

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Swede Black

INTERVIEWER: Susan Birley

DATE: April 1984

Susan: It's April 6th, 1984 and this is Susan Birley interviewing Mr. Swede Black at his home in Edmonton. Mr. Black I wonder if you could just tell us to begin with where you were born and raised?

Swede: I was born at a place called Lucky Strike, Alberta, that is in southern Alberta about 18 miles south of Foremost. In our family there were four boys and two girls. My dad died when I was 7 years old and my mother carried on with the farming and raising the family and when I was 14 years old, my mother remarried a man that had six children also and my older brother and I stayed on the farm and patched for two years then I went to work for a rancher and worked for him for about six years. I remember I used to get \$30 a month in the summer time and \$10 a month in the wintertime. And I was working for this rancher, his name was Ray Walters and R. P. Medderst??? was doing some drilling on his property and I think at that time he was paying about \$5 a day for roughnecks which seemed like a lot of money to me so I left the rancher I was working for and went to work for R. P. Medderst and sons.

#030 Susan: What year would that have been?

SB: That was in 1942. And I worked that winter for Medderst and in March of 1943 I joined the army, went to Halifax, took my basic training, then they sent us overseas and we spent some time in England, then we went to Belgium, then to Holland and that's where I was when the war ended. I volunteered for the Pacific and they sent us back to Canada. I arrived in Lethbridge on V-J night, so that kind of ended the Pacific deal.

Susan: Was there a lot of celebrating going on?

SB: Yes, there was really. After we arrived in Lethbridge we had the opportunity of coming up to Wetaskiwin and we could have had our discharge at that time if we so desired or we could, some of us could work in the prisoner of war camp in Lethbridge, which I elected to do. And I stayed in the army from the time I got back from overseas until the next June. Then my stepbrother and I bought an old truck, there was not many new trucks around in those days and we couldn't have afforded one I guess, if we had have wanted. But we bought this old truck and was going to go into the general trucking business. We hauled grain and furniture and cattle. In the winter of 1946 Cantex Drilling was drilling a well south of Foremost and I got the contract to haul the coal for the boilers on the rig which I did that winter. And when that rig finished there, I think it moved up to Patricia or Brooks and drilled a well up there and then it moved up to the Leduc field.

#061 Susan: Who were they drilling for when you first started with them?

SB: In the Leduc field?

Susan: No, Cantex, the first job that you got.

SB: I can't remember Susan who that was, I think it might have been California Standard but I just don't remember.

Susan: And who were the people that were in charge at that time for Cantex?

SB: The superintendent on the rig was a fellow by the name of Bernard Klein and his wife's name was Honey. And the drillers were Stan Cameron, Tommy Mitchell, and Owen Sands. Some of the roughnecks, Huey Leper was roughnecking on the rig at that time, I remember that, George Ward, Johnnie Ward, Din Hawk???, Gordon Dixon, I can't remember who else was there.

#074 Susan: Do you remember hearing about the discovery at Leduc and how you felt about it?

SB: Yes, of course, I don't think it really meant that much to me at that time. I wasn't really that interested in the oil business. We were going to make our fortune in the trucking business. Anyway we spent the summer of '47 doing what we could in the trucking business and after the harvest was over and the grain was hauled in, myself and Chester Dixon decided to head to the oil field in Leduc. So we drove up, we brought the big old truck up, it took us all day to drive from Foremost to Leduc. All day and half the night I think. Anyway we had a job, I forget how I contacted them but we were guaranteed a job when we got up here. I went to work for, Levi Brooks, was the driller on the rig, and a fellow by the name of Red Keyes was the tool pusher. He was an American fellow. The other drillers on the rig were Gordon Dixon and Stan Cameron, I believe was the other driller and that was on Leduc #12.

#094 Susan: And you were hired on to work on the rig?

SB: Yes, I was hired on as a roughneck.

Susan: Can you remember who you talked to about the job?

SB: I can't remember, unless it was, maybe Gordon Dixon, had let Chester know. Chester was Gordon's brother, the kid that come up with me. But I do know that we knew we had the job when we got up here. That was in October of 1947 and we drilled Leduc 12, I can't remember what the other wells were but it was the next spring that Atlantic #3 blew out and we were just about 1/4 of a mile west of Atlantic #3 and I can remember looking across the road just as day was breaking and you could see the mud just shooting over the crown of the derrick. And then it wasn't many hours after that till the mud in the cellar started bubbling up and the mud in the ditches were little geysers coming up out of the ditches.

Susan: Did it affect the rig that you were working on, the production of it or anything?

SB: No. And they didn't, I can't remember, I think they shut us down for a short period of time but not very long. Cantex had a steam rig that was just north of us and they shut that rig down because of the boilers I guess, I can't even remember why. But they shut the steam rig down and they took the mud hog off the steam rig and they moved it down to the river and they laid some pipelines from the river up to Atlantic #3 and they were using

the mud hog off the steam rig and I think they had one or two more down there that they were pumping water up to the Atlantic 3 well. But I think that steam rig was shut down for, think, maybe six months, I can't remember exactly.

#123 Susan: Did you know anybody that worked on the Atlantic 3 well?

SB: Yes, I knew the one guy, his name was Cliff Covey and of course it was quite a joke at that time, there was to be no smoking around the rig you know. Covey supposedly went out to the outhouse to have a smoke and lit the cigarette and blew the outhouse away from him.

Susan: And he survived did he?

SB: Yes.

Susan: So you continued working on those rigs, or what was the next field that you went into after Leduc?

SB: We moved back and forth Susan, from Leduc to Wood Bend and then the odd well at Golden Spike and then maybe back to Leduc. But I worked for Cantex for 4 ½ years and we never got out of that little area of Leduc, Wood Bend and Golden Spike. And there was a lot of other contractors too that were there for 4 years and never moved out of that field.

#139 Susan: So there was a lot of activity going on?

SB: Yes. We used to have a crew bus, there was a fellow by the name of, I can't even think of his name now but he had a bus and when we stayed in Leduc, when I first started working in that field, we stayed in a rooming house in Leduc and this fellow's name was Amuson???. He used to pick up all the crews for maybe 2 or 3 of the Cantex rigs and he'd drive us from Leduc out to the rigs and pick up the crews we were relieving and bring them back in. But you'd drive out there at night time and you might see 30 rigs scattered around, the lights on the rigs you could see. And then I think about the summer of '48 a lot of us moved to Edmonton and we'd travel from Edmonton out to the rigs.

Susan: You started out as a roughneck, did you work as a roughneck for very long?

SB: I worked as a roughneck for about 6 months. And then I worked derrick and then I think I only worked derrick for six months or maybe a little better and I was drilling. And I'll tell you when I started drilling, there was a lot I didn't know about drilling because things were happening so fast, there just wasn't the experienced people around. But I can remember the first time I laid a derrick down, Tommy Mitchell was the tool pusher then and he told me to lay that derrick down and I was scared to death. I got it down without dropping it. I hadn't been drilling very long. A lot of people were, in about a year, from roughneck to driller. They were buying rigs as fast as they could get them and there just wasn't enough people to staff these rigs. So the only thing they could do was move people up, whether they knew the job or not and this is what happened really.

#171 Susan: Were there very many people that came in from the American side during that time?

SB: Yes. Parker Drilling had a lot of American drillers and tool pushers. Reading and Bates,

they had a lot of American crews. Even Cantex, some of their superintendents, Red Keyes was an American, Harry Sledge, the superintendent was an American. Most of the American companies had American tool pushers and drillers and of course, a lot of people in the head office in Calgary were Americans also eh. Cantex didn't have that many. He trained a lot of people, Dick Harris did. It used to be a kind of a thing, a saying in the oil field, you know, if you've been in the oil field, you've worked for Cantex at some time or another. Because Dick Harris had a name of running a lot of people if they weren't just doing their job, he didn't ask any questions, he just run them down the road. Maybe one man or maybe a whole crew or maybe the whole 3 crews, that's the way he operated.

#192 Susan: What was his background, had he formed Cantex himself?

SB: I think a fellow by the name of Harry Bass and Dick Harris, I don't know where they met up or. . . .but Dick Harris had been in the drilling business in Alberta quite a few years before Leduc started, like around Patricia and Brooks. I think he had maybe only 2 or 3 rigs at that time but he'd probably been up here 3 or 4 years before Leduc started drilling in Alberta before that. Dick Harris himself was an American.

Susan: So he had a lot of experience though in the drilling business?

SB: Yes. Very hard working. If you had trouble on the rig, Dick Harris was there, if you were on a ??? job or something, he was out there night and day until you got things going again. I liked Dick Harris, I liked working for him really.

#211 Susan: And you carried on working in all those different fields, until, did you get tired of working for Cantex, when did you decide to leave?

SB: I think what happened, I had been approached by Brinkerhof??? Drilling to go to work for them, they'd asked me if I'd like to go to work for them. When it happened Cantex had a rig at Calmar working for Texaco, and they'd been having a lot of trouble. The surface hole was 7 degrees off and they were having trouble trying to get it straightened up and what not and Levi Brooks was in, the superintendent, and he come off the rig and he said, I'm going to send you to Calmar on rig 5 and the tool pusher, Paul Knutson from rig 5 is going to come up and take your rig. And I guess it was just the way he asked me, you know, he didn't ask me, he was telling me and I just said, well as long as I'm going to make a change I'll just move over to Brinkerhof rig and stay right here in the Wood Bend field. That's what happened.

Susan: I was also wondering where you stayed when you were working in the different places, was there a camps or. . . .

SB: No Susan, there was no camps in those days, not in the Leduc field. When I first started working we stayed in a boarding house in Leduc and then when we moved to Edmonton, we had our own shacks on 156th Street. We had our own shacks where we stayed in. There weren't any camps. All the crews stayed in Leduc or Calmar or Edmonton. I think a lot of them stayed in Spruce Grove even working in Wood Bend, a lot of them stayed in Spruce Grove.

#248 Susan: And they with Brinkerhof, what did you hire on as with them?

SB: As a tool pusher. I went pushing tools on their rig 16. I replaced a guy by the name of Harold Rhodes was pushing that rig and he moved from there onto another rig down at Pincher Creek I think he went. But I wasn't there very long with Brinkerhof. They were a good company to work for, I enjoyed working for them but. . . .

Susan: Who hired you there?

SB: Burr Redding??? he was their superintendent.

Susan: And do you remember the names of the other guys on the rig that you worked with at Brinkerhof?

SB: One of the guys names I know, was Don McInnes was drilling for me and he left there shortly after and went to work for Oil Patch. Now Don was here at my place about two weeks ago. He just lost his right leg above the knee, he's had trouble with his veins and what not but he drove up to my place a couple of weeks ago. I guess he's lucky to be alive really, he pretty near passed away but he's feeling good now. He didn't have his artificial leg with him the day he was here but his spirits are good and he really looks good. Nick Artnick was another driller and the other drillers name was Dave Gray. Nick is now a drywaller, he's out of the oil field, he put the drywall on my house 10 years ago when I built this house, Nick Artnick did the drywalling for me. Dave Gray, the last I seen him, he was working for Control Drilling but I don't know where he is now. And Don McInnes of course, is not working now. Don lives over here on an acreage just 5 or 6 miles north of me.

#289 Susan: So you didn't stay with Brinkerhof very long then before you went on to something else?

SB: No. There was four people in Edmonton who wanted to start a drilling company of their own. A fellow by the name of Earl Wagner who was a promoter and a fellow by the name of Vic Love who was the manager of Canadian Steamships and Herb Hamley??? who owned Hamley Press and Carl Macdonald who was with Tanner Investments, they wanted to set up a drilling company and they approached me to see if I would look after it for them for a share of the company which I agreed to do. We got with Continental Supply and bought a new Emsco GB 350 drilling rig and we moved it out, the first hole we drilled was west of Leduc. But at that time, it was just about that time that there was a real bad shortage of casing and there wasn't that much drilling going on. So we had a pretty tough struggle. We managed to keep going for about 18 months and finally had to give up the rig. We gave it back to Continental Emsco. We just couldn't get enough work and couldn't make the payments so we gave the rig back to Continental Emsco.

#323 Susan: I guess there were a lot of companies that had started up around that time.

SB: That's right. If we could have kept going for another 2 or 3 months, it was just about the time they found oil at Drayton Valley. Then we would have been able to keep going. But anyway we lost our rig and it was just about that time that Archie Miller had taken over as superintendent for Duke Drilling Company.

End of tape.

Tape 1 Side 2

#018 Susan: Okay carry on.

SB: Archie Miller asked me if I would like to go to work for Duke Drilling and I said, yes I would accept the job as a tool pusher.

Susan: Had you known Archie before this?

SB: Yes, not that well really. When we were drilling for Imperial or Esso in the Leduc field, in the early stages Archie was a drilling foreman for Esso, so I had met him on casing jobs and this type of thing. So I did know Archie a little bit at that time. So I went to work for Duke and the first job was on their rig #2 and it was south and east of Wetaskiwin. It was a National 50 rig and the drillers on that rig were Dave Roundtree, Ken Woods, and Art Salter were the drillers. And we drilled that hole at Wetaskiwin and from there we moved the rig to Peers which is just this side of Edson and we drilled a hole for Shell Oil Co. That was about the time that the Cynthia field was discovered because I remember we had scouts all over the place and they were sleeping in sleeping bags out in the field, trying to count the stands, you know, they'd come out the rig and they'd try to see how deep you are. They had helicopters flying over the crown, it was really quite a deal. They had Bill Daniels who is now the President of Shell Oil Co., he was an engineer on that job and George Cormack was out there, he was the drilling superintendent for Shell at that time. But Shell had a lot of people out, it was a pretty important well that they were drilling.

#048 Susan: Did you ever try to fool the scouts by doing things with the pipe or anything like that?

SB: What we used to do though, and it was funny because it was in the wintertime and it was in cold weather and we'd go down when we were tripping and we'd blow the boiler down. You know, there's a valve on the boiler where you can open it and it blows hot water and steam out and the steam goes up in the air and you can't see anything. Our crews were staying at a place called Niton Junction and some of our boys drilling crews, they heard the scouts phoning from the store at Niton Junction and they were saying, that is the steamiest rig that I've ever been around but we were doing this on purpose. But they used to come out with. . . actually they'd have a helicopter and just sit up above the crown and they were out in the fields in sleeping bags trying to count the stands when we were making trips and what not. But anyway we finished that well and there was a fellow by the name of Al Stedell??? was pushing Duke rig 7 and it was drilling a well out at Eagle Hill, just out of Sundre. He had decided to leave Duke Drilling so Archie asked me if I would go from Rig 2 to Rig 7 and push rig 7. So I moved down to rig 7. When I'd moved to Niton Junction, we'd moved our skid shack into Devon, I didn't take it up to Niton Junction with me. I moved the family and the skid shack into Devon. So anyway when I moved down to Sundre on rig 7, they had a little trailer house for the tool pusher to stay in, so we decided to bring our shack down and put on the location. Bring the

family and the shack down there. And I remember the kids had just got a little border collie puppy dog, so they made the arrangements for the truck to load up the shack and what not and they thought well, the shack will be down there in 6 or 7 hours so they just put the little pup in the porch on the front of the house. And they come on down in the car. They got down there that night and the shack didn't arrive and we spent the night in the trailer and the next morning the shack still wasn't there so we decided to go and see if we could find where it was. And on the old highway, just north of Blackfalds, there used to be an underpass there, and this truck driver, I guess when he loaded the shack, the highboy was a little higher at the back than it was at the front and he's barreling down the highway and wedged the shack under the underpass and spread the top 3 or 4 inches. But anyway we found the shack and rescued the little dog, it was still in the porch. I think I finished that job and it was after that job that I went into the offices as field superintendent. That was a long job. It was a deep well and it was really good on that job, we had, the drillers were Eddie Athal???, Eddie and Hilda, they had their trailer on the location, Bob Lore and Gertie, they had a skid shack, they had it on the location, Woody Gilbertson was the other driller, he didn't live on the location. But Danny Kinitski and Mary, Danny was a motorman and he had his trailer on the location. So we had a lot of fun, we'd play cards at night at somebody's place different nights, it was really good. And I can remember going in to Olds to phone in my reports in the morning and I used to have to carry home the milk for all these. . .and I had like what the milk man had, these little wire deals and I'd come traipsing home with 6 or 7 quarts of milk every morning. I can remember one night, we'd played cards till late at night and everybody used to have a slop pail there, you know, for all your dishwashing and stuff like that and we just had a hole dug out behind the outhouse. Well, we'd played cards till about 2:00 in the morning and Kay had told me to go empty the slop pail. So I walked out with the slop pail and it was right beside the outhouse where we used to throw it over the bank, and I can remember going out there and as I swung to throw it over the bank I kicked the outhouse with my foot and Mary Kinitski was in the outhouse. Well I tell you, she let a yelp out of her. I can remember going back to bed and just killing myself laughing. But two of those guys are gone now, Eddie Athal, he drowned in a boating accident a couple of years ago, Woody Gilbertson had a brain tumour. Bob Lore still lives down at Brooks but he's out of the oil business now.

#121 Susan: So you had. . . the trailers were all right beside the rig?

SB: Yes, we were, within 200 or 300 feet of the rig. It was really. . . and everybody got along well, the women got along well, it was really good. Then when we left there, we moved our trailer into Midnapore, into the trailer court at Midnapore. That was the last move we made with the shack.

Susan: Did you move around when you were with. . .oh yeah, this was still with Duke Drilling, so that was about the only time you really had to . . .?

SB: We moved when we were with Wagner Drilling and we moved with Cantex too.

Susan: I was wondering if you could outline what your duties were as field superintendent, were you responsible for all the rigs that worked for the drilling company and monitoring what

went on?

SB: Yes. You were more or less a trouble shooter. With Duke for example, Archie was the manager, Mel Pope was the drilling superintendent and I was the field superintendent. It was a little different set-up with Duke because Mel didn't care much for . . . Mel was more a paper man, keeping records and this type of thing, and Archie was more of a trouble shooter type of guy. Archie would go out on the jobs or myself rather than Mel, he'd stay in the office more. But normally a field superintendent is, quite often you're on rig moves or if you've got fishing jobs or if you've got problems someplace, that's your job too. You do a lot of traveling, a field superintendent, you spend a lot of time in the field. In some cases a drilling superintendent does too.

#150 Susan: What's the difference between, like what would a drilling superintendent's job be compared to the field superintendent usually?

SB: Well, you generally in bigger companies, you have an operations manager, a drilling superintendent and maybe 3 field superintendents under the drilling superintendent. If you have say, 12 rigs, you might have one field superintendent for each four rigs and if they have problems, that's where he goes or he helps them move or in some cases the field superintendent even relieves the tool pusher in the olden days, that's the way it used to be. Not much any more but that's the way it used to be. If he needed days off, they'd go out an relieve the tool pusher.

Susan: So you carried on for quite a long time then with Duke Drilling?

SB: I was there 4 ½ years.

#166 Susan: Were there any jobs that you remember as being outstanding or ones that you enjoyed. Well you mentioned that one that you enjoyed, were there any that you had real problems with.

SB: We had lots of problem jobs because Duke Drilling, they had big rigs, deep rigs, doing a lot of drilling in the foothills where you have a lot of hole problems, deviation problems, shale problems. I remember we drilled a well in Keystone Valley just out of Cochrane for Pacific Petroleum and it was a terrible troublesome job. Not with the rig itself but there's a black shale there that just keeps sliding in and you can't get the pipe in the hole, you can't get it out of the hole. We had a lot of trouble there. Another job we had a lot of trouble on was Shell, Panther River, which at that time, had the highest content of H₂S gas of any well in Canada and maybe still has, I don't know. They were running a drill stem test and this H₂S gas makes the steel brittle and the drill pipe, when you go to pull it out of the hole, it would just break apart like glass. And you'd go in with the fishing tools and you'd latch on to the fish and maybe you'd pull out 300 feet of pipe and lay it down, it was a real bad job. We spent a long time there, fishing on that.

#195 Susan: You never had any problems with the H₂S leaking out or getting to . . .?

SB: We had some people knocked out with it on that job. There was nobody serious. But the camp, we had two lady cooks in the camp and from the rig there was a low spot and then the camp was down in the valley like, and there was quite a concern when they had the

blowout because the gas is heavy and it stays on the ground and they thought it might get in the camp. I wasn't there, I was in the Calgary office but I think they did evacuate the camp for a short period of time. And the tool pusher, Woody Gilbertson, had a big old police dog, it was up in the doghouse, he got knocked out with the gas. We had a rig at Ram River for Shell and a rig at Panther River for Shell and I used to make trips to these rigs once or twice a week. It's just a beautiful drive up through there, one time I'd go up through Rocky Mountain House and around through Ram River and down that Forestry Trunk road and Panther River and back in through Cochrane, just beautiful country. But we did have I guess, no more trouble than any other contractors in the foothills, you know, everybody has trouble drilling in the foothills because of the way the formations are sloping. They get soaked up and then they start sluffing in and giving you lots of problems.

#222 Susan: What can you do to remedy the sluffing with the shale?

SB: Well now, and they were doing that years ago too, if you can drill with air, then you don't wet the shales, but if there's any moisture in the formation then you can't drill with air, if there's any amount of it because it wets the cuttings and then they ball up and you can't poke them out of the hole. But they've made fantastic improvements in the muds they use and you weight your mud you know, build the mud weight up so the more weight you've got the more you're pushing back against the shale to keep them from coming in. And their drilling bits are improved so much. Say for instance in the Leduc field you might use 12 bits to drill a well, now they probably use 3 bits. That's how they've improved the drilling fluids and the drilling bits. It cuts down your drilling time and you don't have all that trip time. It's just a much better operation than it used to be.

#248 Susan: Do you remember any new developments or equipment that you initially, you wondered whether it was going to be worthwhile or you were reluctant to start using or anything like that?

SB: Not really. I can remember the first jet bits that were ever run in this country. I run them when I was with Brinkerhof. It was a special job that they used the rig that I was pushing, and Scove??? Murray, do you know Scove Murray, well Scove was on that job and George Kirkpatrick for Esso. But that was the first jet bits that were ever run in this country. And we drilled two wells just about 1/8 of a mile south of Devon on the hill. Because Scove Murray used to be able to stay in the Devon Hotel and look out the window and see what was going on at the rig.

Susan: So you carried on with Duke Drilling then until what year?

SB: I left Duke Drilling on Dec. 31st, 1958 and then I started with Bawden Drilling on Jan. 1st, 1959.

#270 Susan: Was there any reason for leaving Duke Drilling?

SB: Well, at that time the only reason was there was no hard feeling against Duke Drilling or Archie Miller or anything like that, it was just, I thought that by going with Bawden, Peter Bawden had approached me 2 or 3 times to go to work for them, I thought that maybe

being Drilling Superintendent with Bawden Drilling where I had 2 Field Superintendents that did the running around that I could spend more time in the Calgary office. At that time we had a home in Calgary also, we lived in Calgary. I could spend more time with my family. And that was really the only reason for making the change. And I can remember at that time, I guess, probably I thought I was making a lot of money too because Peter Bawden offered to give me \$1,000 a month. I can remember my father-in-law saying at the time, there's no man in this world that's worth \$1,000 a month. It seemed like so much money. But that wasn't the main reason, it was just that I thought I could spend more time with my family. As it turned out it really didn't work out that way. Because when I started to work for him, he had 12 drilling rigs and 30 days later, he had 25 drilling rigs. I moved up to Edmonton and stayed in the Park Hotel I guess for probably four months, I can't remember when we bought our house in Sherwood Park but I guess I was at least four months in Edmonton by myself. My family was in Calgary and I lived in the Park Hotel. Talking to a lot of these tool pushers that I hadn't even seen, I hadn't even seen the rig. Ben Garry was up at Fort Nelson, he was a Trident man and I can remember him calling in and saying he'd dropped a derrick and I didn't know Ben Garry, I had never seen the drilling rig. A guy by the name of J. I. Smith was on another Trident rig out at Edson. I'd met Smitty before but it took a long time to get around and see all the equipment and meet all the people so you knew at least who you were talking to. And it was pretty difficult too. Just before joining Bawden Drilling, they had bought out Husky Drilling, so you had two companies there together that had different ideas. You know, the people had different ideas and then you bring in Trident Drilling and then we bought more rigs in for more drilling. And to try and get all these people going the same direction because one company does something one way, another one does it another way. We had two superintendents, Hank Zutz??? and Lloyd Deiss??? who were familiar with the Bawden way of doing things but nobody on the Trident side. So it was at that time that I sent Tony Vandenbrink???, do you know Tony Vandenbrink, he's done very well, he's the President of Trimac now, very clever fellow. But anyway, he was pushing Trident rig 8 so I brought him in as a superintendent and he was kind of looking after the Trident rigs to give those guys a little support. You know, they thought, all these Bawden fellows, we're going to have to do everything just the way they want it.

End of tape.

Tape 2 Side 1

SB: But anyway that's why I brought Tony in and it probably took a year to get everybody kind of oriented and all pulling the same direction.

Susan: What would be some of the differences that you have between one drilling company and the other?

SB: Well, different procedures. And it all stems back to probably the drilling superintendent. He's got ways of doing things and another drilling superintendent with another company has a different idea. It's always frustrating for the people that are taking over. Because they're kind of the underdogs. But it worked out pretty well but it took about a year I would say. In the spring we have our tool pushers meetings and everybody gets together and if they've got something to bring up you get it settled right there. It did help quite a bit.

#017 Susan: Did Bawden have a better approach, do you think, than other drilling companies?

SB: At that time Bawden had an excellent name in the drilling business. They were young, aggressive. They were well thought of, their equipment was good. Of course, the Trident equipment was pretty well run down. Some of them were, they had one or two pretty good rigs but on the whole their equipment was pretty well run down, it hadn't been looked after that well. This kind of drug down the Bawden equipment too eventually because you're having to upgrade so much equipment that a lot of it has to suffer. I think this did hurt Bawden but in the early years there was nobody more respected than Bawden Drilling because of their young aggressive type of people they had there. I don't say that is that way now because they've got so big and lost control.

#035 Susan: How many rigs had you been responsible for. . .or how many rigs had Duke Drilling had all together?

SB: Duke Drilling had six rigs.

Susan: Oh, yeah. So it was quite a change in the size of the operation.

SB: At that time he was I guess the biggest contractor in the country with 25 drilling rigs.

Susan: And did he have a lot to say with company operations, did you meet with him. . .?

SB: Yes, he probably had too much to say. Him and I really didn't get along as well as we might have, Peter and I. Bob Sparrow, who was supposedly running the company, and I got along very well but Peter of course, didn't get along with many people. He was pretty overbearing and it had to be done his way. So we didn't . . .and I didn't have that much to do with Pete really. He kind of stayed out of things. Bob Sparrow was an excellent man, a very clever fellow. Him and I got along really well.

Susan: Had Peter Bawden started out as a driller, how had he got in the business?

SB: Peter Bawden . . ., his dad is in the brokerage business in Toronto. Peter Bawden started out managing a lumber yard in Peace River and he used to haul lumber out to these

drilling rigs and I guess he's smart enough and he could see what was going on and I think his dad backed him and he got a fellow by the name of George Burke, who was an old Royalite man, a very well respected gentleman and a lot like Archie Miller, similar type of guy to him. But he took George Burke in as a partner and they started out with 2 drilling rigs and I don't think George maybe, stayed there two years, him and Peter had trouble getting along. So George sold his interest or whatever, I don't know but he got out of the company. There was another fellow by the name or Val Munt??? who was their superintendent, he started out as their superintendent, it was when he left that I went in and took his place when he left the company.

#066 Susan: And what about Bob Sparrow, was he an old driller?

SB: No. No, they hadn't worked. . . I think Bob, after he come to work for Bawden went out a couple of summers and roughnecked for a week or two weeks. No really they were both boys from Toronto. Bob Sparrow was an engineer, Peter's not an engineer. Bob on the financial end of it, was a wizard really, on contracts and this type of thing. He understood the business real well, he learnt fast. But as far as roughnecking or anything, neither one of them, outside of going out for maybe a week, that's all they. . . . There was three of those boys. Another one is John Thompson, do you know John Thompson. He's the P.C. Member of Parliament for Calgary South. John and I started to work the same day for Bawden Drilling. John was the Accountant for Bawden and then he started his own company too and has since sold out. But they're all Toronto boys, all three of them.

Susan: And you ended up being involved with the Winter Harbour well??? could you tell us a bit about that? Were you involved in setting it up or anything like that?

SB: Actually Lloyd Deiss was the fellow that had more to do with it, Lloyd Deiss and Doug Parker. Doug Parker was the toolpusher. The thing was all put together in Edmonton, sent to Montreal and put on a ship in Montreal. Actually Lloyd Deiss went on the ship from Montreal to Winter Harbour. I think Peter Bawden was on the ship also, Ed Tovell??? I think was on. No Susan I didn't have anything to do with setting it up on winter Harbour because I wasn't there. Lloyd Deiss was there and Doug Parker, Lloyd was the field superintendent and Doug was the tool pusher. I think I flew up there three times during the drilling of the well, that was all that I had to do with it.

#096 Susan: What was the drilling location like, can you describe it?

SB: Just like a big iceberg. Everything up there looks the same. You talk about white outs, you've heard them talk about white outs, everything is white. That's the way it looks. And the snow up there is like sand. You can drive a cat on top of a snowbank, that high. It's almost like ice. The wind blows and it's like crystals, it's so hard that snow. Really there ain't much to say about it outside of it's like a big iceberg, that's about. . . . You know, you're on permafrost.

Susan: How many people were in the camp?

SB: I suppose, with the truck drivers, the cat drivers, I would think about 30 people there all the time, as a base. Had an excellent cook up there, Max Gordichuk??? was his name, really a good cook.

Susan: I guess that would help keep the men's moral up, if there was good food.

SB: Yes. We didn't change that many people on that job. The guys stayed there pretty good.

#114 Susan: Did they have any extra pay or any incentive to go up there?

SB: Not really no. We picked the people. Of course, at that time we had a lot of good people to pick from and they were kind of hand picked. No, they were good crews, they didn't gave us any trouble. And we had a topnotch tool pusher there too, Doug Parker is first class. He worked day and night but he didn't stand for any nonsense. Anybody start giving him any trouble, he's out on the next plane and they all knew this and respected Doug and worked well for him.

Susan: You also went to Australia with Bawden Drilling or did you work in Alberta for very long before going to Australia?

SB: I was in Alberta for 3 years, from '59 until 1962, the end of the year, 1962 we went to Australia. Peter Bawden joined forces with an Australian company and it was called Richter???-Bawden Drilling and they asked us if we wanted to go over as drilling superintendent and I flew over, spent a couple of weeks over and looked the situation over and rented a house while I was over there and come back and got my family. We left here the 20th of December, 1962. It was quite a change really, wintertime here and we got over there, it's the middle of summer and it's hot and humid. And coming from the cold weather, it was pretty tough. Of course, Kay was about 8 months pregnant and she pretty near died over there with that heat. The houses at that time, there was no air conditioning. And at that time they didn't have screens on the windows, they didn't believe in putting screens on their windows. The only kinds of screens you could make and we had them put one screen on one window in each room because all their windows turn out this way, they don't go up and down like this, they swing out so they catch the breeze. Their thought was at that time, if you let the breeze blow through, it blows all the insects through the house and out of the house but that ain't just quite right. So we had some screens made up and they're just like our blinds are, you just pull the screen down. It wasn't long, we had a few problems getting adjusted, the kids in their school and whatnot but really they did very well. It was a great experience for them. The oldest girl, when we left there, she'd finished her grade 12 and she joined the convent there and she's still there. She's a nun teaching in the school where she went to her high school over there. So she's been over there for 22 years now and loves it, she would never come back here.

#166 Susan: Were the drilling conditions that different from Canada?

SB: Not really, there wasn't at that time, that many experienced people over there, they did have some tool pushers and drillers over there. I found the people over there were excellent people, equal to the Canadians as far as learning and working. The only problem we had to start with was those people like to go to the beach on Friday night and spend every weekend at the beach. Well on the drilling rigs, this is pretty hard to do when you're working 7 days a week and 30 days a month. But it wasn't long. We trained a lot of our own roughnecks, we made a lot of driller and some tool pushers. I would say they're equal to our Canadian people. Most of the jobs there were camp jobs because your

distances were so great, you know, you're out in the desert. But the Australian has got to have his beer every day, all the canteens, that was part of the deal, each man was allowed four cans of beer a day. And you had to, they couldn't save them up, when he got his beer, you opened it so he drank it then.

Susan: So they had to be rationed?

SB: Yes. We had no problems with people drunk on the location. But this is part of the Australian's life is that grog they call it, beer. And there's a lot of the people that we sent over there, in 1962, we sent quite a few pushers and drillers over there, and there's a lot of those people still there today that at that time were younger people and married over there. But I'd say there's probably 10 or 12 of those people are still over there and will never come back here I don't suppose. They're married and set up. Some of them are working for Bawden in Indonesia. A lot of them went to the North Sea I think, with Bawden Drilling but a lot of them made that their base, that's home to them.

#203 Susan: What were some of the other projects that you worked on in Australia?

SB: Probably the biggest, most interesting project was the platforms in the Bass??? Strait. The Bass Strait is halfway between Australia and Tasmania and we built these platforms at a place called Barry's??? Beach and all the equipment was put together in packages, about 200 ton in each package. So when you took it out to the platform, we had a 500 ton barge and a 700 ton barge and this equipment was all set on the barges at the beach and then you'd take it out to the platform and set it up on the platform with these big cranes. I would think that's probably the most interesting and you might say, frustrating part of the whole deal I had over there. Because it's pretty rough water you're working in and you can imagine 200 ton on a boom that's maybe 180 feet long on the barge and if you're getting swells of 3 or 4 feet, you can imagine what it's like out on the end of that boom, how much it is and trying to set these 200 ton packages on top of that platform that's about 60 feet above the water. It's pretty frustrating and pretty dangerous too. But we had no trouble there. The one problem, the biggest problem we had and it had nothing to do with Richter-Bawden. It was on the Kingfish platform, that was the first platform we set up and got going. The heliport on these platforms, that is a heliport there you see. . . but after we got going Esso took a bunch of photographers and newsmen out to show them this platform and from this heliport you walk down a ladder just on top of the camp and into the camp down below. So they'd taken these newsmen and photographers out there to take some pictures of it. And the rule was that no one was allowed on this heliport when the helicopters were landing. But anyway, they'd taken 4 of these people up in a helicopter to take pictures and they were circling around and when they were coming in to land some of these other people come up on top of the heliport. And the guy was just about landed with that helicopter and the tail rotor broke and it come down and blew out one of the pontoons on the helicopter. Of course it was leaning sideways and that blade was coming around and one guy lost his head and another guy lost, the old photographer from ??? lost his backside. I think there was 7 people injured. One fellow was knocked over the edge. And then what happens, the Department of Transport wouldn't let us move that helicopter off there until they had an investigation. So these people that were injured,

we had some pretty good first aid men on the rig. They had to bandage them up and do what they could until we got one of these barges come in from Barry's Beach and they have a heliport on these also. But it was the next morning before we got this barge out there and we had to lift those injured people from here with this crane, you see this crane here, we had to lift those people from there over on to the heliport on here so we could fly them into the hospital.

#284 Susan: Oh, isn't that ridiculous.

SB: But that was the only serious. . .

Susan: And it wasn't anything to do with the drilling operations either.

SB: No, it was But that's the Barracuda Platform. See this, it's 65 feet from there to there.

Susan: And was the one of the first offshore rigs in the world?

SB: The first platform? No. But that was the first one in Australia. And that's the big barge where you hauled all the equipment out on. And they also used that barge to lay the pipeline from these wells. That was a ten well platform, that one. They drill one straight well and nine directional wells from that platform. And when they lay the pipeline from there to the shore it is laid with this barge, it's just welded and dropped over the end and it drops on to the ocean bed and it lays on the ocean bed.

Susan: So it was quite a change from the type of operation you were used to on the prairies.

SB: Well, everything is so crowded. We had crew problems to start with because of it being so crowded and what not. But once they got used to it, now they love the platforms, the crews do, they really like it.

#313 Susan: And you did quite a lot of work all through the South Pacific for Bawden?

SB: Well, we drilled the one well in the rain forest in New Guinea. It was quite interesting because we put the rig on ships at Brisbane and sent it up to Port Moresby and then we had to take it on barges from there up a river called the Lala??? River. But when we went in, I'm getting ahead of myself really. When we went in to stake the location, there was the surveyor and a consultant by the name of Harold Noyes???, he's in Calgary now, but he was over there looking after this for a fellow by the name of Macmillan, and myself. We were in about five miles from the river. But we had to start at the riverbank, we had natives with machetes and they had to slash the way in to that location. The growth is so thick and 100 feet tall, the vines and the trees and what not. We actually slashed our way in and camped as we went in to stake the location. The we had to, when we sent the rig in there, we sent it in on barges and we had, on the average I guess, 70-75 natives cutting trees and core drawing and tractors trying to build a road in there. We took most of the equipment in, we had to drag it in with cats, it was so wet and soft. We were in there from one October to the next October and these natives worked continually on that road, core drawing and still you couldn't drive a truck out of there when we finished the job. That soil is just that soft, that everything just. . . . It was nothing to get 10 inches of rain overnight. And the rain there falls straight out of the sky. If you had a dish that big around over your head, you would never get wet because it just falls straight out of the sky and

then the sun comes out. And it gets so hot and humid. We built our own camp in there. We made the frame out of small trees . . .

End of tape.

Tape 2 Side 2

SB: I was saying we built our own camp and we made the frames out of trees about 3 inches in diameter and then the bottom four feet was made out of a kind of a tin foil just run around the frame and then you had four feet of fly netting, mosquito netting and then the roof was made out of this tin foil that's what our camps were made out of. And we had quite a few natives working on the rig, not actually as roughnecks but hauling mud and just labourers around the rig, cleaning and what not. We had some of the kitchen help were New Guinea people and they were real good workers. I've got a list someplace, I forget what we used to have to pay them but they had to have so much tobacco everyday and it wasn't very much and one can of fish for every 2 people, so much sugar, so many shotgun shells. Each group has a gun boy, they have wild pigs up there and we had to give them so many shells, that was part of their pay so they could go out and shoot these pigs and then they'd barbecue them, put them on a big spit.

#018 Susan: Did they get money as well?

SB: Yes, but it wasn't very much. It was something like 50 cents a week. And I've got that written down someplace.

Susan: So it seems like Canadian drillers are really spreading out all over the world and helping develop other areas?

SB: The Canadian drillers have got a good name anywhere in the world. They're probably better accepted than any other people in the business.

Susan: Do you think there's any reason for that?

SB: Well, I think they are the best. They're much better rig people than the American people are. They look after equipment better. I think they understand equipment better.

Susan: And I guess working in Canadian winters, they've put up with really bad conditions.

SB: Yes. That's one thing you want to make sure of. When we went to Australia, until they know, everybody is little Yanks. They call the Canadians, little Yanks. But you want to make sure they know you're a Canadian because you're better accepted. The Americans aren't accepted that well in a lot of places. For some reason, I don't know why. I didn't do any drilling in Borneo. I went up there and spent a few days one time, well actually it was about 10 days. We were bidding on some work up there and I went up to Brunei and looked at a location but we didn't get the work. So outside of New Guinea and Australia and a place, Beryl Island, which is off the west coast of Australia, that's the only places that I actually worked while I was over there.

#043 Susan: And then you ended up coming back to Canada, when did that happen?

SB: We came back to Canada in 1968. When we went over there, the Australian government allowed us to go over, they called us visiting experts. When things got pretty busy over

there, they allowed so many Canadian people to come in and we were allowed to work over there on our salary which was paid, equivalent to Canadian and pay Canadian taxes, which was a lot less than what the Australian taxes were. So I was there two years, then they gave me a two year extension on the same deal, then they gave me another two year extension and after 6 years, they said, you've either got to pay Australian taxes or you can't stay here. So then's when we decided to come home. But really we could have stayed as easy as coming home really, at that time. So we decided to come home, and we got back here, it was six years to the day we got back here.

#059 Susan: I guess it was hard adjusting for awhile was it?

SB: Yes, especially for the little guy. He'd never seen snow. And of course, the kids didn't have winter clothes. You leave there the middle of summer and you arrive here at Christmas time, it's pretty rough on them. And it was a little rough on us really, getting acclimatized again. But we kept our house, we didn't sell our house when we left here because we were only going for two years and so our house was here when we got back and we just moved right back into that. So we got back here at Christmas time and I don't know whether you remember or not but the January of the next year I think was the longest, coldest January on record. And I spent a lot of time in Sama??? Lake and Rainbow Lake that winter and it was unbearable, really it was a cold winter. Then in about the first of July, Peter asked me if I would go to Algiers and relieve, they had a labour contract over there on 2 drilling rigs and there was a fellow by the name of Dick Russo??? was the general manager over there and he was going on two months holiday so Peter asked me if I would go over and relieve him which I accepted to do. There was another fellow from Bawden went over, a fellow by the name of Al Peters went with me, he was a purchasing agent. And we arrived in Algiers and we couldn't speak French and they couldn't speak English. It was pretty frustrating. We got in the airport and we're trying to get some of their local money, dinars??? and you got the feeling you're getting taken but you don't know how bad. And we knew we were to stay in a hotel called the St. George's Hotel so we finally got some money and got a taxi stopped and got down to the hotel. But then when you got to order your dinner in the hotel you don't know whether you're ordering fried eggs or roast beef or what, you can't read the menu. After a few days I found a couple of the waiters that had been over in Montreal at the Exposition and they could understand some English. So that part of it was solved. But it was really frustrating working in the office. I was the only one in there. And there was a bilingual secretary there but if I wanted to talk to any of the Sonatrac??? people I would have to talk to here in English and she would talk to them in French and then they'd tell her what they wanted to tell me and she'd tell me and then I'd tell her and she could tell them. It was a really frustrating two months. Although they were very good to me, the people there but I was kind of glad when I flew out of there headed for Zurich, I didn't really care whether I went back or not.

#106 Susan: And so you came back to Canada then with Bawden?

SB: Yes. While I was in Algiers, Peter Bawden had a little company called Argus Drilling

which owned four little rigs. And while I was in Algiers, Bob Sparrow made a deal with Peter Bawden to buy these four rigs. So when I came back from Algiers, Bob Sparrow met me at the airport and asked me if I would like to go to work for him and he offered me a pretty good deal, profit sharing deal so I accepted. And I worked for Bob for about two years before he got killed. Bob was killed, he was on his way out to the Shuswap to his cabin out there and he run into a Greyhound bus at Revelstoke and was killed. So his wife, Bobbie, operated the company for about a year and then decided she wanted to sell it. So there was a fellow by the name of Graham Ross, Neil Belcher, Merv Demenco, Bernie Shanell??? and myself bought the company from Bobbie Sparrow. And a year later we bought another company called Witco Drilling, who had four little drilling rigs.

#129 Susan: And how many rigs had Argus had?

SB: They had six. And we also bought a company with the Witco Drilling was Wellsite Trucking, who had five or six trucks. And in the fall of 1978 they decided to move the company from Edmonton to Calgary and at that time I decided I didn't want to move. I was pretty well settled out on the acreage, so I sold my interest in Argus Drilling and thought I was going to retire, or said I was going to retire. But I spent a lot of time in the next few months in the States looking for equipment for different people. At that time the boom was on and there wasn't enough equipment around. So I spent a lot of time trying to find equipment for people and helping people, Laredo Drilling, I helped them get started, helped them build their first rigs. I helped Esso rebuild two of their existing rigs and build another new rig. I helped Challenger build a new rig, their 9E rig. I also started a little rental company, where I rent sump??? tanks and I bought and sold quite a lot of equipment when I could get it. Do some rig inventory and rig appraisals, I raised a few registered cattle. And that's about it I guess.

#156 Susan: Well, it sounds like you've enjoyed yourself though.

SB: Yes, I have. I've had a lot of fun. I've enjoyed it.

Susan: Do you think the business has changed that much from when it started out in the '40's?

SB: Yes. And I think for the better in a lot of ways. As far as people are concerned, it used to be, they'd send you out on a job and you'd be there for three months before anybody relieved you. And it used to be that most oil companies, their tax year ended, maybe November and they had a bunch of money to spend before the end of the year. Or their tax year ended the end of the year and they'd suddenly decide the end of November they had a bunch of money to spend. So everybody would have to work over Christmas and New Year's. Now if there's any possible chance, they shut down maybe, 2 or 3 days for Christmas and a day or two for New Year's. Really you should be able to do all your work in 360 days a year without people having to work Christmas and New Year's. And nobody is expected now to got out on the job and stay for 3 months. A lot of it is 2 weeks on and 2 weeks off or 2 weeks on and a week off, which is I think, much better. There's been a big improvement in the equipment, drilling bits, drilling fluids I think are probably they two, as I see it, two items where most advancement has been made. Certainly the equipment has been improved quite a lot. I don't think to the same degree as the drilling

bits and the drilling fluids.

#185 Susan: Do you think the type of people have changed that are involved in the business?

SB: Yes. I think they're. . . I don't know how I would say this. . . they used to be considered a little more rough and tough type of people than they are nowadays. Whether they were or not . . . I think really they were. I think there was a lot of things that went on in those days that don't go on today as far as drinking and fighting and this type of thing. I think really they were a little tougher lot.

Susan: Are there any periods that you enjoyed more than others?

SB: I don't know Susan. I enjoyed Australia really well. I think that's probably 6 years that I enjoyed. And this last four years since I've retired, I've enjoyed quite a bit too, although I've been pretty busy and what not but I've really enjoyed it because I can work when I want and it's been pretty rewarding for me too.

Susan: Are there any people that you feel really impressed you with their attitude or the way they worked or anything like that?

SB: I suppose there's a lot of them when I think back. Tony Vandenbrink was fantastic fellow and Lloyd Deiss, who both worked for me as superintendents. There's hundreds of them really that have been I think, really outstanding, Barry Williams, Doug Parker. I've had a lot of people work for me and I've worked with a lot of people in that time.

#219 Susan: I was wondering what your membership was, if you'd belonged to any of the oil field society's or something like that?

SB: I used to belong to the OTS. I haven't joined for a few years. I belonged to the Derrick Club. I used to belong to the Petroleum Club.

Susan: Did you feel that those kind of groups had a role to play in the industry?

SB: Definitely yes. And I think, the Desk and Derrick Club plays a big role, do an awful lot for the industry. My daughter that stays at home, she's very involved in the Desk and Derrick. She was President a year ago but she spends 2 or 3 nights a week doing different things with the OTS and the curling and whatever. And the Oilman's Golf Tournament, they're always involved with that.

Susan: I was wondering if you just had any closing comments before we finish, about the industry or your career or anything.

SB: Susan, I think all I can say is I think the industry has been really good to me, I've enjoyed it. If I had to do it over again, I think I would do probably the same thing as I've done the last forty years. I don't have any regrets. I've met an awful lot of real fine people and worked with a lot of real fine people in my time in the oil field.

Susan: I guess I was wondering too, I noticed you have a nickname Swede, how did that come about?

SB: I don't really know. I've had it ever since I. . . . I'm not a Swede. But I guess when I was a small child, my hair was perfectly white and my dad nicknamed me Swede and I've had it ever since I can remember.

Susan: Well, I'd like to thank you for taking part in our project and wish you success.

SB: Thank you very much, that was very interesting.

20 Swede Black

April 1984

Tape 2 Side 2