

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Blain, Mark Sr.

INTERVIEWER: Aubrey Kerr

DATE: July 1984

AK: July 29th, 1984. I'm Aubrey Kerr and I'm in the home of Mark Blain Sr. This is #18 Jasper Court W. in Devon, Alberta. Mark, just a little bit of your early background, where were you born?

MB: I was born in Griswold, Iowa, which is about 35 miles east of Council Bluffs, across the river from Omaha, Nebraska.

AK: When did you come to Canada?

MB: I came to Okotoks, Alberta as a baby. I was about a year old and we settled in the Okotoks district, my dad was a farmer.

AK: Why did he come to Canada?

MB: For health reasons. He had trouble with asthma. The elevation in that area was about 7 hundred feet above sea level and in Okotoks, Calgary, as you know it's about 36.

AK: That's right. Did he continue to farm in the Okotoks area?

MB: Oh yes. I was the youngest of 6. He was quite a cattle dealer, at one time we had a section and three quarters of land, over a hundred head of cattle and horses. I attended school at Okotoks and we kept farming and went through the Depression, the dirty 30's. So in '37 I thought it was time to make a change and I went into the oil field in Turner Valley.

AK: What had you done prior to 1937?

MB: Farming, raising grain and cattle.

AK: I see, working with your dad?

MB: Yes, and later on I was on my own, my dad having reached an age where he wasn't able to work and he was sort of retired and I was running the farm.

AK: Are any of your brothers or sisters still living?

MB: No, I'm the last of 6. My sister, the last of the family, passed away last November in Calgary.

AK: May I ask what your age is now Mark?

MB: I was born Sept. 28th, 1906, I'm in my 78th year.

AK: So you went to work in 1937. What impelled you to go get into the oil business?

MB: Well, farming had reached the stage where it was nearly impossible to make a profit. You may remember, when we went through the Depression, wheat was down to 19 cents a bushel. We had cattle and hogs, we were selling 1,000 lb. steer for \$10, 2½ cents a pound for 200 lb. hogs. There was no way that you could show a profit, all you had was a lot of hard work to show for it.

AK: And by that time had you married?

MB: Oh no, I was single, I couldn't afford to get married.

AK: Right. And yet, you were getting on, you were over 30.

MB: Yes, I was.

#037 AK: So, who did you go to see over in Turner Valley?

MB: I had my brother-in-law was working for Purity 99, for A. H. Mayland. So I was back and forth and became acquainted with a few of the people there. Anyway, Purity 99 drilled a well, Mercury #8 in '37, and so I went and applied for a job. I started off with a pick and shovel, there were 37 of us and everybody was wondering who was going to be picked to go on the drilling rig and I was fortunate enough to be selected to go on.

AK: This was a rotary rig of course?

MB: This was a rotary rig and steam powered.

AK: Who was pushing tools?

MB: A fellow by the name of Bill Mond and Bob Cameron, two of them. A. H. Mayland, he was the big shot, he was the man that raised the money.

AK: Had Garnet Edwards appeared upon the scene yet?

MB: Yes, I knew Garnet Edwards. He wasn't on that drilling rig with the group that I was but I met him.

AK: So you worked on the rig, you did drilling right in the valley for how long?

MB: From '37 to '47, at which time I come up here. You see, when I went to work for Royalite, that was a dry hole, that one I was talking about. The driller was Slim Harper, quite a noted driller down there. We were all laid off in November and I started in January 13th of 1938, with Royalite.

AK: And who did you get a job through, through Fred Cameron or who was it?

MB: Dutch Visser.

AK: Oh, Charlie Visser. You had known him before?

MB: We went to school together. Yes, yes, I knew Charlie.

AK: So you kind of grew up together?

MB: Well, yes, Okotoks, sure.

AK: So when you went over to the Royalite office, you went to see Charlie?

MB: Yes.

AK: Was he able to put you to work pretty soon?

MB: Yes, right away in fact.

AK: What did you do?

MB: I went racking pipe. Sam Sewell was our driller in those days.

AK: Do you remember Lauder Nowers?

MB: Oh yes, he was our derrick man, I was racking pipe and he was our derrick man.

AK: Lauder and Betty Nowers, who was Dr. Taylor's daughter, are good friends of ours in Calgary. So I must tell Lauder. There was a story that Finn Lineham told about Lauder, coming out, his dad brought him out and this was before I guess, you got started, to Sammy Sewell and Sammy looked at him. He had white shoes on and fine clothes and he said, you sign the book and you get back here tomorrow morning with your working clothes on. But Lauder used to reminisce about travelling back and forth into town and hitching rides with Frank Moody and with George Pokey Sr. I don't know whether you remember those guys.

MB: I remember them by name.

#075 AK: Okay, let's move on. How long did you work on the rigs then, before you went into production?

MB: There had been quite a few of the boys injured on the drilling department. So that was the reason that I had got the job through Charlie who needed quite a number of fellows. So anyway, that was in January, until June, at which time I was bumped back. So I was sent over to production 5 days a week, I had a lower rate of pay, 65 cents an hour to be exact. So then it was sort of a waiting game until holidays would start in July. I rather enjoyed the production, I was learning quite a little bit about the operation. Charlie Visser, I'll always remember this, left a note at the tank farm where I was working and he said, go to work at 4:00 tomorrow afternoon, Royalite 30 and rack pipe for Harry Morris. And he said, and put out. So I had to tell the boys at production that I was going to go back to the drilling department. Bill Blinn??? and Lou Silverthorn, they said, oh boy, don't you go back there, you stay with us, we'll be working and those guys will be all laid off and you'll still be working. So I phoned Charlie that night and I told him I'd decided to stay on production and I did.

AK: And he didn't resent that?

MB: Oh no.

AK: He understood.

MB: Yes he did. I gave him the reasons. Charlie was a very fair minded man.

AK: Yes, he was open and kind of a friendly, happy person.

MB: Yes. He was a friend to everyone, everyone spoke very highly of Dutch Visser as they called him.

AK: When you were on the drilling end did you have much to do with Floyd Welker?

MB: Floyd Welker, yes. He was with Charlie the day I got the job.

AK: What a character eh?

MB: I'll tell you what he said, I had worked with Purity 99 and I mentioned Slim Harper. Slim Harper was quite a noted driller and he had been with Royalite and he was doing a bit of drinking and they fired him. When I talked to Charlie about having experience he said, I'll have to get hold of Floyd Welker. So down comes Floyd, he said, who did you work for. I said, Mercury, Purity 99, who was your driller, I said, Slim Harper. Oh my god, he said, if you can rack pipe for Slim Harper go to work tomorrow morning.

AK: That was good enough for him?

MB: Yes. So I started the next day and I stayed for 15 years.

#111 AK: So then, when you made that big decision to stay in production, could you just describe briefly what you used to do in the valley?

MB: When I first started, they called it separator operators then. It would be one well coming through a separator which as I'm sure most people know, it separates oil from the gas, the gas going up to the top, to a pipe to the plant line and the oil into 2 tanks. There were usually two 500 barrel tanks and you'd have to keep track of the oil, you'd gauge it every hour. The tank was full, you'd switch to the other one then the pipeline boys would come

and pump it away to Turner Valley.

AK: That was oil rather than that hot stuff, the gasoline?

MB: You're thinking of the naphtha.

AK: The naphtha, yes. Were you ever on a well where they had the tanks where the gasoline was collected, the naphtha?

MB: Oh yes, I was. Very much so. You see, I moved forward, you started usually with one well, I moved on and I was looking after one of the largest batteries in Turner Valley. There was 4 wells, they were producing about 1,000 barrels a day for each one, we were supplying fuel gas to 2 drilling rigs that were there and pumping water from the river. This was the Highwood River, way down in the valley. We were pretty busy, we were just on the hop from morning to night, between pumping the water, looking after the gas and producing 4,000 barrels and oil and pumping it. So then, there was a travelling truck, it made the rounds, picked up the reports, looked after the gas wells and assisted new operators when necessary. That was when I became involved with the gas wells. They were shallow, I think they were Madison Gas, wasn't it?

AK: Yes, that was the subsidiary.

MB: That was a subsidiary but we looked after the wells. It was mostly changing charts and they would load up with naphtha. This is what you were talking about, they would load up with naphtha and then it would choke off the gas. So we'd have to shut the plant line off and pull them through a separator to a tank. I remember the Mayland wells, 1, 2, 3 and 6 were the numbers, and that naphtha was just as green as that old 3 star gasoline we used to have out of the pump. You got used to it, if you stayed with it. I remember getting 100 barrels of naphtha, that had to be the top amount. The more naphtha you got out at a pull down the longer it would last in producing the gas. So you could pretty well tell whether you'd done a good job or not. If you only got 15 barrels of naphtha you didn't do a very good job.

#152 AK: Was there a tendency for those wells to freeze off?

MB: No, not particularly.

AK: What about the H₂S?

MB: That was more prevalent in the north end. We weren't troubled to a great extent in the south end, with H₂S but the north end you had to watch it very carefully.

AK: When you were working around there did you have masks?

MB: No, we did not.

AK: You just had to be darned careful.

MB: We had our safety meetings, we were trained to be careful and to always be on the high side of the wind and little things like that, that you naturally do.

AK: But no masks?

MB: No masks.

AK: What a change.

MB: I went on . . . not that I will keep this going too long.

AK: That's all right.

MB: I moved on to taking bottom hole tests. 2 boys that were with me were Ted Fisher and

Len White. So there was an opening and I was lucky enough to get the job and I was real pleased. I'd come off the travelling operator, which was interesting and I'd been there for quite a few years. Anyway, I got on with the bottom hole boys and you were talking about H₂S, we had to set up our lubricator and taking your bottom hole balm??? down to the bottom of the hole and you had to unflange the top of the wellhead, above the master valve. The screw type plug valve, flange and plug, had caused a lot of trouble in leaking so they changed it and it went from a screw type to a flange type. There were 10 bolts, studs and we had to undo these and put on our lubricator with another companion flange. This was at the north end and as soon as the drilling rig moved away, the timbers would still be there, those big 16 x 16 timbers, and we'd have to pack our lubricator in there by hand and set it up, to take the test. And down underneath all these big timbers. Len White and I were working, getting it flanged up and I looked at him and he was starting to turn green. I said, get out of here, you're sick. No, I'll be all right, I said, get out of here. So Len, he crawled out and I thought I'd be brave and I'd finish it and I crawled out too, underneath the timbers. I'm telling you, you wouldn't need any noontime lunch after that.

#190 AK: Let's move on to. . . I guess maybe I should ask you, who was the overall production superintendent out there at the valley?

MB: Mr. Tremell and King Houston.

AK: Yes, Bob and King.

MB: Bob Tremell and King Houston, yes.

AK: Bob had been in South America I believe, and he'd brought his South American wife with him. They lived up on Nob Hill there.

MB: That's right.

AK: Did you become production foreman eventually?

MB: When I came up here.

AK: No, but I meant down there?

MB: No.

AK: You were working. . .

MB: I was on bottom hole operating.

AK: Then you'd have something to do with Frito Mulder?

MB: Oh yes.

AK: And Gordon Connell?

MB: Oh yes, indeed.

AK: Were they working on the unitization then?

MB: No, I think that was previous. We reported every day to Gordon Connell when we come in with our tests, from the bottom hole.

AK: And he lived out there did he?

MB: Yes, he did, he lived in Turner Valley.

AK: So he was kind of your technical man?

MB: Yes he was.

AK: And Tremell and Houston were the . . .

MB: Field superintendent and the production manager, King Houston was production

manager.

AK: Right. There's a lot of stories about the unitization, about Frito Mulder, how he claimed that he was the one that put it in but really, it was Gordon Connell that really did the job.

MB: I would say yes to that.

AK: Did you have much to do with the Conservation Board people out there?

MB: Oh yes, we did. Dick King, yes, they would come from time to time and check us.

AK: Check your bottom holes.

MB: Yes, we would run our own, we called them Humble??? technical bottom hole balm. So they had another type, I'm just forgetting their type, and we'd compare the two. So it would be within a pound and we always claimed ours was much better than theirs.

AK: The Humble was developed by Esso anyway?

MB: That's right.

AK: Now, when did you first hear about Leduc, when you were in the valley?

MB: Oh yes, Campbell Ayred came up. He was. . .

AK: Was he the first person up here?

MB: On production?

AK: Yes.

MB: Yes, he was.

AK: Then did he go back to the valley?

MB: No, he stayed here. He came up and put the #1 well on production.

AK: Then how did you get involved?

MB: Well, things started to boil pretty fast here you know. I just forget how many drilling rigs they had, they must have had about 7.

AK: Yes, they really started up in a hurry.

MB: Yes, you'd remember that. Anyway, Campbell phoned down and I was out in the field, we were running a test and he asked Roland Thompson, was our immediate supervisor then and a really fine man.

AK: Very fine.

MB: Roland came out to the field and I'd been at Norman Wells with Campbell you know, so we'd worked together a lot. So he asked Roland Thompson to ask me if I would come up and help him because he needed help, he needed a bottom hole operator. I naturally didn't want to go because I didn't know anything about Leduc. So I said to Roland, can I go on loan. Sure, sure. I'll go on loan and help them out or see what I can do. So I came up here on steady production then. I was here and took a bottom hole test on the discovery well, I told you that, and Frito Mulder was there too.

#249 AK: What about Carl Kosier, did he come up too?

MB: No. He was in the lab I think, in Turner Valley, wasn't he?

AK: Alex Piercey?

MB: Yes, I knew him

AK: I think he come up when the Atlantic 3 was ???

MB: Maybe, but they weren't stationed here.

AK: So by that time had you married?

MB: Oh yes.

AK: And what did your wife think of coming up here?

MB: Not too much I don't think. She was a Calgary girl and she didn't think too much of Turner Valley really. I was here for 3 months, I was here from August to January before my family came up, I had a family of 3.

AK: Then did you move into this house here?

MB: No, we lived a year in Leduc.

AK: In the town?

MB: Yes. That was '47. Devon, there were no residents here until '48 I imagine, the first one would have to be August or September.

AK: Yes, we moved in in July over here. Then you came in the second wave I guess.

MB: Yes, December we arrived here, before Christmas.

AK: So you moved into this house, and you've been here ever since?

MB: Yes, that's right.

AK: Wonderful. When you got up here Campbell was the production superintendent?

MB: Yes, he was the boss.

AK: Right. And Mabel.

MB: Mabel, his wife. He had a suite in the hotel at Leduc.

AK: Yes, and then he bought the house at the corner.

MB: That's right.

AK: And I think he moved in there in the fall of '48.

MB: Yes, he did.

AK: Because I remember, we used to go over and party over there, because we were just 2 doors and Anderson's.

MB: ??? Erickson lived across the street.

AK: Okay. So your job up here was to go around and take bottom hole pressures?

MB: Not exactly Aubrey. You see, when I arrived here there were only 7 wells. That was when I first came up, 7 wells. So it wasn't enough to keep . . . Bruce Shier was with me, I'm sure you must have heard of Bruce Shier. We would repair meters, then we were on well completion, when there was a well come in I went down to swab it in. The minute that the well came in it was a production boys came over and looked after the swabbing, were in command of the swabbing of the well and releasing the rig. That was my work as well as bottom hole.

#298 AK: Would you use the drilling rig to swab it in, or did you bring a service rig in?

MB: No, no, the drilling rig.

AK: With the sand line?

MB: Yes.

AK: And that was the procedure then. In the meantime, the next derrick was being fabricated over in the next location.

MB: That's right.

AK: Then they'd skid the draw works out. But they'd leave everything there until you'd brought the well in.

MB: Oh yes.

AK: Do you remember any of them being drilled completions?

MB: Yes, I sure do. 12, there were 12 drilled completions before I left.

AK: And did they operate pretty well?

MB: I think Aubrey, that was a little bit complicated to do a completion. As you know and everyone else, you pump it up the casing and the tubing, but there was a lot of production equipment, ??? oilfield equipment and it was touchy and difficult to set. But there's still one pumping over here at this time. One that we had completed before I left the company.

AK: So getting on to Atlantic 3, your first indication that something was wrong over there, could you give me a little bit of background on that, and that was in March of '48? Could you give me just what you heard and . . .?

MB: Well, you know, to me it seems a bit sketchy because I wasn't particularly involved in it. The first thing I remember, we had to go and shut in all our oil wells that were producing and then we wondered what we were going to do with the battery operators because we had quite a stack of people. Some of them had to go over to construction because the boys were still building batteries. Then there would be 3 or 4 of them would go over to take care of that oil that was coming from the Atlantic 3 that we discussed a few minutes ago. They set up over in the southeast. So then, as I mentioned, it was the security guards all over the place and you had to warn the boys, no matches, no lighters. Then I would be down there in the morning, not continuously but a great number of time during that summer, I'd be down there, ??? the oil in the mornings.

#346 AK: Now just backing up a bit, prior to shutting the wells in you'd have batteries that would serve how many wells?

MB: Over at Battery 14, which was the biggest in those early days, 16 wells in one battery.

AK: That would be like 8 D-2's and 8 D-3's.

MB: That's right. All produced through a manifold system, which was 1" manifold, you would have 2 test separators and one group separator.

AK: And there would be one man on duty all the time?

MB: Yes.

AK: And he'd work 8 hour shift. At this time there was thought at all of LC Lease Custody transfer or anything like that?

MB: No.

AK: All hand cranked, everything ran through pipe, everything was gauged.

MB: We done it exactly the same way as they did in Turner Valley and we sure heard about it too. The boys would say, well this is the way we did it in Turner Valley. So the word got around you know, the new hands would say, is this the way you did it in Turner Valley.

End of tape.

Tape 1 Side 2

AK: . . .second production from freehold and Crown, you were saying Mark, that each well

- was or at least 2 wells were tested every 24 hours. You say it the way it should be.
- MB: That is correct. The Conservation Board requirements were that each well be tested within a certain period. By that token you had to test 2 each 24 hour period so the following day they would go in to a group production. But from test to test, that well would receive, if it was making 100 barrels a day on the test, by the next 7 days it would have 700 barrels accumulated oil for the royalty holder or what have you.
- AK: So that there would be a good clear record of each well?
- MB: Oh yes. And that was a requirement by the Oil and Gas Conservation Board.
- AK: And I'm sure it would be a requirement by Imperial too, so they could pay their royalties?
- MB: Exactly.
- AK: Because they didn't want to pay royalties to those who had poor wells.
- MB: No.
- AK: Well, I just thought I'd clear that point up Mark. Now let's get back to Atlantic 3. This battery that you're talking about, that was set up, it was an emergency battery over on the parcel, I guess it would be the east half of 23. It was where the Leduc Consolidated well was drilled and that was the well that Garnet Edwards drilled.
- MB: Yes, that's true.
- AK: Yes, and there was a flow line laid from Atlantic 3, which by this time was blowing oil uncontrolled. Some of the oil would be produced through this line from a kind of a wellhead?
- MB: Yes. It was right off the top of the wellhead, on chiksan manoeuvre, you can't hardly have firm pipe, so it would be chiksan from the elevated top of the wellhead down to the ground and the conducted through a pipeline over to the battery.
- AK: Which was staked down.
- MB: That's right.
- AK: Now just for the uninitiated I'll spell chiksan, and it's an articulated high pressure method, it's almost like you might say, a metal hose. Only that it's rigid.
- MB: That's right. You can turn it at every angle, which was a godsend to the oil industry.
- AK: That's right. A chiksan was a wonderful thing. Okay, and how many thousand barrels would you reckon was being produced through that line, over to that battery?
- MB: I would say, per day, I would say in the neighbourhood of 5-6 thousand barrels, approximately.
- AK: Right. So the balance of the oil was just running downhill, over at the corner, where a dyke had been built. You were down there with Maurice Paulsen. Could you tell me what you did down there?
- MB: It was pretty simple. The main thing was to be careful you didn't slide into the slippery, over the dyke and into the oil. There was a willow stick that we had stuck into the ground, I don't think we even had it measured, we had a little tape yes, we had a little tape. So each morning you'd pull the little tape out of your pocket and measure the level of the oil to the top of the stick and that was the manner in which we found the amount of oil produced or shipped.

#040 AK: And you'd do that over and above your normal duties?

MB: Oh yes.

AK: You had other things that you were doing?

MB: Oh, that was just a sideline.

AK: What else were you doing when the wells were shut in?

MB: We were still drilling Aubrey. It was my job to make sure all the proper tools, chiksan, swabbing tools, lubricators, were on the job for oil wells coming in. I always thought it was strange and I did even then, but the drilling companies, they were contractors, they still didn't have their swabbing equipment. So the company, Imperial Oil I guess, had made some arrangement with them that we in the production would supply the swab tools every time a well came in. And it was always my job to make sure that they were taken to the job and taken away afterwards and run them over to another lease. We had 4 sets incidentally, we had 4 sets.

AK: And put new cups on them and everything else.

MB: Yes, and they had to be, the drilling boys they weren't too interested in production. They wanted to drill so it was our job to make sure that everything went smoothly and well in production.

AK: This is jumping ahead a little bit but when did Imperial decide that they should move in a service rig instead of using the drilling rig? Or did any of that happen at all in Leduc?

MB: Oh yes, yes it did. It was mostly for a well that was low porosity. So you see, to keep the drilling rig, I think it was \$35 an hour as I remember it then. So they couldn't afford to keep a drilling rig sitting around. The service rig would work for about \$20 an hour, and if you had to swab all day or accedes it was much cheaper and a better operation than keeping the drilling rig.

AK: Well, that's obvious, yes. Okay, now getting back to Atlantic 3, you saw this thing deteriorating. Could you just tell us about the events just prior to the derrick falling over and how you saw the derrick and that sort of thing, just before that happened?

MB: As I previously mentioned Aubrey, the boys came in one day, GP, General Petroleum, a tool push whose name was Tom Warrick. Tom was a bit of a joker, very capable person but he told the odd little joke. So he came in and I was busy as a badger. He had another chap with him, the two of them came up from wild Atlantic 3 and he said to me, and he looked pretty serious, he said, you know, that derrick is going to tip over. Well, derricks don't tip over. So I said, I think you guys are seeing things, what about those white fleecy clouds that are floating above. Well he said, that isn't right and I said, I think you guys have got rocks in your head. Well, you come on out and so we went out to the field. Unfortunately there weren't any of the drilling boys around so I thought I'd just go out and keep them happy and by cracky, they were right.

AK: Now at that time, you were in the old office over here, the Devon office which has been torn down?

MB: It's torn down now, yes.

#081 AK: You were still reporting to Campbell Ayred?

MB: I was production foreman by this time, yes.

AK: Yes, and Campbell was still production superintendent.

MB: That's right.

AK: Where was Campbell?

MB: I don't know.

AK: You were one of the few people in the office so Tom picked you out?

MB: That's right.

AK: And then you drove out to the well and tell us what you did then?

MB: The boys, they were right. There was no doubt but what the derrick would swing to the south and in less than a minute it would start to gradually go to the north. It was a little scary. Anyway, the flow line that we spoke of previously over the tanks was connected and hooked up so we felt that we better shut that off. So it fell my lot to go up and shut the master valve off at the top of the wellhead. So when I come back down I was pretty well lubricated with oil. There wasn't very much at that time that we could do. We reported it to top management and all the rest. The next morning, early morning, no, it wasn't, it was afternoon the next day, I was in Leduc and I saw the smoke. I was back into Leduc for repairs or something and I come out and I'm telling you, it was a fire and a half.

AK: That was Labour Day.

MB: September, yes. Were you here then Aubrey?

AK: Yes, I was.

MB: You were here.

AK: Just going back to this wellhead and this valve, was the derrick floor still intact?

MB: Oh yes, everything was intact.

AK: How high up above the derrick floor was this valve?

MB: I would say, 10-12 feet.

AK: So you had to kind of climb up to get to it?

MB: Oh yes.

AK: What was below it, was there a master valve?

MB: A blow out preventor and all the rest of it.

AK: And you could still see the casing bowl could you?

MB: Oh yes.

AK: So it was all there?

MB: Oh yes, it was all there. It was hard to get up but it wasn't hard to get down because all you'd do is slide down the ??? on the oil.

AK: So that was your closest contact of the worst kind.

MB: That was close enough.

AK: It was a good thing it didn't catch fire while you were up there.

MB: Yes.

AK: So of course, by this time the 2 relief holes had been drilled sometime. Do you remember what steps were taken as soon as it caught fire?

MB: I don't really, Aubrey, to tell you the truth. I think was it not within that day or the next day that the south relief hole reached the bottom?

AK: Yes, they were down and I think the west relief was already pumping water in.

MB: Maybe it was.

AK: Yes, and that was that line that was laid by Bill Yoke.
MB: Yes.
AK: Did you have anything to do with that water pipeline?
MB: No, I didn't.
AK: That was a separate deal. Did you have anything to do with the fellow that sold water, the Jew, what was his name? Sammy Hector?
MB: Sammy Hector. Yes, I knew Sammy.
AK: I mean in Leduc, did you have much to do with him there?
MB: No.

#121 AK: He and Tip Maroney got into some good rows about Sammy trying to make a deal you know?

MB: Oh.

AK: But he had his experience down in Turner Valley, that's where he sold water down there didn't he?

MB: Yes. He's still got the pit down here that he dug all those years ago, on Highway 60 here. It's Sammy Hector's pit, it's still there on the ????. That's on the man that owned the land of the discovery well, I forget his name.

AK: Okay. Let's go on then, all this time then the wells were shut in and my understanding was that some of the boys went out and they took bottom hole tests and they could see the pressure sink that was developing around Atlantic 3. Did you have anything to do with that at all?

MB: No, I didn't. When I first came up here I was on bottom hole and so I trained people to take care of the bottom hole operating and then I moved on to more important parts of production.

AK: Completion.

MB: Well completion.

AK: Okay. So when do you recall that they allowed Imperial and the other wells to go back on production, after the well was killed?

MB: I think almost immediately. The batteries, the construction had been going pretty full tilt during this time. As I remember it, they went back onstream about as quick as we could put them back on.

AK: There was some proration though, wasn't there?

MB: Well, there was an initial potential. Every well that came in had an initial potential, IP, but then you're talking about the restricted flow?

AK: Yes, it was restricted to meet them. . . . By that time had they got that Imperial pipeline laid to Nisku or were they still hauling?

MB: It was laid. You see, we could only produce what the refineries could handle. It was more of a refinery restriction than anything else. We had lots of oil but we could only sell so much, so many barrels.

AK: Right, so you were restricted to that. So then things settled back in and you continued to be production foreman. Did you have any other changes in your responsibilities?

MB: Yes. We were having, apparently a little bit of difficulty perhaps, with maintenance.

Campbell asked me one day if I would like to look after maintenance, which I thought I had enough to do as it was. Anyway, I said, I don't know anything about maintenance, can't you get somebody else. Well, Mr. Welch, Bob Welch was our boss then, he was superintendent and a very fine man. I tried my darndest to talk myself around it, I didn't want to be bothered with it, I was pretty busy. He said, Mr. Welch has suggested that you start up this new department, it hadn't been handled before. I said, all right but I don't know anything about it, he said, nobody else does either. So we started. That was a bit involved. The department then, everybody answered to my department. The bottom hole boys came in, the hook-up crews came in, the meter men came in, and we all met in the morning over at the warehouse and there would be about 20-25 meeting there in the morning and they all went in different directions to do their days work. And I can tell you this too, very truthfully, I sent so many people away in the morning to work, they'd come in in the evening and I'd forgot what they went to do. Everybody was pretty busy.

#178 AK: So when did you retire from Imperial?

MB: I left them after 15 years, I left in August '52.

AK: August 1952.

MB: Yes, '37 to '52.

AK: And then you went into the service rig business?

MB: No, I went to work for a little outfit called Newfield Operators.

AK: Oh, that was Lorne Pearson.

MB: Lorne Pearson. That was a horse of a different wheel base. I stayed with them for 3 years. We drilled a lot of wells in Lloydminster, we drilled quite a few here.

AK: What were you doing, production?

MB: I was field superintendent. Anything that was done, it was my responsibility.

AK: Where is Lorne now?

MB: He's in Edmonton, I haven't seen him for years. Last I heard he was looking after a coffee shop.

AK: Isn't that something. So you said you were there for 3 years, then did you get into the...?

MB: Then we formed our own company, Blain Well Operators we called them then and I bought a service rig. We started very small and kept on improving. The first rig I bought, it cost \$10,000 and I wondered how in the lord's name I was ever going to get it paid for. But we did. And we moved on, fortunately. We kept getting bigger rigs, more expensive rigs, more capable. We are still operating. My son, he's the boss now, I'm just the old man and we're still operating.

AK: And you stayed with 2 rigs did you?

MB: We stayed with 3 rigs, yes, we did. I think at one time we had 3.

AK: But you never went haywire with 8 or 10?

MB: No, no.

AK: Not like some of these other people did?

MB: No.

AK: And lived to regret it.

MB: Yes. We kept small, we were fortunate, we always had capable boys. One thing

somebody was asking me the other day, about overtime. There is no overtime now with the company, it's more of a contract basis. So I was telling someone the other day, we were compelled to pay overtime after 9 hours when we first started. After 9 hours they got time and a half. I thought that one hour, that 9th hour, 8 hours is a working day to the average man, 8 hours. So after 8 hours we paid time and a half. And it sort of paid off because the word gets around and we had good boys and they stayed with us for years. Just one hour.

#219 AK: It made a difference.

MB: You bet it made a difference.

AK: How many of your original hands do you still have working for you?

MB: None, no.

AK: You've had a turnover.

MB: Oh yes, they move on. We don't try to hold them. Because they become knowledgeable about the oilfield production. The longest I think, that any of them have stayed was 7 or 8 years. And they went on to greater heights.

AK: Well, that's fine.

MB: Oh yes.

AK: Did some of them go and buy their own rigs?

MB: No, they just went to work for Haliburton or maybe a different service company.

AK: So you've kept your rigs pretty well busy in the Leduc field?

MB: Yes, we have.

AK: And you've gone back into holes that you completed 30 some odd years ago?

MB: Oh yes, I can still remember them.

AK: How about the packers in there? Are some of them froze in, did you have to drill any of them out or dig some of them out?

MB: Yes we have. Oh yes, and it's tough too.

AK: You wouldn't do your own fishing would you?

MB: No, but we've drilled the packers out with our rigs you know.

AK: What, with spaghetti or with tubing?

MB: Tubing.

AK: Strong enough to drill eh?

MB: Oh yes. But you can't put much weight on it you know, you've got to be patient but you can do it.

AK: But then that would all be part of your hourly rate?

MB: Oh yes.

AK: You wouldn't be penalized for running into. . . I mean, that wasn't your problem, a stuck packer. That would be the operators problem.

MB: That's right.

AK: Now with the field going to blow down, how do you see oil production, do you see it continuing on a very low level or how are they going to handle that?

MB: We see it along these lines, it will only be the immediate field here that the blow down will take place. Way to the north we have the big lake, away to the south we have Bonnie

Glen and we have many fields that will not be affected by the blow down in the new gas area. So we feel, you see, we used to have a dozen service rigs in the field, this last winter there were only 3. So that there will always be room for 1 or 2 service rigs in the field as I see it.

#260 AK: From how many wells will they produce the gas?

MB: All the wells that are now on production will be reperfored in the gas zone. It will be no longer known as an oil well, it will be a gas well, it will be converted from an oil well to a gas well. That would apply to the best of my knowledge, to the entire field. The immediate field.

AK: Yes, but why rework all the wells, why not just rework a dozen or so and produce the gas out of them?

MB: Maybe that is in the books. They will eventually have to abandon the poor ones and increase the flow on the better ones. That part of it I'm not too fully aware.

AK: But of course, since the field is unitized, it doesn't matter which ones they do.

MB: No, you only take a certain amount out anyway.

AK: Are the liquids that are recovered at the plant, do they go over to Golden Spike now?

MB: Not to my knowledge, no. You mean for . . .

AK: For enhanced recovery.

MB: Not that I know of.

AK: And there's no more water flood here?

MB: No. She's just kind of dying a natural death so to speak.

AK: You've seen it right through from its birth to its. . .

MB: Yes, I have.

AK: It's still not dead yet. There will be some oil produced won't there?

MB: Oh yes.

AK: But they're officially gone over to blow down?

MB: That's the word.

AK: Mark, this has been a great pleasure. It's been a little bit shorter than I'd hoped for. Maybe you could just spend a minute or two, I've got a few more minutes of tape here, about your experiences up at Norman Wells. What years were you up there?

MB: 1942, on the Canol project. That was war time, as you may remember. There was about 150 of us that went up. There was one standard drilling rig, there was 4 rotary rigs. I'll always remember, when they built the camp, we were living in tents for the first year. They were great big 16 x 16 tents. I think sometimes there were 16 people in there too you know. It was rough and tumble, there were 150 of us, all men. We had 3 trucks and one jeep, that was our transportation. I was production foreman and the boys were green but they were good workers and agreeable and what have you. It fell my lot to set up tanks and batteries and the like of that, run flow lines, a little bit of everything.

AK: Was it Vern Hunter that was up there?

MB: Yes. He was assistant field superintendent, Vern was.

AK: Who was field superintendent?

MB: Walker Taylor. Vern, he was drilling supervisor.

AK: Right. So that was kind of a period in your life, at that time you had married?

MB: I was married.

#323 AK: And you left your wife in Turner Valley?

MB: right. Left 2 boys, left a son, I was to leave on the 29th of June or some such date so I said, no, I won't be going. They said, why not, you're going, I said, oh no I'm not, I'm not going until my wife has the new baby. So the baby was born on the 23rd of June and I left on the 1st of July. I'm telling you, that was quite an experience.

AK: It would be yes, flying up there.

MB: Yes. A little DC-3, we left Fort Smith and there was smoke, there was a lot of fires there in the muskeg you know. It was so thick, the bush pilot lost his way. It was Saturday night and we were having, 6 of us, 8 of us, anyway, Colonel Steele was there, up from eastern Canada, he was a great old chap. So we'd had a bottle and we were passing this bottle back in the back and having a little sniff. I guess by this time we were getting a little bold and we were walking back and forth with the bottle. The co-pilot called back, can't you guys keep quiet back there, don't you know we've been lost for half an hour. I'm telling you, that slowed us a bit. Finally he saw this water, he didn't know where he was either he told us, and it was Hay River and we came down and stayed overnight.

AK: I think on that note Mark, I'll say so long and once again, thanks for this interesting interview. It's just another chapter in the picture of Leduc and thanks again. Over and out.

MB: Thank you Aubrey, I've enjoyed it.