious when he went to the barrio. So, finally this fellow left the community. I don't know whether he got driven out or what, I don't know.

Jones

Do you happen to remember his name?

Davis

No, I don't. I don't think I knew his name ever. But I probably heard it a number of times, but never paid any attention to it. Of course, you know, we had a mayor. What's-his-name. The province mayor, up at Palimbang. Of course, this was quite a show. Of course, they had a lot of problems with him. But he would solve a lot of problems for them, too, you know. You probably got this information from somebody else. About the chickens getting killed in the road. The logging trucks would go by and maybe kill a chicken and then whoever owned the chicken was going to sue the company for - they wanted ten times what the chicken was worth. Of course, they had to call the mayor in and settle the dispute.

Jones

There was a little incident that I recall that happened over in the barrio and perhaps it involved this radical fellow that had ambitions. But there was one of the company's managers or superintendents or officers, or maybe someone coming down from Manila, was going to come into the airfield there and then they were going to bring him through the barrio and over to the mill. And, it seems that they had somebody assigned to watch this radical and it seems like there was a barbershop that was involved there too, or something like that. But anyway this fella, who was assigned to see that this radical didn't do anything, took position right alongside of him or right back of him and, I guess he had a pistol with him, and I forget how the story goes. I'm going to have to try to find out who told me that. There was some kind of report afterwards. They asked him,

"Did you have any trouble?"

And he said, "No, no trouble."

"Well, did he make any threatening motions or gestures?"

He said, "No, he didn't dare because he knew I had a pistol."

That stopped that.

Davis

No, I don't remember that occasion. Evidently I wasn't there, at the time. I did know this, of course - anybody with any influence that you know of, like the mayor or anybody else, you know, they all had their little private armies. I guess they go for that now. I know the judge up at Palimbang was a Christian. Well, he was a Christian Moslem, see. He used to come down and play tennis. He was kind of a big man. But he had a pistol in his hip pocket.

Jones

Part of the costume?

Davis

Part of the costume.

Jones

Okay. Nick, when we first started talking you mentioned being out of Snoqualmie when Bill Sim first contacted you. I'm not sure I quite understood what was involved. What were you doing out there and what was Bill Sim doing at that time?

Davis

At that time, I was quality control supervisor at the plywood plant.

Jones

Okay.

Davis

That's when I almost lost my job there. I had had a slight heart attack and I had been off six weeks. This was the last day, Saturday, and I was going back to work on Monday. That's when he contacted me.

Jones

And what was he doing at that time?

Davis

He was on one of his trips to the States. I really don't know. I think one thing was that he wanted to get somebody to come over as quality control, but that wasn't the only reason why he was over here. He was on company business, I presume, and maybe on vacation.

Jones

He, at that time, was on assignment in the Far East?

Davis

He was the Far East manager. He was manager of the Far East. Of the whole operation.

Jones

He had come back and he was going to recruit some people, while he was here.

Davis

Yeah. He recruited me and wanted me over there. Of course, I had worked for him and he knew my qualifications and stuff like this.

Jones

Where had you worked for him?

Davis

Right there at Snoqualmie. See, Bill Sim, at one time, came up from Coos Bay. He came up to the mill, and he worked - he was superintendent of the sawmill. And then they made a change in the plywood manager and they sent Bill Sim over to the plywood plant to manage the plywood plant, be superintendent of the plywood plant. To kind of straighten up the operation. He was there probably about a year, at the plywood plant. I don't remember how long. Of course, nobody stays longer than a year. No superintendent stays any longer than a year at a plywood plant.

Jones

Okay, that fills it in for me. I wasn't aware that he had worked at Snoqualmie.

Davis

Of course, he knew me there and I had done some things for him there that were real valuable, that he took the credit for. But that is just water under the bridge.

Jones

Okay, well, that's fine and dandy. Well, have we maybe run the course here?

Davis

Well, I think so, unless you have some other things that you want -

Jones

I don't know what else to ask about. I think we've had real good coverage and we've recorded some real good information here, Nick. I'm particularly glad that we've got your report on the problems that you found when you went over there and the steps that were taken to get them straightened out. That's going to be an important part of the story.



Davis

Yeah, we certainly had to get the plant operating. Of course, the best thing that happened to me was to be put in charge, after the first week. Nobody, actually nobody would take that plant. And I didn't know - the funny part was, when Sabali left, on Friday night - that Friday night - I didn't know Saturday morning, when I went to the plant, I didn't know he wasn't going to be there. I went down to the plant.

And "Well, Sabali's gone."

"Well, who's going to run the plant?"

"I don't know."

"I guess me."

Of course, I contacted Elmer Renken. "Yeah," he said. "You just take over." He had fired Sabali on Friday night. I didn't know he had fired him, on Saturday morning. I didn't know he wasn't going to be here.

Jones

Second surprise.

Davis

Second surprise. I said, "Well, now, Elmer. What goes?" He said, "Well, you take over." I said, "You know good and well I can't run this plant very long, because this is a Filipino operation. We've got enough Filipinos to . . . Well, what I'll do, I'm going to pick my people to run this plant." Elmer wanted to go back. He wanted to go out and get some well-educated person to come down there to pick a crew and take the plant. I said "Elmer, that's the biggest mistake you could make. Why do you need a well-educated man to just sit down here and just make veneer? You need somebody that knows how to make veneer and knows how to run a mill. That's all you need." So, I picked this here Joe Calendro.

Jones

A fellow that was already there.

Davis

Yeah. He was about 45 or older. He'd worked in this veneer plywood plant before, so he had a lot of experience. He was very aggressive. Of all the Filipinos, he was the most aggressive one I ever got hold of. He'd take over things. So that's the reason I picked him, because he was aggressive. He grabbed things and did them. I said, "Well, that's the man I want. Somebody to grab this thing and get hold of it." And so I told Elmer who I put in. "Well," he said, "I want to go out and see if I can't find some good man."

But anyhow, he did bring a couple of fellows in and interviewed them. Then I interviewed them. Then we got together. I said, "Nothing doing. You're going to waste your money." He would have had to pay them twice as much, for one thing. And he would get nothing out of them. Here the fellows knew their outfits. They knew step by step by step, and he had nerve and he had guts. Boy, he'd tell those fellows what to do and in a hurry, you know. And he was aggressive and that's the guy we wanted. And we left him. So, evidently he did the job.

Jones

He knew the people, too.

Davis

So, I guess that's why the hardheaded, educated man doesn't necessarily know how to run a veneer business.

Jones

Do you remember any other stories or experiences, Pearl?

Pearl

No, I don't know. Probably will after you've gone.

Jones

Well, I think that always happens, too.

Davis

Well, of course, there's always interesting things come up. The kids were so cute. Dad would love them. The sweetest children. I had them all around me. I'd go down to the mill and walk through that bunch of houses, you know, and these kids would say, "Hi Uncle Nick." And they'd come out and hold my hand or touch me. Walk with me. Joe had the youngest boy. He was about 5 or 6 or 7 or something like that.

Pearl

No, five.

Davis

Five. They had a tree outside the house. Every time I went by he was in that tree. So, he was Tarzan. I called him Tarzan. He was always up a tree, every time.

Jones

Well, if we've gone about as far as we can now, I'll close our interview. And if you think of any real important high-light or something, why either jot it down or give me a call, Nick, and we'll get it in the records somehow.

Davis

I think I've gotten everything pretty well covered. They had a good plant. The thing that surprised me was that

I expected to go down there and find an old broken-down shed and wooden floor and broken machinery. They had a beautiful plant. Clean. That plant was clean and had a nice smooth concrete floor. I was just dumbfounded. I expected the worst.

Jones

It was relatively new, too.

Davis

Yeah. But they had good equipment.

Jones

How long had the plant been there when you arrived in 1970?

Davis

Well, it had been a couple of years. They had had a lot of problems with it. The company had made some awful mistakes. Spent a lot of money. They had a young, ambitious purchase agent and found some old lathes and thought this is exactly what they want over there.

Jones

Same old mistake.

Davis

Yeah. I'll buy it. You fix it up, repair it, you know.

Jones

Okay. I sure thank both of you.

Davis

You're sure welcome.