

**NASA HEADQUARTERS NACA ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
EDITED ORAL HISTORY TRANSCRIPT**

BYRON D. GIBBS AND NELLIE C. GIBBS
INTERVIEWED BY REBECCA WRIGHT AND SANDRA JOHNSON
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WRIGHT: Today is February 18, 2015. This oral history session is being conducted with Byron and Nellie Gibbs at their home in Lancaster, California, as part of the NACA [National Advisory Committee for Aeronautics] Oral History Project sponsored by the NASA Headquarters History Office. Interviewers are Rebecca Wright and Sandra Johnson, and we certainly thank you so much for letting us in your home and appreciate the time that you've set aside for us today. We would like to start, if we could, with Byron. Would you share with us how you first learned about the NACA and how you became a part of it?

B. GIBBS: Okay. [In 1951] I graduated from Sanger [Union] High School, which is close to Reedley [College, California], where I went to after I graduated. I attended Reedley College for three semesters.

WRIGHT: Did you get drafted?

B. GIBBS: I got drafted [in May 1953]. The teacher just gave me a letter and said, "Just give this letter [to the U.S. Army recruitment office]." [After boot camp in Virginia] I went to [Gary Air Force Base] San Marcos, Texas, with the [US Air Force Helicopter School].

WRIGHT: Did you learn about helicopters while you were there? Is that what you learned about?

B. GIBBS: Oh, yes. I went to helicopter school and [also to Alaska working on helicopters]. After I got discharged [in 1955], I went back [to Reedley], and the [aeronautics program] instructor, Roy Russell, his brother [John W. “Jack” Russell] worked at NACA. We got a bunch of us—I think there was six of us—went through NACA, and we all got hired. John Russell gave us a little tour, and all six of us were hired. I was Aircraft Mechanic III and had maintenance repairs on R-4D, [Douglas] C-47 [Skytrain], [Convair] F-102-A [Delta Dagger], [North American] F-100-A [Super Sabre], [Lockheed] F-104 [Starfighter], and this was from February 1956 to March '60.

WRIGHT: Did they give you training when you got to the NACA?

B. GIBBS: Yes, we got training. When we first got there, we had to live in a dorm because they didn't have any places for people that weren't married. We went to South Base, and I was mostly on the R-4D, which is a C-47, and I was the Crew Chief, and I got training from the Crew Chief that was there, and then he left. Most of the training was hands on. There were two hangars at NACA at the time, and the aircraft were in the big hangar, and the little hangar was the calibration hangar. You had to furnish your own tools.

WRIGHT: And that was very interesting. You had to furnish your own tools?

B. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: Did they give you a list or did you come up with your own list?

B. GIBBS: Yes, they did. They told you the tools you should have, and there were people that came around selling tools, so you could really get what ones you did need.

WRIGHT: Nellie, when did you become part of the NACA?

N. GIBBS: Before Byron did, actually. I came in June of '54, one week out of high school, I think.

WRIGHT: You had lived in the area for a while, right?

N. GIBBS: I had.

WRIGHT: What did you know about the NACA and about what was going on at the base?

N. GIBBS: Nothing. I did know the name of it, but that was it because a friend in high school, her dad worked there. I had heard her say that, and she was dating an Air Force guy out at the [Edwards Air Force] Base, and we would drive out there and throw rocks at his dorm window or barracks window or whatever, so he would come down and say hi to her. At one point, she drove me by what was the NACA, so I had seen it before I went out there the first day.

WRIGHT: Was there a job opening that you applied for, or did you just apply and they called you?

N. GIBBS: No, I don't remember ever applying for anything out there. I took the civil service exam at the old post office down on the boulevard, and they just called, so they must have given a listing or something. Maybe our high school teacher did it, or I don't know exactly how. I got a call from the personnel lady who was Leona Corbett at the time, and went out for an interview and started June 28, and I graduated in June of that year, so it was shortly after high school.

WRIGHT: What were your first thoughts about being out there?

N. GIBBS: I thought, "Oh my gosh." I walked in the office the first day, and there was this big old calculator sitting there, and I took no math in high school. I did typing and shorthand, and I thought, "What do you do with that big old thing?" It was interesting. Scary.

WRIGHT: What area did you first work in?

N. GIBBS: In the fiscal office is what they called it, cost accounting. All the employees, which I think there were under 200 at the time, but they all filled out a biweekly [timesheet] the size of a typing sheet, and their numbers all had to coincide, if they had any overtime in there, and their regular days, and they had to put the times they signed in and out. My first job was going over those biweeklies before they went to the payroll clerk, which was in the same office.

WRIGHT: Did you drive every day or did you carpool?

N. GIBBS: I did. I drove every day. Then it was just a couple of weeks, I think, when we started carpooling. I knew several people out there, actually, after I got going, so it was fun.

WRIGHT: It seems the more that we talk to people who worked out in this area, there in those days, carpooling was such an advantage.

N. GIBBS: Oh, yes.

WRIGHT: Why did it work well for you?

N. GIBBS: Well, I had to use my brother's car. We only had one car. It was just my brother and I and our mom, and so I'm not sure what he did on the days I drove, but he must have had some way to get to work. Usually, it was only one day a week. I remember there was a man on the next street from us that worked there, and I'm sure that we just scared the stuff out of him because we were all young, and he was kind of an older man. I remember one day, we had some sheep crossing the road, and he said, "Sheep!" but we had seen them.

When I started—I'll backtrack just a hair—they had only been in the building a week or two, I think. I'm not sure what the move-in day was. We all were kind of learning the facility at one time, so it wasn't too bad being the new kid in the office.

WRIGHT: You got to share that with the rest of them.

N. GIBBS: Right. Yes, and there were six or eight of us in the same office.

WRIGHT: All females?

N. GIBBS: No, no. There was—well, just two males. Our director was J. Leslie Garbett. He's one of the originals that came out from Langley [Research Center, Hampton, Virginia] and was at the South Base. Then we had a Mr. [Arthur J.] Lynch. I think he did travel [reservations for the whole Center]. A lot went on in the fiscal office. It was just the only place for accounting, I guess, which was the most unlikely place for me to end up with no math skills.

WRIGHT: Did you learn how to use that big calculator?

N. GIBBS: I did. I did.

WRIGHT: Was it one of those big Friden calculators?

N. GIBBS: I'm not sure what its name was.

WRIGHT: But it was big.

N. GIBBS: Oh, yes, and we did have IBM electric typewriters, which was nice.

WRIGHT: A lot of typing. No mistakes, I bet, was there?

N. GIBBS: Not in that office, not so much. Later on, I went into security, and that was the no-mistake area.

WRIGHT: At what point did you meet Byron?

N. GIBBS: Leona was the personnel—what was Leona's title? I'm not real sure. She hired. I don't think she fired, but anyway—I don't think in the government there's a lot of that, is there? Philip [E.] Walker was the Personnel Director, and he kept coming down the hallway and bugging me, and this was I guess in early '56. I started in '54, and he would bug me. "Nellie, when in the blank-blank are you going to get married?"

I said, "When you find me a guy."

He said, "I got one coming Monday."

I said, "Okay." I said, "He better be tall."

"Yeah, he's tall."

I said, "Okay." I shouldn't say this for the NASA archives, but I don't think much work got done that Monday morning because my friend Darlene [McLaurin Seiler] and I stood at the window and waited and waited. We saw this guy come in, and he was kind of tall, and we said, "That must be him."

B. GIBBS: I didn't have a chance.

N. GIBBS: You didn't have a chance, no.

JOHNSON: Yes, I was going to ask, did you know that was going to happen when you walked in?

B. GIBBS: No.

N. GIBBS: I had another friend kept asking him, did he need a girlfriend, and he said, no, he needed a housekeeper. In those days, oh my gosh. My mother would have just—we didn't tell her. But, anyway, that was in, like I say, February of '56, and we were married May 11 of '57. It didn't take long for that snag.

B. GIBBS: I think I got the best part of it.

JOHNSON: That's sweet.

WRIGHT: Was it one of his first days that you saw him?

N. GIBBS: The first day. The first day.

WRIGHT: The very first day. He did have somebody lined up.

Byron, some of the first days that you were there, were you learning from the people that had been there previously, or did they give you a project to work on that was yours?

B. GIBBS: The first days, they would kind of take you around and show you all the aircraft and things, show you the hangar, tell you what to do. Then they'd get you on an airplane probably right about the first week you were there. After that week, they'd get you on an airplane.

WRIGHT: Do you remember what plane it was that you first worked on?

B. GIBBS: It was a C-47.

WRIGHT: Had you been up in the planes before when you were in the service?

B. GIBBS: Yes, when I was in the service. But they were different planes. They were small, and I didn't have anything big like that.

WRIGHT: C-47 is a pretty big plane.

B. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: Some of the work that you did on those first planes, were you out on the flight line, or was it all work inside the hangar?

B. GIBBS: It was out on the flight line. On the C-47, we took people to different places, Ames [Research Center, Moffett Field, California] or someplace, or down to LAX [Los Angeles

International Airport] for some reason or other to pick somebody up. That lasted about two years, I guess.

WRIGHT: Were you just assigned to one plane at a time?

B. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: You were part of that crew that went wherever?

B. GIBBS: Yes, me and the pilots.

WRIGHT: I bet you knew more about the plane than the pilots.

B. GIBBS: Oh, I don't know. They had flown it for quite a while. It was an old one.

WRIGHT: I'll bet it was important you were there, then, if it was old, to keep it going. Do you remember any specific challenges with the C-47 that you had to deal with?

B. GIBBS: No. I can't think of anything. Like I say, it was an old airplane, so it was pretty well worked on before I got there.

WRIGHT: Sounds pretty reliable, though. What did you move on to after the C-47?

B. GIBBS: I went to the 102-A, and then a 100-A and a 104.

WRIGHT: Was there a lot of difference between those three airplanes?

B. GIBBS: Yes, they're all jet planes. But, I didn't have any jet training in school. Everyone helped you out. We had all kinds of people that knew more than I did at the time.

WRIGHT: I guess they all learned the way you did?

B. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: From someone else?

B. GIBBS: I think they did, yes.

WRIGHT: Did some of those men come from Langley that were mechanics as well?

B. GIBBS: Yes. They had what they called inspectors, too, so they would come and tell you something or show you how to do something, and it was pretty easy to get it fixed.

WRIGHT: Did you fly on the 100 series as well?

B. GIBBS: No.

WRIGHT: Is it just a one-seater?

B. GIBBS: Yes. Most of them were one. Well, the 104s had two seats, but all the rest of them were just one-seaters.

WRIGHT: Those are pretty fast airplanes, aren't they?

B. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: Then, at some point, you moved over to Rocket Power Systems, didn't you?

B. GIBBS: Yes, 104 was the last one, and then I went to the rocket shop which was coming up for the [North American] X-15. The X-15 was coming in, so they needed more people in there. They asked me if I would rather be there, and I said, "Sure." So I went and worked on the rocket.

WRIGHT: What were your thoughts when you first saw that engine?

B. GIBBS: When I heard it, it was worse. Yes, it was a pretty noisy airplane, and they would have to run the engine, and so they had to have somebody that would walk out and check everything. That was really a scare because it makes a lot of noise. There was one case where

the engine did blow up, and the pilot was in it, and it scooted him ahead and left all the back of the engine on the tarmac.

WRIGHT: Were you out there at that time?

B. GIBBS: No. I wasn't there.

WRIGHT: That's good. Did they have any type of protective equipment for you to wear when you were working around that plane?

B. GIBBS: Yes, you had to wear all kinds of stuff, masks and things because of the propellant, and the exhaust.

WRIGHT: Did you have to wear things for your ears?

B. GIBBS: Yes. They had very good hats with plugs in the ears and a shield on it. When it was running, you had to get up there and check all these things.

WRIGHT: You were dressed like a space man with the whole suit.

B. GIBBS: Yes. We were just lucky that there was nobody there when the one went up.

WRIGHT: Were you there to check the plane out before it took off and after it landed?

B. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: That part of your job?

B. GIBBS: They have to put the rocket fuel into it before it takes off. So, we'd have to get up early in the morning and go out and put all the rocket fuel in it, and it'd take off and fly back. It was pretty interesting, really.

WRIGHT: I guess so. Were you ever in the plane [Boeing B-52 Stratofortress mother ship] when it launched?

B. GIBBS: No, no.

JOHNSON: Do you remember the first flight of the X-15 with Joe [Joseph A.] Walker?

B. GIBBS: Yes. Well, they had an ex-flier from NACA [A. Scott Crossfield], and he worked with the people that made the airplane [North American]. He flew it [on a test flight] and broke it [when he] had to [make an emergency] landing. So, anyway, I wasn't at the first one, but all the rest of them, we were there. North American made it, and they had to take the plane back in and fix it up.

WRIGHT: It's that word about experimental and research?

B. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: Nellie, you were kind of involved in the paperwork, weren't you, with that?

N. GIBBS: Kind of, yes.

WRIGHT: Share with us that story about how you were working, I think, security at the time.

N. GIBBS: Right. I didn't really stay that long in the fiscal office, and it was informal working out there because I think there were less than 200 of us. Marion Kent was the Administrative Officer, plus he did security, and he had a summertime temp who I had known in school. She was leaving to go to college. He comes down to where I am, looking in the door. I don't know if he had checked with Mr. Garbett or what, but he was going, "Psst, psst!" and motioning me into the hall. I thought, "Oh Lord, I wonder what I've done now."

I went out there, and he said, "Would you be interested in transferring to my office, to the security office?"

I was kind of shaking in my boots, but I said, "Okay." Then he went in, talked to Mr. Garbett, and I think I started down there the following week. One of the jobs there was typing these security clearances, which were the top secrets at the time, and it was mostly for the guys out in the aircraft area and the engineers. There were eight copies, and you did them on a typewriter, and that's where the no mistakes came in, and I thought, "Oh my gosh!" But I loved typing, so we got through that.

One of the jobs was the security conference, or the X-15 security conference that they were going to have. It was over on the Base, as I recall, and I had to get up with the chickens and go over there and be there and register people and so forth and make sure that they were cleared to attend. That was kind of fun. The X-15 didn't really have a name at that point. It was project something-or-other.

JOHNSON: Project 1226.

N. GIBBS: Was that it? So it was a project, and it was soon after that it was unveiled as the X-15.

WRIGHT: Did you have any idea of what the project was?

N. GIBBS: We knew, yes. Right, yes. So, that was interesting.

JOHNSON: But, you had to have a security clearance, I would think, too.

N. GIBBS: Yes, right, and Byron had one. In fact, most of us had a security clearance, but some of them had higher degrees, of course, which is the way it is now, too, I'm sure. As I recall, I was expecting at that point, so I think my days were numbered when that happened.

WRIGHT: You definitely had a deadline, then, didn't you? Life was about to change.

N. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: Before you left, would you share with us some of what you saw as part of the experimental planes? Was that something that you, as a personnel person, could go watch the landings of the planes?

N. GIBBS: We could, and this is really embarrassing, but there was many, many years when I said I would never, ever set foot in an airplane. I said I never wanted to fly. I don't know what scared me about flying, because we always have airplanes going over living here, but I didn't want to ever fly.

One Christmas Eve, Stan [Stanley P.] Butchart was one of the well-known pilots, and he flew the Gooney Bird [C-47] like they called it, which Byron was on. He was taking all the ladies to buzz Disneyland because he had to go down below anyway. It wasn't just a regular flight to take. He invited all the girls to go down and fly over Disneyland, and I said, "No way!" I was the only girl that stayed at the Station that day. I wouldn't go.

But through the years and while I was there and even after I left, we'd go watch landings, but I saw the X-15 take off and land a few times, and it was pretty exciting.

WRIGHT: Especially when you consider, not many people have that memory, because there weren't that many people to see that.

N. GIBBS: The Center out there is, I think, only two or three stories. We could go up on the roof and watch, and that was always fun, too, looking down or up or whatever it was. It was lots of fun.

B. GIBBS: Problem was, it usually was real early in the morning.

N. GIBBS: Yes, yes.

B. GIBBS: Just about daybreak.

WRIGHT: Did your neighbors ask you what all those sounds and noises that they heard from the base?

JOHNSON: The sound barrier being broken.

WRIGHT: Were people asking about what was going on at the Center?

N. GIBBS: Not really. It was kind of aircraft city here in the '50s and '60s, so people knew. They lived through the Shuttle [sonic] booms [years later].

WRIGHT: Was it a family atmosphere for you to work in? You felt like people were friends?

N. GIBBS: Very much so. We did a lot of things together because there were so few of us. Rosamond is a little town as you come out the dry lake, and so we would have dances and stuff up there at one of the clubs in Rosamond, because the guys could come from the Base and other people from Lancaster. Yes, we had a lot of social things going on.

WRIGHT: Is there much about the transition from NACA to NASA that you recall?

N. GIBBS: I tried to think about that, and I really it just happened, and you really didn't notice it. Other than a lot of forms had to be changed, I didn't notice much. Maybe a few more people gradually started hiring on because we were really small before that. I didn't notice much change.

WRIGHT: Byron, do you remember much of the transition? Especially after Sputnik [Russian satellite] did things seem to be more accelerated or changed in thought on how the experiments were being done or the research being done there with the airplanes?

B. GIBBS: It probably was started up a little faster. Not too much. See, all of the X-15 was NASA. They did hire more people for it, and North American, the builder, was there, too. So, they had guys that would tell you what to do.

WRIGHT: I guess they knew that airplane well, North American. Did their mechanics come out to work on the plane as well?

B. GIBBS: Yes, they did. They helped on them too, for a while, until we got going good. I spent a lot of four o'clock in the mornings on that.

JOHNSON: Were your hours always long or was it just depending on what project you were working on?

B. GIBBS: Yes, just that project. The X-15 needed to go early in the morning hours just about every time it seems like.

WRIGHT: Part of the time you were working with the X-15, you were working on the crew support systems. Is that correct? The life support and egress systems equipment?

B. GIBBS: Yes. I had to change from the rocket shop into the life support. We would take the pilot in and put his suit on, and he had to wear a suit. We would take him and put him into a seat. He usually went and to fly and take off. Of course, when he came back, we had to take care of all the stuff he had on and take that off.

WRIGHT: Then had to prepare it for the next time? Did each pilot have their own set of equipment?

B. GIBBS: Yes, they all had their own equipment, suits and breathing apparatuses and everything.

WRIGHT: Did that change over time? The improvements for that equipment?

B. GIBBS: Yes, it changed, some of it got a little better equipment, yes.

WRIGHT: Why did you move into that area to be an equipment specialist?

B. GIBBS: They were getting rid of other people, because the X-15 was getting where it was slowing down and moving out. The person that was in charge came over and said, "Do you want to go with us?"

I said, "Okay, sure." The rocket shop, I think was about the best, that I liked the best. But still, it was someplace to go I think, more than anything.

WRIGHT: You were still working with high-powered, high-performance aircraft.

B. GIBBS: Yes, I still worked on the X-15, putting them in and everything like that. Then, any airplane they flew, sometimes if they wanted to go to altitude, they had to put a suit on, even the 104s.

N. GIBBS: Didn't you do parachutes too?

B. GIBBS: Yes, parachutes. We had to take the [ejection] seats out, too, and the parachutes, we took them down to the Air Force, and they packed them. The suits were in the Air Force, too, because they would know how to take care of them. But we put them on the pilot.

WRIGHT: That must have been a significant checklist. Did you have to do specific things in a specific order?

B. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: What did you do with the ejection seat installation and removal? What did that entail?

B. GIBBS: There are parts that have to be removed and put in the new parts, because they go out of date. They had a date on them that they would be changed at a certain date, so we had to do that. That's about all I think about in there.

WRIGHT: Did you ever see a pilot have to use that ejection seat?

B. GIBBS: No. I've seen pictures of it.

WRIGHT: You also worked on the [Lockheed] SR-71 [Blackbird], so was that a different airplane compared to all of the others that you had done before?

B. GIBBS: Yes, it was faster.

WRIGHT: That's what I hear.

B. GIBBS: But, it was less work for us. We still had to take the seats out, but it was really, really nice.

WRIGHT: At some point, you became the supervisor.

B. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: You had people that you were responsible for. Did you have a big crew of folks?

B. GIBBS: Three people.

WRIGHT: Did you train them?

B. GIBBS: Yes, we trained them. When I was there, which wasn't very long, the supervisor retired. The pilots put me in to be the supervisor, and we had to get people and train them, and there are two good ones left, and I was there with three other ones. They all got pretty good. There was one guy that had been in the Air Force and he knew how to do the things, too.

WRIGHT: During your time there, the Space Shuttle was moving into development, and they tested with the Approach and Landing Tests [ALT], the flights there. Can you talk some about what that was like to see that flying machine compared to the other ones that you had seen?

B. GIBBS: Yes, it was different. It was getting up early again. We always had to do that. Of course, we had a van that we put all the suits on the people, and so we had to get out there early in the morning and put the people within the van, all with the suits. Also, on the YF-12s [SR-71]. We put the suits on the people, and when they came off, we took the suits off. There was a period where they were landing just at Edwards and not Florida [Kennedy Space Center]. They just landed at Edwards. We would have to go out and do it then, to pick them up and take their suits off, and then when it was going to go again, they would put them back on. They had them landing out at Edwards, quite a few of them.

WRIGHT: There was the time after the [Space Shuttle] *Enterprise* rolled out of the factory, and then when it was ready to come here, I understand it just came down the main drag. Do you remember that? Can you share with us what it was like seeing it come down the main roads?

N. GIBBS: It's called Challenger Way now. [It also traveled the same route.] They renamed the street for it, but we didn't go out and see it. Everyone knew that it was going down 10th Street East.

WRIGHT: It must have been a sight.

B. GIBBS: Yes, they had to take all the power lines down out in the street. North American did that.

WRIGHT: Then, next, you see it on a [modified Boeing] 747 [Shuttle Carrier Aircraft].

B. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: Were you out there for all of the ALT?

B. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: Were you all able to see the landings as well?

N. GIBBS: Oh yes, oh yes. We went to the first [Space Shuttle] *Columbia* [STS-1] flight. The kids were small.

WRIGHT: Then were you able to be out there when the President [Ronald Reagan] came [STS-4 landing]?

N. GIBBS: We were, yes. That was quite a day, too.

B. GIBBS: We were there. Yes.

N. GIBBS: Our good friend, Fitz [Fitzhugh L.] Fulton, of course, his funeral is the 28th of this month, but he's the one that flew the 747 over and dipped the wing at the President and First Lady. Byron worked that flight, too. You drove the van for that, didn't you?

WRIGHT: That had to be exciting.

N. GIBBS: It was. Lots of people.

WRIGHT: I guess that was a difference in itself. You hadn't had lots of crowds watching approach and landings at that runway before, like it was for the Shuttle.

N. GIBBS: Right, yes. That was, I think, the first time they had a landing and a takeoff in the same day, yes.

B. GIBBS: The SRs were pretty bad, too. Nobody got in to watch them. It was real interesting. It's a real interesting airplane.

WRIGHT: Why do you call it interesting?

B. GIBBS: Because it's made different. Yes, and it was all real heavy. They were special wings. If the pilot didn't want a suit, we built up where he could just go halfway up. He didn't have to have a suit on. He would have had this pressure suit that we built up for him. Actually, it was made in England. I had to go over there and check out two pilots. We had to take the pilots out to England to check them out in the suit. It did get a lot of use. We called it a half-pressure suit.

WRIGHT: Did you get to go to England, Nellie?

N. GIBBS: No. I had a nephew that was stationed over there at [Royal Air Force Base] Mildenhall on the SR, and so he took Byron out to see his plane.

B. GIBBS: I took a little trip up the water from where we went because he was up with the SRs.

WRIGHT: That was good timing.

B. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: Did Byron come home and share a lot about what was going on at the Center after you left?

N. GIBBS: Yes, but we all kept up. We had a group called WONASA. It was the Women of NASA, and so we met, and a lot of them are still friends. Those of us still living are lifelong friends, and so we would keep up. We always knew what was going on.

WRIGHT: Filled in the blanks that you did know.

N. GIBBS: Yes, because if you start out with a facility—I was at the local hospital for 24 years after that—but you still keep up. And aircraft is so big in the valley that everybody's interested.

B. GIBBS: We used to have picnics and all kinds of things.

N. GIBBS: I laughed because it said in there, did you ever meet any dignitaries, and I thought, yes, Neil [A.] Armstrong, but he was just a cute guy that was single in those days. He went to the picnics and all of that. But, he wasn't so famous at that point.

WRIGHT: Yes, the pilot names that so many people read and that people grow up seeing them as heroes, were you're friends.

N. GIBBS: Yes, Joe Walker and Gracie lived across Avenue L. We weren't here. We were just in town, which we only moved three miles away, but yes. Joe Walker, Stan Butchart. We all went to church together. Fitz Fulton there, a long-time Methodist. We all just intermingled.

JOHNSON: That's what I've read about out here, especially, because it was a smaller site, and it was all pretty seamless, and everybody had social activities together and gatherings, and no one worried about who worked for who or that sort of thing.

N. GIBBS: Right. Yes. Oh yes.

WRIGHT: Did you ever think about leaving? You met so many people from North American and maybe, as well, from other aircraft makers. Did you ever think about leaving and going to work for industry?

B. GIBBS: No.

WRIGHT: You liked it out there?

B. GIBBS: Because they were always laying off somebody.

N. GIBBS: They did, yes.

B. GIBBS: When they made something and finished it.

WRIGHT: Were there managers or leaders out at the Center that you recall, you especially enjoyed working with or learned from them?

B. GIBBS: Yes, Roger [J.] Barnicki.

N. GIBBS: He was in the life support department. Jack Russell. His brother brought you down here.

B. GIBBS: Jack Russell, he was really good. There was a lot of aircraft that I worked on with people. They did most of the work, but they would have somebody in charge of it on the airplane, and they all were good. Actually, even the inspectors were good, really.

WRIGHT: What did you find to be the most challenging part of your job? Especially when you were encountering a new aircraft. What was the hardest part?

B. GIBBS: The C-47. I had to go riding with it, and I didn't really care too much about that. But everybody was really primed up and really working on these projects. Of course, on the X-15 and even on the 104s and the 100s. They were checking the 104s. There was one 104 we worked on that they were trying to make it shoot off a rocket on the bottom. It had a thing, and they'd go back and turn it over, and then they'd shoot off a rocket. It didn't last very long.

WRIGHT: You have some things that you want to ask?

JOHNSON: You mentioned some of the pilots. Were there any pilots that you enjoyed working with the most?

B. GIBBS: I think they were all pretty good.

JOHNSON: I imagine they were an interesting group because what they did was so different and dangerous and then, of course, there were accidents with a lot of the pilots, and I know that affected the whole community at NACA, when things would happen.

N. GIBBS: It did. What did Mike [Michael J.] Adams crash in? Was that the X-15?

B. GIBBS: Yes, it was the X-15.

N. GIBBS: I thought it was, yes.

B. GIBBS: They were all pretty good.

WRIGHT: Interesting personalities. [pause]

I wanted to ask you about working with the other Centers, especially when Dryden was part of Ames. Did you go there often, or did you work with the folks from Ames?

B. GIBBS: People came down. They had a regular up and down, every day. It was a shuttle plane, but it was some people. It wasn't Ames or NASA. They just shuttled it back and forth every day. I went up a couple times. One time, we went through Ames, looked at all the centrifuges and all of that stuff. I didn't really get up there too often.

WRIGHT: Quite a different Center, isn't it? More compact.

B. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: We had talked a few minutes ago about such a family atmosphere, so you had friends that were on the Base, and then those were also your friends here. You were in different activities. I think you mentioned that you were in a bowling league? Did that help build the friendships between the people for when they're on Base as well?

B. GIBBS: I think so.

N. GIBBS: I think so, yes. We had a lot of fun. Just about the whole Center bowled, I think. It seemed there were a lot of people.

WRIGHT: Bet the bowling alley was happy.

N. GIBBS: There wasn't a lot to do around here.

WRIGHT: During the years, Nellie, there were ups and downs with the Center. Did you feel that, at some point, the Center might be closed or changed in ways?

N. GIBBS: At budget time, yes.

B. GIBBS: They said something about it, but it never got closed.

N. GIBBS: They even talk about the Base at times. I know that's always a possibility.

WRIGHT: That would be a change for the community. They've got to have the Base there.

N. GIBBS: Oh, my goodness. It really would, yes.

B. GIBBS: We stuck it through, didn't we?

N. GIBBS: Yes.

WRIGHT: Your town's changed over the years, too, hasn't it?

B. GIBBS: Oh, gosh. It's getting big.

N. GIBBS: I grew up on the other side, on the east side of Lancaster, and I used to ride my bike up one of the main streets. Now, it's Division Street, and I used to ride my bike to the Saturday matinee, and I got stuck every time with my bicycle because it was just a sandy, dirt road. We've seen a lot of changes.

WRIGHT: Well, is there anything else that you wanted to share with us about your time out at the Center?

B. GIBBS: What do you think, dear?

N. GIBBS: You're the career man.

WRIGHT: I'm sure he had his hands in the middle of all of those.

B. GIBBS: I retired, and I really didn't want to, but I retired. I had a problem with my heart. Not really the heart. It was the arteries going in the heart. I didn't think I wanted to keep working.

N. GIBBS: They were good, though. They had a doctor at the Base after—not when we started there, of course, but later on during the Shuttle. They kept tabs on him. They’d check his blood pressure and tell him when to go get a real Pepsi if it was a little low or something. The doctor told him one day, “Go drink a Pepsi. Not a diet.”

WRIGHT: Get a little boost.

N. GIBBS: Yes.

B. GIBBS: After I retired, they had a reunion [NACA].

N. GIBBS: Oh, the reunion, yes. We worked on the 50-year [Center] reunion.

WRIGHT: How fun!

N. GIBBS: Yes. In fact, we were in charge of room reservations.

WRIGHT: Well, thank you. We appreciate your time today, and for sharing information from a very different perspective, so it’s nice to hear.

JOHNSON: Yes, we appreciate it.

N. GIBBS: Hope you can use something.

WRIGHT: It's very useful for all aspects of it. Thank you so much.

B. GIBBS: Oh, sure.

N. GIBBS: We thank you.

B. GIBBS: Yes.

[End of interview]