

[OH2149.Stuart\_file3\_access\_clip1.mp3]

[01:10:30]

Stuart: An exciting time was when we had a potential leak. Not often did we get to wear our breathing apparatus gear, our suits, with our air tanks and our protective equipment, kind of look like astronauts. So, you get certified on it, but it's where you actually put it on in your enlistment time. I was on my second enlistment when I got to put one on, so I thought it was cool. But then again, I realized we were the two being sent inside the site to confirm if it was a nuclear leak or not. [laughs]

Halaska: [laughs] Can you walk me through that? Like, tell me the story as it was happening, when you first heard, when you had to put everything on. All the way through.

Stuart: So, we get alerted. You're on call, you have teams on call on base as well, so [inaudible] your schedule, so you're sent out. So, you're like, okay, nothing happens and you just get a free night off. Well we get called to come in, and we're like, "Okay, it's just like any other day, hey, what's our task." And I go, "We're picking up MSA gear?" And he's like, "Yeah, you need your breathing apparatus."

Halaska: MSA?

Stuart: I forgot what it stands for, it's the company, it's not necessarily what it is. But it's a breathing apparatus that attaches to the protective gear suit that you're wearing. [laughs] 'Cause you see your equipment list, and you're like... And then it said, "site inspection for leak." But then when you realize what equipment you have supporting that, and I could see what technical orders I would have to pick up, I knew. This was a test that you don't actually ever do. You learn about it and know that it's there, but you don't. But, nobody was available higher than our office to go out with us, and normally that's what they do. They always wanted either a supervisor or a team training branch or quality assurance to go out with you, 'cause it's just a rare thing, and it's added security or management oversight. So, just two of us went, me and the guy I was on call with. So, we get or stuff and we're driving out there, we're like, "Yeah, this is pretty cool, I never put this on." I mean, you're reading and training yourself. He was driving so I was reading, so he could at least hear it. About how to check the air gauges, what the temperature codes mean, what the color codes mean, when do we adjust it, how do we put it on – 'cause, you don't' ever get to wear these. You know, you're trained on it and then you just never use it. You don't get retrained every year, you just get trained once, and then—So here, we're doing it, we're pretty confident, you know, puttin' it on. But when we're driving up, we authenticate, get on the site, and all of a sudden we have to inform our security. We're like, "You need to park in the furthest corner of the site, you both have to be outside the vehicle." We're not

allowed to tell them 'til we get there. Because normally they sit so they can see the security pit or whatever, but we had to have them safe and upwind in case when we opened it, it was something. Because, our job is to open it up, we do some testing, aerial testing, and we tell them, "We'll go like this, we'll just raise our hand up like this if it's okay. Then we're gonna go down, we will send someone up again to tell you if it's okay. If you see someone come up like this—"

Halaska: With both hands up?

Stuart: "—get in the truck and leave." It's also the first time you get in the driver's seat, because normally they sit in the back. And they're just like, "What's goin' on?" We're just like, "We're just here to test some vapor, some alarms are going off." So, when the plug does go down and we doing our final—it's like, a really long process, it's more like waiting. You got your stuff on, but you don't completely put your mask on, and turn the gear in and do your gauges 'til you're actually okay to go in. And that just means, if you go in and it's bad, you can breathe enough to get up and get out. [laughs] It's really kind of done. But, they have someone who's really qualified with job control talking to us, but he's not qualified to go out into the missile site.

Halaska: Mm.

Stuart: So, the only qualified person was on base [laughs] while we were out there, we're trained but we hadn't done it. So we're like, "Okay, shit, we're goin' in!" [laughs] Y'know? Paper says it's good, we can go in, "Okay!" So we put everything on, and then it just feels really quiet, and all you hear is the breathing inside. I don't know if you've ever – like a gas mask, almost? But it's just noisier because your ears and everything are covered. You just hear [inhales and exhales loudly], and it's just quiet. If you bump into something, you're just like, "ding." Everything's vibrating inside the suit with the tank and everything on it. And we're overcautious 'cause we don't do this regularly. We're checking our gauges and we had to hit some button here for – we didn't know what's going on. But then, we had to carry our stuff. So we're like, alright, and we can't put backpacks on because we have the tanks on our back, so it was really weird lowering. So we get down in there... Well, first we're like, "Who should go first?" [laughs] "Well, traditionally you would go first, but I don't mind going first." It was so funny, because he's like, "Yeah, you can go first." Not really realizing, I mean, if I would've died he would've been right after me and died too, 'cause I wouldn't have been able to tell him it was okay. So, it made no sense, who went first. But when we get down in there we have to, you know, know each other's there. You have to verbally – that's always when you're operating in a missile site.

Halaska: And how far down did you have to go?

Stuart: So the B plug goes all the way down to – it goes sixty feet down, and then you enter the site. And, that's the access hatch we always go in, and always go through.

Halaska: So, you had to climb sixty feet down the ladder in the suit?

Stuart: Yup. So you hit the wall, hear the “ding” and that would be very loud and resonate inside your whole thing, as you go [inhales and exhales loudly], you know? And then you're starting to breathe more, but you have this card, and it says, “Relax, control your breathing.” Because it's reminding you to conserve your air.

[End of OH2149.Stuart\_file3\_access\_clip1.mp3]