

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Vernon Hunter

INTERVIEWER: Aubrey Kerr

DATE: August 1983

AK: This is Aubrey Kerr, I'm at Vern Hunter's residence in Edmonton, 13911 - 92nd Ave. and today is Wednesday, 17th, 1983. Vern, I'd like to talk to you a little bit about the days just around Leduc and then leading into Atlantic 3. I know that David Newman has already done some taping and he's probably got some other things. I didn't want to go way back into your history but I wanted to get some of these salient points. To start off at the beginning, you'd moved your rig from Provost to Leduc.

VH: Right, we drilled 2 wells down at Provost. One was an oil well that produced for a little while then turned to water and the other was a good gas well.

AK: Right. And that formed a basis of what Dome later took over as the Provost gas field. And there were other gas wells drilled. Then you got orders to move your rig to somewhere southwest of Edmonton. The story goes that the roughnecks thought that was not too bad an idea but they knew that there wouldn't be any oil because it was too close to Edmonton, is that right?

VH: That's absolutely right. The only hopes we ever had in Saskatchewan of finding oil was in Buffalo Gap, which is right down on the Montana border and we thought that probably, if there was any oil in Saskatchewan in that godforsaken country. And we knew darn well if we ever got up near the city of Edmonton we'd never find anything.

AK: Right. So you drilled the hole and you got down to the D-2, sorry you got down to the lower Cretaceous and there was an arrangement between Imperial and McCall Frontenac, or Texaco, whereby information was exchanged on the well that they were drilling on the Hobema Indian Reserve and your hole. Could you tell me a little bit about that story?

VH: I didn't get into that very much. I don't know who told me but I got to pretty well know about it, I guess probably from Walker Taylor or somebody. But Jack Webb was very honest, a fine gentleman, and he was exploration manager for Imperial. When he made a deal he made a real honest deal and he couldn't understand how any respectable, reputable oil company could do a thing like that, get the information, run up and file on the land, without any consultation or anything like that. However, it broke Jack Webb's heart I know, he was really disappointed with the people he was dealing with.

#034 AK: My understanding Vern is that when Ed Hunt, did you know Ed Hunt?

VH: No. Well, yes, I knew him but I wasn't . . .

AK: Well, he was kind of an anchor man there in the office. He was the one that, from his experience apparently, realized that wet gas meant that there could be something more in the way of crude somewhere in that area. That's really what, from my information, what triggered the move. But as you say, the gentleman's agreement wasn't held up by the

other party.

VH: No, it sure as hell wasn't.

AK: And that strained relationships between Walker and Ed I guess.

VH: Well, I think Walker probably, you know, was responsible for it, to Toronto.

AK: How did Imperial find out that they'd filed on it?

VH: They went up on Monday to file. And it had only been filed on Friday.

AK: That fast?

VH: Yes.

AK: I guess they couldn't believe their ears. Was Hubert Somerville running that, or was it more Ian McKinnon?

VH: I think it would be before Hubert's time but gee, I'm not sure.

AK: Hubert was there a long time. He probably had something to do with it.

VH: Maybe it was Hubert that told me that, about Texaco arriving on Friday and Imperial came on Monday morning. It probably was, I got to know Hubert pretty well.

AK: Anyway, those are the facts. My understanding too, was that when Jack Webb planned the drilling of the well, I don't think he was too aware that there could be any Devonian reefs. Although Bill Hancock said later that he didn't understand why they wouldn't have thought about reefs because of Norman Wells. But all that Jack was reported to have wanted was any leases at all within that one township, Township 50, range 26. He didn't want to go out and lease freehold outside of that township. But Imperial had the Crown rights.

VH: Had the Crown rights, yes. No, they weren't too active in getting private leases. They were working on it but they weren't willing to pay what some of the ??? were.

AK: No, what Johnny told me was that they paid \$5 a parcel, not \$5 an acre. And 50 cents an acre rental.

VH: Something like that. And then Home Oil came in and bought that quarter section, ???, they paid \$50,000 for that thing. I remember Walker saying, can you imagine that, \$50,000. He couldn't believe that, that anybody would pay that.

AK: That's right. And the interesting part of that was, Jim Lowry, in his characteristic way, bought the whole schmear, he bought the farm and everything, he bought the surface and the minerals. He was going to have it all, so he could put that. . . But you know, according to Jim Lowry, and here again, I'm going back in my memory which may be faulty, but Jim Lowry was cautioned by Walker and maybe this is the reason he made that comment that you said, Walker cautioned in good faith. He said, you know, we're not sure that structure goes that far west.

VH: And it went a lot farther west. That was a real good quarter, ???.

#074 AK: That's right. There was the D-2 and the D-3, and that paid off very well.

VH: Bill Sutchee??? really made a killing on that one.

AK: That was a lot of money for those farmers in those days.

VH: Boy, was that ever. To get oil rights on 8 wells producing. When we first went there we had to haul water for the rig and it was getting cold. We could haul from the river but Bill Sutchee had a big slough, not a big slough but a slough on his land, right close to the rig.

So I went over one day and made a deal with him to get water out of the slough for the boiler and mud.

AK: This is for #1?

VH: Yes. He said, how much will you pay and I said, we'll pay \$3 a load, well that's fine. So I sent the truck driver over to get a load and Bill Sutchee ran him off. So the truck driver said he wouldn't allow him to have any water so I went over and talked to Bill and Bill said, \$3 a load is not enough. I said, well, we can haul from the river but I said, how much do you want. He said, I don't know, I'll have to ask my wife. So he went in the house and he said, his wife wanted \$5 a load and I said, no, we'll haul from the river because you're liable to be doing this to us all the time, raising the price. He was a little disappointed but anyway we hauled it from the river.

AK: So you never did make a deal with him?

VH: Never got a load of water out of his slough. He was too tough to deal with.

AK: That was probably the trade-off point. When you got down to the D-2, just to clear the air, there's some confusion about, I believe it was George McClintock was the well site geologist but he was away on holidays and it was Steve Cosburn that actually picked the D-2?

VH: I don't think so, I think it was McClintock.

AK: You think it might have been McClintock.

VH: I'm pretty sure it was.

AK: Yes, well, that's my understanding but that's something I will have to check. Steve's still around and so is George.

VH: I'm damn sure it was McClintock because I can remember out there at night. You know, he was looking at the samples and gosh, this is good porosity and looks like oil staining and he had a drilling break and everything, he said, gosh, we're going to have to take core. Well, I sure agreed with that.

AK: But you cored before you tested.

VH: Oh yes. We took a good core and it come out, I was pretty disappointed there was no oil bleeding out of the core but it was good porosity and it had all washed out. And of course, I was giving George the gears, I said, here you go core in the middle of the night and . . .

AK: Yes, I know, I got that at Imperial Leduc #2.

VH: Where's the oil running out of this core but there wasn't any running out because it had all run out. It was just real good porosity.

AK: I think both you and I were used, in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan to see a core and the oil was all old dead oil but it would kind of bleed, ooze out.

VH: Right, that's what I was used to.

AK: There was one core we pulled at Taber and there wasn't a bit of oil when we pulled it out and about 3 or 4 hours later the whole thing was just a mass of oil. It just all oozed out. But that's true, you know, we were so used to that.

VH: ??? that one core, ??? smack dab in that first test.

#115 AK: Yes, right. That's when you really put on the secrecy then?

VH: Yes, but it was pretty hard when we were taking another 23 to core and test again and

[then a big flame come up]???

AK: Yes, you could hardly cover that up.

VH: Godfrey was right in there.

AK: Who was Godfrey with?

VH: He was on his own, buying land.

AK: What about Nick Nichols, do you remember him?

VH: Yes. He drowned didn't he?

AK: Yes, he drowned in Hawaii in '59.

VH: He was a really nice guy.

AK: I remember Nick, I have fond memories of him because he'd come around you know, and he wasn't the least bit abrasive or anything, he was really nice. But you know, I didn't realize until about a year or 2 ago, that Nick and Art Feldmeyer had come up to Canada back in '43. They were sent up. They'd come from New Zealand and they'd sailed across to San Francisco or Los Angeles and somehow or other, by hook or by crook, just right in the middle of the war, they got a trailer or tow and cars, new cars and a couple of trailers and they came up into northern Alberta and went up into northeast B.C. and looked around. So that was the beginning of Superior Oil up here. So Nick had kind of an inside track. I think that's why they got quite a few freehold leases, through a fellow called Snap Wasson???

VH: Yes, I remember him.

AK: Yes, he was a very aggressive landman.

VH: Yes, in Saskatchewan too.

AK: Then of course, Imperial had the Youngblood's, did you ever run into them?

VH: Yes, Carter.

AK: They were from Carter yes, and they were on contract. When you got that first test away, what was the decision, to make some more hole?

VH: Just keep on coring and testing. So we'd take maybe 20' of core and test again and another 20' of core and test again.

AK: But you didn't get to the green shale?

VH: No. Everybody started to get scared. I don't know, we had maybe 100' opened up. You think, christ, we know there's no water, not much and it will make a good well.

AK: Yes, why knock it eh?

VH: I remember talking to Walker, should we core, you know, we were trying to decide.

AK: Well, were they getting their signals from Toronto then?

VH: Well, yes, but they had to make some recommendations.

AK: Sure, they'd have to tell them, we should do this or that. But then as you say, they were getting a little edgy then were they, and didn't want to get into water?

VH: No, they knew damn well that they had maybe 100' of gross pay opened up with no water and it would make a damn good well, why . . .

AK: Yes, why go any farther.

VH: You could drill another well for sure.

AK: Now what word did you have about the word about moving that Frank's rig from Greenblade in, the one that I was on?

VH: Oh, that Lorney. . .

AK: Lorney was on it and I guess Bill Blaine was on it too.

VH: That was as a result, you know, when we got to Pelly??? River we got a little show of gas, dry gas, in the Pelly River formation, first test we made. I don't know how deep that would be, 2,500 or something like that. Pelly River and a little show in the Viking and then this gas in the Cretaceous. I think it was the gas in the Cretaceous probably, that decided, I'm sure it was.

#160 AK: Well, that's my understanding too. Of course, in the interim. . .

VH: You guys come in there and you were rigging up on the 1st of January.

AK: But it took forever to get started because. . .

VH: It was cold.

AK: Yes, and then we had to blast, there was a hard pan in there, we had to blast to get a sump built you know.

VH: Oh yes, and it was cold. That was in January.

AK: Yes, that was a cold winter.

VH: It was 40-50 below. I told Lorney I used to feel sorry for him on that crew. Because we were nice and warm on our. . .

AK: Yes, you were all boxed in kind of, you had all those boards up there. But did you have much to do with the other rig at all, or was that done separately.

VH: No, I'd drop in there and visit back and forth. But no, it was a pretty blue day when they found out the D-2 was all tight and they got the green shale, I'll tell you.

AK: That was sad that D-2. We cored and we pulled that core out and looked at it and it was just like building stone. Of course, that was when the fan started to get dirty. I wonder now, did you get any feeling from Walker, now, what have we got, have we just got a little one hit wonder here?

VH: Oh yes. That was kind of the feeling I got. It was disappointing when you got green shale instead of . . .

AK: Well of course, the green shale was what really. . .

VH: Well, that was the cap.

AK: That was what capped the D-3.

VH: How much of it was there, do you remember there?

AK: There was about 150' of green shale.

VH: Redwater it got down to, one well we drilled there, there was only 15' of green shale there.

AK: I know.

VH: That whole field, ???

AK: Sure. And it would have been Willingdon you know, because Willingdon was a reef.

VH: Yes, oh, a tremendous reef.

AK: But it was breached.

VH: Just in one place I guess, eh. Sort of a. . .

AK: Well, that was all it needed. It was gone, it disappeared somewhere, maybe up to the tar sands. No, that was the tricky-dick but you see, at Leduc there was no erosion of the green

shale. It was pretty uniform throughout except when you got off the reef, then it thickened up enormously, like at BA Perch you know.

VH: Yes.

AK: Yes, you don't remember too much about BA Perch. It was drilled in '47 and it missed the edge of the reef, just, I suppose. . .

VH: On the west side.

AK: On the east side. As you come up there, north of where Garnet Edwards drilled, ultimately, in the northeast. Then Neil McQueen took a farm out from BA Perch and moved right over closer to the fence line and north.

VH: Oh, and got a well?

#199 AK: Oh yes, no problem. Well, I guess, in your job then, you were pretty close to pushing tools then, even at Leduc #3 were you?

VH: I pushed tools on Leduc #3.

AK: Then you got set up to be field superintendent?

VH: Yes. That was the last well I worked on was #3.

AK: Then you built that building at Leduc?

VH: The office building, with the 2x4 partitions. That was funny.

AK: Who decided to put it there, tell me a little bit about that.

VH: They actually wanted to build a little town site in Leduc, or right near Leduc but the prices got so high.

AK: Oh yes, getting away on them.

VH: You couldn't make a deal for the land around there, not at a price that they were willing to pay anyway. So they bought this farm, a barley field out by the river, where Devon is now. But by that time the office was under construction, the outside was all built and the 2x4 studdings were up, separating the offices. Then Walker phoned me one day and he said, shut her down on that building the office, he said, we're going to build out in the field. I said, gosh, we've got the 2x4 up, we might as well put some boards on. No, shut everything down.

AK: Yes, because you could see through the . . .

VH: Months later, Walker came up and he was sitting in my office, looking through the 2x4's at everybody else. Walker said very quietly, I think you better get your office boarded in, never mind the others but get yours done.

AK: Do you know what they paid for the lot or what it cost to build that little building?

VH: No. Not very much, it was a nice little building.

AK: Oh yes, it was all right and it served the purpose. The outside parlour, oh god.

VH: Yes, I remember, the head medical guy from Toronto came out, I've forgotten his name now. He was the head of Imperial medical and he wanted to see our inside facilities, ??? outside. So he went out, oh my god, you know, he was from Toronto and I don't think he'd ever seen one, he certainly had never smelt one.

#236 AK: Was this before it got cold, because when it got cold it just froze up into a cone?

VH: Oh yes.

- AK: Well, what did he do about it, did he. . .
- VH: There was nothing he could do because . . .
- AK: No, there was no toilets or anything. I guess all he could do was be shocked. What did he say to you when he came in?
- VH: He was really astounded and hurt to think that Imperial would subject their employees to such a terrible thing. But he was a real old Torontonion, as I say, he'd never even seen anything.
- AK: No, he'd probably never seen an outside biffy. Because you know, even back at the turn of the century there was flushing toilets in eastern Canada.
- VH: Yes. It reminds me, it's a true story, after we were moved out to Devon the public relations department decided they would invite lady reporters from Vancouver to visit. So one of the PR guys, he had a car and I had my car and we brought out 5 girls each, out from Edmonton, to look around the field.
- AK: At Devon?
- VH: Yes.
- AK: And the field?
- VH: And they wanted to see rigs, they wanted to see everything. So we took them into a rig and it was cold and the wind was blowing. The outside crapper there was half covered with drifted snow you know, there was a path going to it. This one gal, she said, Mr. Hunter, where's the bathroom. I said, we're going back to the office pretty quick, we've got inside facilities there. She said, no, when you've got to go you've got to go. So I said, okay, right out there, follow that path. And she went out there and she came back pretty soon and she said, you know, I knew I was going to see a lot of weird and wonderful sights in this oilfield but I never expected to see the pyramids.
- AK: Well they were there, every crapper had one.
- VH: The same gal, on the way home, we were going around through the Coulee and I mentioned the fact that there was one rig drilling on one side of this Coulee and another rig on the other and she said, what's a Coulee. I said, I don't know what you call them out in Vancouver, ravines or gulches or something like that. She said, I always thought a Coulee was a quicky in the snow bank.
- #278 AK: So she had a real sense of humour.
- VH: Did she ever.
- AK: That was probably a pretty good. . . Talking about public relations people, do you remember George Lawrence coming out?
- VH: Oh yes, he used to come out all the time. He was a bit of stick as far as I was concerned. I never could get very close to him but there were a lot of guys in the PR department that were really good guys. Oh, George Lawrence was all right.
- AK: What about Jim Rennie, was he. . .?
- VH: Jim was a good guy.
- AK: Where is he?
- VH: He, I think he lives, I'm not sure if he lives in Hawaii or if he just stays there all winter but he's there all winter, I know.

- AK: Is that right. He lived in Edmonton here for awhile.
- VH: Yes. He worked in Edmonton before he went for Imperial, the old Bulletin.
- AK: That's right, he was a newspaper man.
- VH: Yes, they were all good. . . well, Lawrence was all right but he had too much Toronto.
- AK: Well, that was part of the problem. Okay, the decision was made to move out to Devon. I guess you haven't any idea what Imperial paid for that tract of land?
- VH: No. I expect, because I talked to Mike ??? about farm prices. Mike owned the land you know. . .
- AK: Yes, around.
- VH: He said, that land would sell around there for about \$74 an acre. He said, I'd sell for \$100 an acre. So I presume that they probably bought that land for about \$75 an acre.
- AK: Then who designed the building, was that all done somewhere else, or did Chris Kristoferson have anything to do with that?
- VH: Kristoferson, no.
- AK: The big tall civil engineer that. . .
- VH: Yes. Allison.
- AK: Norm Allison, did he have something to do with that?
- VH: Yes. He ran Devon Estates.
- AK: Then Jack Gallagher took over.
- VH: Yes, well, Norm Allison was the engineer. He turned and became a minister.
- #317 AK: I know, he's down in Kingston. It just shows you what happens. But I thought there was another fellow that was quite tall and thin and he was a civil engineer and he worked with. . .
- VH: Well, Walt Dingle.
- AK: No, not Walt, no, no. It was somebody else, Powell, wasn't there . . .
- VH: George Powell.
- AK: So the building went ahead, did Powell have much to do with that or did he do outside surveying?
- VH: He did mostly outside stuff.
- AK: Like tank farms and that sort of thing, yes.
- VH: Swimming pools. I tried to talk Mike ??? into giving us a donation for the swimming pool. He said, I'll tell you, if you people raise half of it we'll give you the other half. So he did too.
- AK: Is that right. What happened to the curling rink, same thing?
- VH: Same thing, yes. Gee, I don't know, yes, they raised some of it but I think Imperial pretty well. . . of course, Imperial built a lot of stuff there they didn't know they were building too.
- AK: I'm sure yes. Because there's money spent on different things that probably were in different directions.
- VH: The contractors used to do a lot of work for nothing, after working hours you know and do a lot of work for us for the people around there.
- AK: Yes, well, was it George Powell or Walt Dingle that built a house of his own? Walt built

a house.

VH: No, Walt never even lived there, Walt lived in Edmonton.

AK: Oh, it must have been George then, that built a house.

VH: Yes.

AK: Right, and then he probably ultimately sold. When you became field superintendent then, you were in the office and Campbell Blair??? came up, when did he, did he come up fairly shortly after?

VH: Right quick, yes, he came up when they put in the first separator. And he was made production superintendent. They wanted to set him up as production foreman and he told Walker, I won't come as production foreman.

AK: He wanted. . .

End of tape.

Tape 1 Side 2

AK: About Campbell, well Campbell and Mabel built their own house down there at the corner, or down at the end of one of those, Jasper Court, didn't they?

VH: Yes.

AK: They didn't buy a project house.

VH: I don't know, I think they bought a project house. I don't remember them building a house. It was different from the others but. . .

AK: Yes. Well, Walter Salamandick was telling me today that he'd get a ride out with Campbell because Campbell lived in Edmonton apparently. Then when they had their house finished I guess they . . .

VH: Yes, I guess he did have another contractor build it.

AK: Yes, I don't know. Well then, who did you have as your drilling superintendent then?

VH: Woodrow Wilson. And a whole bunch of drilling foremen. Woodrow, he was the kingpin and a damn good man. I couldn't have got a better guy. I was sure happy when Walker asked me if I'd like Woodrow because I'd had him at Norman Wells and . . .

AK: Sure, and you knew how he operated. But Charlie was the head drilling superintendent.

VH: Yes, in Calgary.

AK: Right. And Charlie I guess approved of it too I guess.

VH: I'm sure he did.

AK: Yes, and then these drilling foremen were out trying to keep an eye on the rigs.

VH: On all the contract rigs. We didn't have any rigs of our own working in there.

AK: No, what happened to Imperial Leduc, the rig that you had, where did it go?

VH: I don't know where it went. Went wildcatting someplace.

AK: I know the Franks rig at #2, it just drilled the one hole and it went right over to Looma, east of Nisku.

VH: I think this one went up Bon Accord or. . .

AK: I think that's where George de Mille . . . You see, it's an interesting thing that George de Mille was around Leduc, sitting on wells and helping because he'd been over at ??? Kinsella and they asked him whether he wanted to stay at Leduc or whether he wanted to

go wildcatting and he said, I want to go wildcatting so he went, I guess with one of those rigs. Because then they started to move out you know, on these other prospects. Then you were getting kind of settled down and you had your staff there. You had Ruth Welsh as your secretary?

VH: Right.

AK: Where does she live now?

VH: She lives in Calgary and she is well on into her 80's but she's going to live for a long time because her mother lived to be over 100.

#036 AK: Oh, is that right. I didn't realize she was that old. Larry works for IPSCO, her son. She was widowed I guess way back was she?

VH: She was widowed back in the early 40's. That was a funny, peculiar. . . it wasn't very funny. Ducky Welsh was his name and I never knew what his right name was, he was always called Ducky. His brother-in-law, Stud Pallister???, those are 2 characters. They married sisters, they both married Knight girls. Bill Pallister got sick and they didn't know what was the matter with him. He was in the hospital and they thought he was going to die, for quite a long time, I can remember that in the 30's. So Ruth Welsh finally prevailed on Ducky to go over and see Bill at the hospital. So Ducky went and as soon as he walked in the room, old Stud Pallister he said, what the hell are you doing here. He said, don't think I came here because I wanted to. He said, what did you come for then, he said, Ruth made me. That was his wife you see. Stud said, well, why don't you just bugger off. Ducky said, okay, I'll go right now and Stud said, don't come back. Ducky said to him, why the hell don't you die, I can't be wasting my time ??? and old Stud said, you bastard, I'll outlive you and he did. He outlived him by 3 years.

AK: Is that right, isn't that amazing. Just shows you, you better not go around cursing anybody. They must have been real . . .

VH: Oh, they were great friends.

AK: The Knight sisters, were they any relation to this Dick Knight that I . . . ?

VH: Yes, Dick ???

AK: Is that right. Oh, that's important to know because when we see Dick I'll have to mention that to him.

VH: Dick, he's getting on to 90 and he's still playing golf.

AK: Well, he must be, he's quite alert and got his faculties and everything. So things were rolling along in pretty good style then, in the winter of, when you started to come into '47, '48. When did that office get started, was it . . . ?

VH: In Devon? In '48.

AK: What month was it?

VH: It was in May or June.

AK: By that time Atlantic 3 had started to act up.

VH: Yes.

AK: Right.

VH: And it rained and rained and rained and rained.

AK: Oh yes, there was mud up to your . . .

VH: [We'd draw]??? water out of those sumps and ???

AK: Well, they emptied the sumps?

VH: Tried to. So we could fix up the leases you know.

AK: Oh, I see, yes, to get it back to . . .

VH: Yes. Gee whiz it got down to New York even, it got to Toronto, a guy, it wasn't a farmer but a lawyer who was looking after one of the farmers was out in Toronto so he went to see Mike Hyder down there. Then he went to New York and he talked to New York about these leases not getting cleaned up. Well, Walker then, he got it and he phoned me and he said, can't you get more trucks on. I said, gee, we've got every truck around here, we must have 50 trucks hauling water out of these sumps and it's running in just as fast as we haul it. Well, gee whiz, Walker, he came out finally because he had to see it.

#079 AK: Yes, he couldn't believe it.

VH: He said, gee, there's no use, you know, we were just wasting all this money. And Mike Hyder, he . . . finally it dried up and gee whiz, we had cats and trucks and got all these leases cleaned up and Mike Hyder, he came out one time and he said, so about those leases, let me have a look at some. I said, all right so I drove him over to one and gee, it was beautiful.

AK: It was a nice real. . .

VH: He said, yes, I know, you've got some ??? to show me, how about that one over there. So I took him over there and they were just finishing up and they were doing a real good job but they hadn't quite finished it.

AK: He wasn't convinced.

VH: No, he looked at 2 or 3 then he said, well, okay.

AK: Yes, he figured there was a few hiding.

VH: Yes. I remember the first time I met him, this is an interesting thing. He came up, he was just appointed general manager in Toronto, it was his first trip out here. He came out to, I went into Edmonton and picked him up . . .

AK: Was this after the Leduc discovery?

VH: We just spudded, no, we just started drilling. In fact, we had surface casing.

AK: Oh, you were just drilling #1.

VH: Yes, we just had surface casing.

AK: That was in the fall of '46.

VH: And George McClintock wasn't at the rig. We took him out to the rig and we were shut down, waiting for some cement to set. He said, where's the geologist and I said, he works night and day here but there's nothing to do today because the cement's setting. Well, I'd like to talk to him anyway, where is he. I said, well, he lives in a hotel in Leduc. He said, let's go in and talk to him, I want to talk to him.

AK: And did you phone ahead and get him out of the beer parlour?

VH: No. I knew where he was and so I just. . . on the way in he was saying, you know those geologists, he was an engineer you know and he was always talking about. . . so he said, all these geologists, they always want you to take a core. He said, they've got the samples there to look at but they're not big enough so they want you to take a core and as soon as

you get them a core they take a hammer and break it up in little pieces again. So I went into the beer parlour and got George and I said, there's a guy out here from Toronto that wants to see you and he said, what the hell does he want to see me for. I said, he's Mike Hyder, he's the new general manager, he just wants to talk to you. Well he came out with me and I opened the back seat of the car and George started to get into the back seat and Mike was sitting in the front seat. He reached out, and he kind of stumbled as he got in and as he did he pulled an ashtray off the back of the front seat. Mike Hyder said to him, ??? geologist, you break everything you touch. He said, and a flying fuck to you sir.

AK: That's a nice way to . . .

VH: But gentlemanly, you know, real polite.

AK: Oh yes, very polite. While we're on the subject of Mike Hyder, one of the things that I guess, hastened Ted Link's departure from Imperial was the fact that Hyder was organization man, in quotes, and brought along some of his Carter people. Ted Link was pretty much of a free spirit but Ted was very fond of playing practical jokes. You mentioned one that he did up in Norman Wells on you, about the owl.

VH: Yes, he shot an owl. That was before we got our food supply in there, we were living on macaroni and cheese and all of a sudden one of the cooks brought me a plate with this baked fowl, roasted fowl on it. I said, what's this and he said, Dr. Link shot a goose and he wants you to have it. I said, that's very nice, a pretty skinny legged goose but anyway, Carl Lawden???, who was the warehouse man, was sitting next to me and I said, we'll eat it anyway. So we cut it up and the breast was pretty good and there was quite a bit of meat on it. The legs were awful stringy and tough and the wings, you couldn't eat them but it was pretty good stuff. But when I go to play a joke back on him, I'll tell you, he didn't like it.

#132 AK: No, it was kind of a one-way street. But it seemed to me that in retrospect that Ted had to leave. I didn't mean had to leave but it was time for him to go, he'd found that, at least he'd been one of those that was responsible for Leduc. And as Doug Layer says, who really did kill the bear, there's about 50 people out there that take credit for Leduc and all that stuff. Did you ever hear anybody say that they did take credit for Leduc?

VH: No, but a lot of people gave me credit for it.

AK: You were pushing the tools.

VH: For years and years, you know, the papers got hold of this Dry Hole Hunter name. I don't know why it rang a bell with them but they sure liked it and I was on the banquet circuit for quite a long time, making speeches. And people got to think, not people in the oil business, they knew better but it's surprising the number of people in Edmonton who still don't know the slightest thing about oil wells. They presume that I drilled that well. In fact, when we were in Devon the first year, we got a copy of an English newspaper that had a headline on it, Hunter Finds Oil.

AK: You should have taken that to Walker and said, Walker, I want some more money.

VH: This Englishman had come out and he'd heard that I'd. . . a lot of people thought that I put up the money. Some people think I probably drilled it with an auger. I never heard any

one particular person ???

AK: Doug Layer got a lot of. . .you know, he's made some comments on that. But you know, it was all a question of, what will we really go down to. Just like what you've just been saying Vern, there's been a lot of misinformation published on Leduc #1. The fact that all the wheels were out for the weekend and the hole was in the Viking. The drilling crew decided to keep on drilling and on Monday morning they hit the D-2 you know. Christ, how they go from the Viking to the D-2 over a weekend is. . .

VH: Not the way we drilled.

AK: No, not in those days. It took us forever to drill that. But then, moving on, then you were assigned Lorne Faulkner, he was your first assistant. He'd been in the Imperial office I guess, in Edmonton, had he?

VH: Let's see, what the heck was he, was he a geophysicist?

AK: He was a geologist.

VH: Geologist.

AK: He and Harry Reedford you know, had walked the Arctic coast. Have you ever heard from Harry?

VH: No. But Lorne, he was a good guy, a good man. But he was too ambitious to stay with a big company. He wanted to get into business for himself.

#173 AK: Do you know any of the circumstances about Moses and hiring Lloyd Stafford away from GP and setting up that company, Devon Drilling?

VH: No. I know that he offered him a job and he took it.

AK: Yes, he went. At that time there were probably people, including myself actually, I left in February of '49, that went to other companies. And you were still recruiting people and bringing them out there. Like you had Harry Simpson and Hank Bonet and Bob Tesky and of course, Maurice Paulsen.

VH: Maurice went to Redwater and Home Oil hired him. They hired him away from Imperial for \$900 a month. Of course, Maury was making \$450 so they doubled his pay.

AK: But there was quite a gang in Redwater. You were never involved in Redwater.

VH: Oh yes, I was only in Devon for 2 years then I went to Redwater for 2 years.

AK: Oh, I see. What year was that that you went?

VH: In about '50 or '51. I was in Redwater for 2 years.

AK: Yes. There was Rod McDaniel and all that crowd. Lauder Nowers was there wasn't he?

VH: He was personnel.

AK: Yes. Betty. We keep pretty close touch because that was the nucleus of the bridge group you see.

VH: You know, she used to get migraine headaches there at Redwater.

AK: Betty?

VH: Nowers. And she would maybe stay in bed for a week, pull the blinds, days anyway, days on end. These terrible migraine headaches. After they moved to Calgary she started to smoke cigarettes and for years and years and years, she never had another migraine headache, I don't know whether she's ever had one since.

AK: Her state of health is very, very precarious.

VH: Is it?

AK: Yes, she's not in good shape at all. She's had so many operations and she's very fragile. But she still has that tremendous sense of humour. But before you left for Redwater, you had the Atlantic 3 thrown at you. When did you first realize that this Atlantic 3 was something more than, you know, out of the ordinary?

VH: Some of the guys on the rig used to drop in at the Leduc office and tell about these problems that they were having and wondering if I had any suggestions. Well, cripes, without knowing all the details you couldn't make any suggestions. It probably wouldn't be able to do anything about it anyway. So I could see they were getting into deeper and deeper difficulties all the time but I didn't get too concerned about it because I was too busy.

#218 AK: By that time you had about how many rigs?

VH: I don't know, we were getting rigs every day.

AK: How many of those rigs. . . I mean, Ralph brought a whole bunch of steam rigs up that he'd converted, practically converted overnight and put the cats out at the end of the walk.

VH: Lorne McCallum come in there with Commonwealth rigs.

AK: Where did they get their rigs from, was that from the valley?

VH: Yes, they were steam rigs, Turner Valley mostly.

AK: What about the ones, like the Cantex and that sort of thing. The contractors from down below, did they start to come in?

VH: Oh yes, Cantex had several rigs in there. Dick Harris. I don't know how many we had, I suppose we had 30 rigs, contract rigs.

AK: One of the things that I seem to recall was that you had to drill . . . you see, the old regulations, which were switched over of course, required, in order for you to get a lease you had to drill it. That's on the Crown lands. You see, there was no Crown reserves for township 50, range 26. Imperial got 100% of the crown land but then there was these offset obligations, freehold against Crown.

VH: They had to be drilled I'll tell you.

AK: I don't remember all this but was there a program set up for that?

VH: I'm sure there was in Calgary. They'd tell us where to drill and . . .

AK: The other thing about, when Atlantic 3 started to act up, the hole that Imperial had drilled immediately west, the west offset to Atlantic 3, was used as I understand, to pump that 10,000 sacks of cement down.

VH: That was the first offset to get down. The first thing we did, we had to run a pipeline from the river and put a pump down to the river and we pumped 14 million barrels a day of water in.

AK: Into that hole?

VH: Yes.

AK: And of course, there was no reaction to that at all.

VH: Well, after. . . I don't remember pumping all that sawdust and all that feathers and stuff down that hole. I think you told me that they had put it down there.

AK: My understanding was, and I have a picture from Nate Goodman, that they used that hole, and I can't remember the number, I was thinking it was 48 but I'm not sure. They had all the cementing trucks in the country lined up and they had 10,000 sacks of cement and they pumped that cement down that Imperial hole with the idea that it might work its way over.

VH: They probably did, I wasn't there. But anyway, we were pumping 14 thousand barrels a day of water.

AK: Down that hole.

VH: Down that hole, for 2 days and you could see the difference in what was coming up.

#264 AK: Over at the wild well. Oh, is that right, so the water was getting. . .?

VH: It wasn't on fire you see, it was just blowing. And the water vapour was coming up mixed with the oil and gas and then all of a sudden it caught fire spontaneously from the inside out. It didn't catch from outside and thrash in, it started in the middle. . .

AK: Like a ball.

VH: Yes, like a ball of, not flame but red hot.

AK: Yes, well, the way Tip talked about it he felt that it wasn't 2 pieces of metal scraping together.

VH: No.

AK: It wasn't a spark.

VH: No, Jimmy Young in his lab down there in Calgary was able to duplicate it. If you start spraying water into gas and oil like that you can make it go off spontaneously. Like a grain elevator, you know, you get spontaneous combustion in a grain elevator. And he was able to duplicate it in the lab.

AK: Is that right? There was a clever man.

VH: Oh gosh. Never went to university either.

AK: No, he'd forgotten more and had more smarts than all the rest of them put together.

VH: Yes, he had one of these photographic memories. He could read a typical book in an hour and tell you what page anything was on.

AK: He had that squint you know, remember. Did he come up to Leduc much?

VH: Oh yes.

AK: What about some of the stories about some of the hands in the office there, during the time, you know, some of the antics? There were lots of them.

VH: It seems to me it was a geologist wasn't it, that got his arm broke during a safety banquet?

AK: It could have been, I don't know who that was.

VH: It wasn't me. I think it was one of the young geologists, or maybe sample catchers. Because we hadn't had a loss time accident, we had a safety banquet.

AK: Was this out at Devon?

VH: Yes. And instead of . . .well, there was a certain amount of money available but I think we increased the liquor and cut down on the food. It got to be quite a party and one of the, I don't know whether he was a young geologist or sample catcher or what, and some other guy there got into an argument and it got hotter and hotter and the geologist got thrown out the door or the window or something. I think that was the last safety banquet I

was ever at. I can tell you a real funny story. It's a little bit dirty but . . . This same geologist down there in the early days of #1, he wasn't married and he used to take girls out once in awhile. It was a very cold night, Saturday night and he had this gal out. the next morning when the crew brought the reports in to me in the morning to phone Calgary, I think it was Fin Lineham, he said, say, if you want to see something funny when you go out to the rig go around by the hotel. So I thought okay, so when I went out to the rig I drove around by the hotel and looked and here was this car parked out in front of the hotel . . .

#324 AK: You mean the Leduc Hotel?

VH: Yes, Leduc Hotel. Apparently the geologist had made out pretty well the night before because he'd thrown the condom out the window and the wind blew it back and it froze on the door of his car. On the side of his car and it was parked there. Well, that was about 9:00 when I saw it there but all the people going to church [laughing]. . .

AK: To have a look eh?

VH: Fortunately I don't think the townspeople knew whose car it was.

AK: There was no name on it, we didn't have names on the cars, no, just on the panels of the pick-ups, ????. But getting to Leduc and the telephone operator, do you remember Fran at the switchboard?

VH: Yes, you were telling me about her the other day? Fran?

AK: Yes, I saw her. Her name is McInnis now, I think her maiden name was Flood. She talks about the circumstances. She said, they finally decided to have contract calls and I guess that was it, wasn't it. You'd come right in to the telephone office and make your call, rather than use a . . . that's before you got the phones.

VH: Oh yes.

AK: Back early.

VH: That was early, yes, we'd go right to the telephone and make it.

AK: But then she said there was a phone installed at what was called Lucy Corner.

VH: Yes, there was.

AK: That's just south of Devon?

VH: Yes, just south of Devon, that main corner.

AK: That was like a payphone or what was it?

VH: Yes.

AK: But it was the only private circuit out into the field?

VH: Yes, I don't know how private it was.

AK: But it wasn't on one of those party lines.

VH: Oh no.

AK: There was 10 or 15 on them.

VH: All the salesmen and the contract tool pushers you know, used to phone their reports in. That was a real busy spot, that Lucy Corner.

AK: Yes. Then when you got your building built at Devon of course, you'd get your own phone facilities in then. And that was another direct line. But she talked about all the calls that she'd have to make, you know, middle of the night sort of thing.

VH: God yes, it was busy night and day. It was busy and we had no roads out there. Trying to make roads every time it rained.

AK: Imperial picked up a lot of the tab for some of those roads didn't they?

VH: All of it.

AK: Is that right? The government didn't . . . ?

VH: Not in the field. They did the roads to the field but not in. . .

End of tape.

Tape 2 Side 1

AK: This is tape 2, side 1, continuing my discussions with Vern Hunter, August 17th, '83. We were just talking a little bit there, before the other tape, about your responsibilities with Atlantic #3 and you were saying that you and Woodrow had enough on your hands without doing anything, except to relieve, maybe Charlie or Tip. Could you give us a little more on that?

VH: That's right. The drilling was still going on in the field with lots and lots of rigs and we had to keep on that. The production wells were shut in because they had over-production from Atlantic 3. So we were very busy. We used to go and visit Charlie and Tip. Charlie Visser and Tip Maroney worked 12 hours shifts on that rig until it was finished and they very rarely ever wanted anybody to come around to relieve them. So you know, we used to go and offer quite often but they would say, no, we'll look after it. So they did so it was very rarely we ever got a chance, except to go in there and help them at times when they were loading, what we called Maroney suppositories into that joint of casing they put down there to get the cement in the hole.

AK: That went down the south relieve well.

VH: Yes, that went down the south well. The west well we pumped 14,000 barrels of water from the river down that hole. After a few days of that we could notice the difference in the way the thing was blowing out there. And the rig fell in, that's when the rig fell down the hole, after the water started coming up.

AK: Yes, and that was either the morning or the night before, because Tip told me that he sent a crew in there the day before, of the night that the derrick fell in. He was going to send a crew in there to try to right the derrick, it was starting to lean. And he decided he better not so he got out of there.

VH: He had a Pumpson engine and everything, slid down the hole, down into the cavern. It was quite a thing. But it seemed like, as soon as that water started coming up with the gas and oil it changed it. And then after, I don't know, it was probably only about 3 days of all that water going in there till it caught fire.

AK: That was kind of a tough situation and Tip really showed his good sense and judgement by insisting the 2 directional holes be drilled.

VH: Oh yes, you're darn rights.

AK: A lot of people said, oh, what's the point of 2, why don't we just do 1. Well, it sure paid off.

VH: Oh yes. Because the south one was the one that really, actually contacted, either the old

original hole or a cavern, the same cavern or approximately.

AK: Yes, well, Al Phillips tells me that with the calculations they made and Charlie Smith with Eastman, did you know Charlie Smith?

VH: Yes.

AK: Is he still alive?

VH: I don't know.

AK: No, I should have asked Al. But at any rate, Al said that their calculations showed that they were right smack dab, right at the old original, what was left of the well bore.

VH: Yes, of course, the didn't know where they were, because it hadn't been surveyed.

AK: That's right. Except ????. But they didn't tell you which way it was. . .

VH: Hell no. But it did, either contacted the old hole or the same cavern.

#041 AK: Well, that's right.

VH: The bottom just dropped away when they hit it.

AK: Did you remember the story about the Calseal???

VH: No.

AK: They got this Calseal up from the States you know, and that's the stuff that sets while you're looking at it. The net result was there were 5 singles, they were just solid. . .they had to lay them down and they never got it away and I guess they ran old Calseal, what was his name off, and sent him back to the States.

VH: It was good stuff, but they were trying to put it in there just at the right. . .no margin of error. There was no room for error.

AK: And these suppositories, they were made out of what?

VH: I was helping him roll up there one day, that day Maroney had gunny sacks and chicken wire. Roll them up just as tight as you could possibly roll them and shove them in the casing.

AK: They'd have to be smaller than. . . because the 7" was in there then.

VH: Yes.

AK: The way Al talked, as if they kind of ran them through a piece of 5 1/2" first.

VH: On the end of the drill pipe they'd have one 30' joint of casing. Just 6" casing, somewhere around 6. . .

AK: Yes, just enough to get into the hole.

VH: So it would go inside the 7" casing. Then ram this stuff up from the bottom. First they'd ram a plug in there, like a . . .

AK: Ball seal plug?

VH: Yes, like a pump piston, up there, and then roll this chicken wire and matting as tight as you could get it. And shove it in the pipe and tamp it right up against that plug in the top of the casing. And then put another, you know, chicken wire comes in rolls maybe 4' wide you see, and roll it up really tight, never tied it but get it started in there and then ram it right back so that the whole 7" 30 ft. of casing was filled with these pills of chicken wire. But I think, like you said, they used welcome mats or anything else. The day that I was there they were using heavy burlap.

AK: Chuck Rankin, that's the one word I remember, welcome mats.

VH: And the bottom.

AK: Then they'd run this into the bottom?

VH: Yes, then they'd put a sheer plug in. And another, like a piston in the bottom and then the sheer pin through it. So when they'd run that down into that cavern, on the end of the drill pipe, they'd just start pumping mud in and the pressure would build up and build up and build up until it would break that sheer pin in the bottom.

AK: And these suppositories would fly right out.

VH: The plus would come out and then all these suppositories would come out and immediately unwind and spread out. And then they'd put in, maybe 100 sacks, of cement right behind it. Just small plugs. And put that in there and just pull out of the hole again and make another suppository and run it back in there. I don't know how many they put in there, dozens I guess.

AK: Oh yes, they must have.

VH: But gradually with those things, when they'd unwind and spread out there and they would hold ??? of cement and let it sit, just enough so that, eventually got it so that. . .

#082 AK: Going back to the pumping of the water, Tip told me quite a story about Sammy Hector. Do you know about the bargaining over the water?

VH: No, about the pipe.

AK: Yes, the pipe but bargaining over the water.

VH: I remember something about the pipe, Sammy Hector ??? the pipe. It wasn't that easy to get in those days. And Sammy Hector had some but Tip didn't like dealing with Sammy.

AK: No, the way he talked as if he didn't.

VH: He figured Sammy beat him all the time. Actually you know, I think I'm a pretty good ??? but he said, I can't beat Sammy.

AK: But Billy Oakes is the one that put the pump down at the river bottom?

VH: Yes.

AK: Were they Imperial's own equipment?

VH: Oh yes, they were mud pumps.

AK: That were supposed to go up to muskeg I think.

VH: Oh. Yes, they were Imperial's mud pumps. Our production crews were ??? and Billy Oakes I guess was probably. . .

AK: He was the one that was down there at the river bottom. But I think it ended up that Hector didn't, I don't think Hector's facilities were used. Because remember, Hector had set up a kind of water system throughout the field, to supply water to the different rigs. Wasn't that right? And he I think he was going to expand his activities to. . . And I think this is what Tip was. . . It was something like that.

VH: I didn't know about that one but I knew that Tip had had problems

AK: Well, he did, you could tell the way he was talking about it. But the net result though, was this water was pumping down, finally after the west relief hole got cased and all completed, then they started pumping the water down that hole. In the meantime they got squared around on the south one. But the south one should have been finished sooner, except that Cody Spencer ran that casing in too hard.

VH: I'd forgotten about that. Or maybe didn't know.
AK: Yes, and Al Phillips was right there and one of the roughnecks got his hand taken off.
VH: Did he?
AK: Yes, he couldn't see him but Al was working cat head. This guy got his hand right in where the latch was. Shouldn't have never had his, you know. . .
VH: It was on that rig where the guy went to have a smoke out in the crapper.
AK: Oh yes, everybody remembers that one. It was an individual that did it all right but that was the last time, although it didn't blow anything up.
VH: No.
AK: And this was the funny part. You were saying when the damn thing caught fire, Al and one of his friends, they were going to go out and take some pictures you know. And this thing caught fire at the time, this chap was with him, I can't remember his name but he told me, he said, he just left his boots right there, he just ran. But he said that the fire didn't spread. You know, not that fast.
VH: We had to get in there and bank it off. It was gradually spreading on the ground and we had those big pits, you know, where we were collecting oil.
AK: Oh, down at the corner?
VH: Yes, down at the corner. And it was just gradually spreading down that way so we went in there with rubber boots and banked it off.
AK: So that the oil wouldn't run down into the pit? And the fire wouldn't jump over.
VH: So the fire wouldn't get down into the pit, yes.
AK: Did you have enough clean earth to put in there?
VH: Yes.

#123 AK: Is that right, you must have brought some trucks or something in there. So you were involved in that sort of rescue operation?

VH: Yes.
AK: But that was after it caught fire?
VH: Yes. I was a mile away but I saw it catch fire.
AK: Were you at home?
VH: I was out by the Lucy Corner there, a mile on the road west of #1, just driving along there when I kind of looking at it.
AK: All of a sudden.
VH: Yes, but I was a mile away.
AK: And that was Labour Day, September 6th.
VH: It was, eh?
AK: Yes. I think Tip Maroney said it was his wife's, their anniversary or something. I don't know whether he was there or not. I know we were in town, oh yes, we'd moved out there because I remember Elsie getting oil all over the clothes on the clothesline. You know, the spray of oil would come over there. But we were driving around somewhere, I think my mother and dad were there or something. We were somewhere, whether it was in town or not and I said, there it goes, there's a big black, I said, it's gone. Those kind of things stick in your memory.

- VH: Leduc didn't get known worldwide until that happened.
- AK: That's right. Did you hear that story about someone phoning up from California about the well blowing wild? This is back before they killed it, you know, back in the early stages. Did you hear that story about this fellow phoning up and saying, what's this I hear about a well producing 15,000 barrels of oil a day. Yes. What's the name of the company that's running it? Atlantic. Is the stock listed? Yes. What's it trading at? 25. He said, \$25. No, 25 cents. The guy couldn't believe it. But did you ever get involved in any of that stock that was being peddled around. Because there was stock being sold in Atlantic that winter, you know, when Frank bought the lease. This was the late fall of '47. I think Nate and Maury and some of those others bought some.
- VH: Oh yes, they would, they were great gamblers. Stock market players and poker players. God, Paulsen was a good gambler, holy gee.
- AK: Yes, he's cool. Did you ever get into a game of throwing quarters with him?
- VH: Yes, I did a few times, I learned my lesson.
- AK: Never again, eh?
- VH: No.
- AK: Don't you think some of that was just a natural ability?
- VH: Oh yes, he's a natural athlete.
- AK: Natural athlete. Good at golf, he was hitting, according to what Don Wilkin told me he got a 74 at Earl Grey the other day. That's not bad.
- VH: You know, he's a skier, just well coordinated.
- AK: Yes. What about some of the other people that were around there that you've got any stories about that add a little colour to this interview?
- VH: We were always looking for fun in those days. Usually you could find some someplace or another. It was a pretty poor day when there wasn't a joke of some kind going on. I used to notice down in your geological office there in Leduc, there used to be loud laughter coming up the stairs every once in awhile. I think I remember one time you guys got this fellow to put the funnel in the front of his pants and put a penny on his forehead and bend over and drop the penny into the. . .
- AK: Oh yes, in the meantime. . .
- VH: Somebody poured the cold water in the funnel. Walker Taylor was sitting in my office when this was going on ??? I'm pretty sure it was you.
- AK: No, that's true, I think probably maybe old Sluzar??? had something to do with it too.
- VH: Oh yes, it could have been old Sluze.
- AK: We have those locks installed now so we can get back to some of the stories about the Calgary office. It seemed to me that they felt that they needed some people that had some experience and I guess this is why they probably brought Mike Hyder up to start with.
- VH: Oh yes, sure. They sure did because you know ??? Mike Hyder come up ??? you've got to have land first, fishing . . .
- #185 AK: That's what he said eh?
- VH: Yes.
- AK: Well, he could see the fundamentals of it.

VH: One of the geologists was down there making a presentation to the board meeting, on a certain project and afterwards, Mike Hyder took him aside and he said, you know, when you're talking about a project you don't discuss the project and say, this is going to cost a million dollars. You describe the project and say, it's going to cost a million dollars or so.

AK: It's the inflection of the voice.

VH: Only cost a million dollars.

AK: In other words, it's going to be too expensive. I guess Hyder, was he fairly regular in his trips out to western Canada?

VH: Yes, he used to come out a lot.

AK: I remember him on one trip but very vaguely.

VH: He used to come out a lot.

AK: And Walker Taylor, he wasn't a production man was he, really?

VH: No, Walker was a warehouse man actually. He ran the warehouse in Turner Valley. I didn't know Walker too well in Turner Valley. Walker was a great hunter, he loved to hunt.

AK: Yes, and he was quite a student of the Arctic, he had books on the Hudson Bay.

VH: I'll tell you about that. In Turner Valley he ran the warehouse and I was working on the drilling rigs so although we knew each other, not very well. Then I went pushing tools on a rig down in Brooks and the Tilley area. It was a brand new rig, mechanical rig as opposed to a steam rig and there weren't many in the country, only 1 or 2 of them in the country at that time. This brand new rig engine broke down in the middle of the night. We had 2 engines so we could still operate but not very well. Like a twin engine plane flying on one engine. So at 4:00 in the morning I was out helping them tear this engine out and we had a truck there to ship it to Calgary to get a quick overhaul job.

#222 AK: Was it a diesel?

VH: Diesel engine, yes. So Walker came down hunting and at 4:00 in the morning, he wanted to be out there at daylight for the pheasants. He drove in to the rig while we were there and he wanted to know what was the trouble and I told him. He said, what are you doing here and I said, well, it's my responsibility. He said, yes, but you've got a crew here, can't they do that, what are you doing out here at 4:00 in the morning. I don't know, it's pretty hard to sleep when you've got an engine broke down. He never said anything more, he went hunting. A few months later Walker was made superintendent of the Norman Wells operation during the Canol project, you know, when the Americans were spending all that money up there and Imperial was drilling the wells. Walker was the first superintendent there and so he needed a drilling superintendent so he asked for me to go up there as a drilling superintendent. I'd only been pushing tools for a couple of years. So I went up there for 2 years with Walker and I'll tell you, he was a real friend of mine. He did everything for me and I worked hard for him. When I was on Leduc #1, pushing tools again, after I came out of the Canol project after 2 years, he got me the job as a field superintendent here. And I heard from other people afterwards, Don Mackenzie told me later, he said, you know, Walker really went to bat for you. They wanted to bring somebody in from Carter. Of course, that was before Hyder was there and they thought

they should bring somebody in that was more experienced. Which was probably true, but Walker battled according to Don, he battled for me and got me the job as field superintendent, just because I happened to be on the right rig at the right time. And because I knew Walker from Norman Wells and from this, he caught me out working at 4:00 in the morning.

AK: I'm sure that a lot of things don't go unnoticed. Getting on into once Hyder came along I guess he felt that he needed some other people up to augment the other staff. Was he instrumental in bringing Ray Walters up?

VH: I don't know. No, I don't think Hyder was. Not Ray Walters. But Hyder was responsible for bringing Curran??? in. Ray Walters was the exploration manager and a hell of a good guy too, honest guy. But when Curran. . . the only mistake that I ever knew of Hyder making was in bringing Curran up here, who was a crook and a well known crook in the States.

#275 AK: Yes. And it's a funny thing he didn't check it out.

VH: Everybody that had worked for Carter knew that Curran was a crook.

AK: Maybe they were doing a cover-up so that they could get rid of him.

VH: Sure, kind of wanted to get rid of him, absolutely. But why Hyder, who come through that organization, didn't know, I don't know. He brought him in and they just turned everything upside down. I told you about the time he came out to Redwater and told us we had to quit. . .

AK: Yes, would you tell us on the tape here about that?

VH: After I left the Leduc field and went to Redwater, we had 28 rigs running there and the wells were only a little over 3,000' deep. We were drilling quick and gee, we had a lot of production, battery building operations going on. Crews and crews and crews building batteries. Government regulations call for fire walls around these tank farms so if there's a spill the oil won't run away. So we were naturally, building fire walls around the tanks. He came up one day with Tip Maroney, Tip was driving. They were looking and he said, Maroney come here, what are you guys building over there. Maroney said, that's the tank battery and we're just putting the fire walls around it. He said, we don't need fire walls. Well, Maroney said, we probably won't need them but you have to have them because it's regulations. Well, we're not going to build them. Tip says, are you ordering me to. . . he said, yes, shut it down. So Tip came over to me and he said, Curran says shut down the cats building those fire walls. I said, you know darn well we can't do it, we have to do it. He said, do you want me to put it in writing, I said, no, you don't have to put it in writing, you say shut them down we'll shut them down. So I got Lee Constable, the production superintendent, to shut the cats down there at quitting time, no more fire wall. The next morning I'd just got to work when, I think it was Ron Edgecombe was the Conservation Board ??? man up there, he was in and said, what's this about shutting down the cats to build fire walls. I said, yes, we shut them down last night, he said, why, I said, because I was told to. He said, who told you and I said, Tip Maroney told me, he's my boss. But I said, somebody else told Tip. So he took off and I don't think it was half an hour later when I got a phone call from Tip saying you can start the cats up again. He said, Ron

Edgecombe phoned down here and got somebody in the Conservation Board, the second in command down there, I've forgotten who he was and he came over to see me and Maroney and I said, you're talking to the wrong guy, you've got to talk to the guy at the other office over here. So this guy went back and got the head man, I don't know who would be the head of the Conservation Board at that time.

#336 AK: Well, Ian McKinnon was chairman, then there was George Govier, it might have been Frank Manilock???

VH: No, it was Ian McKinnon was the head of it then. So Ian McKinnon came over and got with Curran for a few minutes, I don't think the whole thing took more than half an hour till we had the cats out again, working on the fire wall.

AK: Well, that's true. Just digressing for a minute, was George Bannantine up there then?

VH: I took George's place. George went to Calgary as Tip Maroney's assistant and I took his place and Bob Welsh came up to Devon and took my place.

AK: Because he became production superintendent at Devon, Bob Welsh did.

VH: Well, district superintendent. By that time they called it district, first it was field superintendent then it became district. So Bob Welsh was just back from Columbia. He was a Canadian who had been working down in Columbia for ??? years.

AK: Yes. Of course, he was responsible for that gas plant there.

VH: Yes, he was a gas plant man, pretty well.

AK: That's what he was, yes, he was Mr. Gas Plant from then on. Okay, then there was the story about Curran telling his friends that all they had to do . . .

End of tape.

Tape 2 Side 2

AK: Maroney would be approached by these contractors, probably at Coutts, wondering what they were supposed to do with their rigs. And Curran had said, come on up and we'll get you a job. Maroney just put the clamps on that right away.

VH: Well, he did as much as he could. But you know, it was pretty hard. Same with Ray Walters, Ray didn't want these seismic crews but what can you do. Your boss tells you to put them to work and you're hiring rigs, or seismic crews, so you do. I shut the cats down anyway, because I was told to shut them down.

AK: What about this business of George Shoultice going into Bob Curran's office?

VH: Bob Curran used to give farm outs to companies and then immediately phone up a broker and buy stock and tell Ray Walters that Ray had agreed or something, that they had discussed it on the phone.

AK: That he'd agreed to the farm outs?

VH: Yes, that he'd agreed to the farm outs. And Ray had never heard about it. So he got George Shoultice down there, who was a pretty darned good electrician as well as being a good seismic man and he bugged his desk and bugged the phone so that he could record everything that was said. But Ray Walters, he didn't do that very long, he just quit.

AK: He quit?

VH: He couldn't stand it and went to South America and christ, he died in a very few months afterward. I never did hear what. . .

AK: But he'd had previous experience in South America hadn't he?

VH: Yes. He was a very experienced guy, a hard worker and a tough guy but a real honest guy.

AK: Ray said, from what I'd been told, that you know, when he discovered Leduc that he would be able to map out others, just give me some seismic crews and I'll find these other ones. And that's when he found Redwater and . . .

VH: Willingdon.

AK: Willingdon was a bust because of the. . .well, we mentioned that a little earlier.

VH: Yes, he found it though. ??? Golden Spike.

#037 AK: What do you recall of Golden Spike? There seemed to be an awful lot of uncertainty about that thing, it didn't show up on the seismic.

VH: No. I remember Walker saying, we're going to have to drill this well over here, we have to drill it because of lease obligations. He said, it's a waste of time and effort but we've got to drill it so as soon as you get a rig available, we've got to go over and drill at Golden Spike. He showed me where it was on the map and he said, it's no good but. . . And there was 600' of pay.

AK: Yes, well, it was under your jurisdiction?

VH: Oh yes.

AK: Yes. You know the story that Jim Lowry tells, or at least told, he's been dead now 30 years nearly, was that Imperial was thinking of offering that as a farm out.

VH: I wouldn't be a bit surprised. Walker sure, now where Walker got his information, he's no geologist either. . .

AK: No, but he'd take the word. . .

VH: Oh yes, but the exploration people didn't think anything of Golden Spike. There may have been some indication because to hit a pimple like that with the first well, there may have been just one little blip or something, on the seismic.

AK: But the seismic, they shot it pretty good by my understanding, but it just didn't show up on the seismic. Because you see, one of the problems with seismic is, when you shoot over a reef all your energy is dissipated in the reef and you don't get good reflections. It's when you're off the reef that you get good reflections. It's just a jumble of energy in there. Then of course, don't forget that geophysics were pretty primitive in those days.

VH: Oh yes, compared to now. They can find these little pimples, like Gulf on down there in.

AK: Yes, that one at Stettler. The other person I was going to ask you about was Bill Twaits. Where the hell did he fit in?

VH: He was the president of the company.

AK: Well, I know, but didn't he serve a little apprenticeship out in Calgary?

VH: Yes. And even in Devon, he was kind of had a little. . .

AK: Was he up at Devon for awhile?

VH: Oh sure. We used to get him in the poker games, on Friday night poker games with Nate and ??? and Paulsen and those guys and Twaits. But he wanted to play Toronto rules.

You know, the rules of poker, like low ball and all that, are different out here than they are in Toronto. Everybody here was playing western rules and Twaits would get mad because he didn't think those rules were right. So every Friday night we had a poker game in the office there, christ, there were about half a dozen guys. Jack Mackay would sometimes lose his cheque, he was a tool pusher, do you remember Jack Mackay?

AK: Yes, his widow lives in Cochrane I think.

VH: But Twaits would always lose, Paulsen and Nate Goodman, those guys were real poker players. And George Thompson too. And those guys, they would just take Twaits's money every Friday. Twaits, he didn't like that very much.

AK: And yet he didn't want to. . .

VH: He wanted to be one of the boys and . . .

AK: What actually did he do, was he kind of an administrative person or was he just learning the ropes?

VH: What he did when he was here?

AK: When he was at Devon?

VH: Nothing really.

AK: Just kind of stand around.

VH: Walker Taylor told me, he said, he's the next president. He wasn't president then.

AK: No, no, because he . . .

VH: But he said, he's going to be the next president.

AK: Well, they'd picked him out, that's what they sent him there for.

VH: So he used to read books and drive around the field and sit in on meetings.

AK: I knew he was in Calgary.

VH: One thing about Twaits, I noticed it but other people have told me the same thing, he's a brain picker. He was one of the biggest brain pickers in the world, and the best. You know, you've got to be good to pick the wheat from the chaff.

#082 AK: That's right. And then you take it and run along with it, as if it's your own.

VH: Sure. And other people told me the same thing, that Twaits was the best brain picker they'd ever met because he could pick the brains. . .

AK: Maybe that's why they put him in that job.

VH: I guess so. Actually, he wasn't that original himself, but picked brains.

AK: Tip made some comments about Twaits being in the kind of a position that was not very much authority in Calgary either.

VH: No. I don't know how long he was there, maybe 3 months or so.

AK: Well, he was there awhile because . . .

VH: NO, he didn't have any real authority.

AK: But he was just kind of being passed around and seeing what. . .

VH: Yes, and learning the budgets and attending all the meetings, and actually, picking brains is what he was doing.

AK: That's right. Then the succession was, in Calgary then, later on, Jack Armstrong came up from South America in '48 and then he started to move into the orbit.

VH: Yes. I'm pretty sure he took Ray Walters place when Ray, as the exploration manager. He

had been here and when we were in Redwater Jack used to come out once in awhile, out to Redwater, from when he was in this building in the south side here.

AK: Oh yes, was he district exploration manager or something?

VH: Yes, district exploration manager.

AK: Where was that building?

VH: Right on the other side of the High Level Bridge.

AK: Near the Scona. . .

VH: Yes, I forget the name of it.

AK: Yes, but we had an office over in the Alexander Building.

VH: No, his office, the exploration office ??? High Level Bridge, there was a building there, I forget the name of it. But Jack, he took Ray Walters place and he. . . I knew Jack very well, Jack's a Mormon you know, at least he married a Mormon. After Redwater I went to Calgary too, for 2 years.

AK: Yes, I knew you were down there.

VH: It was just one of these assistant nothings, looking after budgets and personnel and staff positions, it was terrible. Jack, we got to be very good friends. We went to quite a few good parties with Jack over the years and then all of a sudden, for some reason or other, he decided to join the Mormon church. I could never figure it out but he told me one day, he said, I've joined the church. I said, my god, you won't be able to drink or smoke. Didn't bother him a bit. And I'll tell you, he never, to my knowledge anyway, had a drink or a smoke either. He would drink ginger ale but he wouldn't drink even coke.

AK: No, coke had caffeine in it you see.

VH: I said, Jack I will give you 3 months, 6 at the most. No, and he stuck with it and I think he's a bishop or something now.

AK: I think he's quite high up in the hierarchy, yes.

VH: He used to laugh about it, he said, the first job they gave me was trying to collect money from these jack Mormons that won't pay their tithes. He said, I have to go get these guys and some of them ??? right out of the house but I have to just go back the next day.

AK: That's their job yes, and they have a list.

VH: I said, well, do you ever get any of them. He said, oh yes, I get them to tithe for awhile, I don't know how long they last but I get some money out of them.

#126 AK: There's an interesting sidelight on that Vern, is that Alex Bland worked for me down in Taber.

VH: I remember Alex very well.

AK: Alex is a half-brother of Jack's wife.

VH: All this isn't going to get out anywhere is it?

AK: No, no, it won't.

VH: Gee, because Jack Armstrong always was a good friend of mine, he's done lots and lots of things for me.

AK: That's fair ball because you get all different opinions of different people. But I have a funny feeling the reason that Alex Bland survived that 1971 purge was because of probably, his connections with Jack. I don't know.

VH: He was a brother-in-law you say.

AK: No, a half-brother to Jack's wife. It was Keith and . . . But they had a bakery in Taber called Bland's Bakery.

VH: I remember something like that.

AK: That's where the connection was because we knew, what was her name, Jack's wife's name? We knew her quite well you know. We knew her when you know. But no, no matter, the higher up you get the more shots are taken at you. When you were in Calgary, you said you were there for 2 years and then you went to Regina.

VH: Yes. Oh was I ever tickled.

AK: Yes, I remember visiting you there I think. And you had something hands on then.

VH: Division manager, gee, was I ever tickled.

AK: And what was it, Robertson was down there with you?

VH: Yes.

AK: What was his first name?

VH: George Robertson.

AK: He was kind of supply person wasn't he, kind of a big heavy fellow?

VH: Yes. Transportation. He went to Libya.

AK: Did he?

VH: Oh yes, he got a good job over in Libya.

AK: Who else did you have with you, did you have Jack Harvey?

VH: No

AK: No, Jack took over from you didn't he?

VH: Yes, when I came up here. Lee Constable was there, as production manager and George Shoullice was assistant manager.

AK: Was he, was that before he went to Dawson Creek?

VH: Yes. He went to Dawson Creek the same time I went to Edmonton. Because all the drilling had died down, we'd drilled up all the leases we had.

AK: And by the time Jack had arrived, he was kind of turned into a kind of care-taker thing.

VH: Yes.

AK: Jack had quite an interesting career with Imperial.

VH: I thought he might make the board but he never did.

AK: No.

VH: He was too interested in the stock markets, and commodities and horse racing.

AK: I guess so. I guess he was manager of the minerals one afternoon, the next morning he was nothing. This fellow Pfister took over for him, Bob Pfister. He's been manager of the minerals ever since.

VH: Is that when Jack retired?

AK: No, he stayed on and the I guess he got into other things.

VH: But he never made the board, I thought he would.

AK: No, he sure didn't. No, I thought he was material.

VH: I did too.

#169 AK: Because he had a very incisive look at things. And I don't think they got the best

use out of him. Who else was at Regina when you were there?

VH: Frank Spraggins was there.

AK: He was still working on geophysics was he?

VH: He was the exploration manager down there. And Peter White, that prick.

AK: I guess he was one of the ones that had to do the knife job in 1971.

VH: Peter White?

AK: Yes.

VH: He knifed me before that in my pension. I had been promised a better pension than I got.

AK: Is that right. But how did he influence it?

VH: He was down there in Toronto as a general manager. I retired and he knifed my pension, the bastard.

AK: What about Poyen?

VH: Poyen would never stick up for anybody. I was crazy to ever take Poyen's word for it because he was gutless???

AK: Poyen, how did he get in from Cantex? He was with Cantex and then, how did he ever get . . . ?

VH: He got in as a landman. I can remember being in Ray Walters office, about 9:00 in the morning, in Calgary and he said, look who's coming across the tracks. I looked out and there was Poyen. He said, that son-of-a-bitch, he comes an hour late every morning and he leaves an hour early every afternoon and plays gold.

AK: Oh, he was a golfer, no wonder he was able golf so well.

VH: Yes, late every morning, early going every night. How he got by with it, Ray Walters couldn't stand him.

AK: Was he a buddy of Curran's?

VH: I think Curran must have hired him.

AK: Yes. Because you see, he came up with, it wasn't Cantex but he came up with what, Manning Drilling or something like that and had a look and then went back. Then Dollar-for-Dick hired him but I don't know how Dollar-for-Dick would want to hire him. But I guess there was a great sigh of relief when Curran was hired by Bob Brown to go over. . .

VH: Was there ever.

AK: And how come Bob Brown was so stupid?

VH: And ??? Paulsen and guys with Home Oil you know, how come Bob Brown didn't know. He said, well, they just kept him insulated from what was going on in the world.

AK: But the game was you see, that Jim Lowry hired Curran you see, on the surface. It wasn't to be known that Bob Brown had taken control of Home. Lowry was still ostensibly in control of Home and there was a picture of Lowry and Curran when Curran was appointed. Then it was Bob Brown that had to fire Curran when he found out \$150,000 later. But I know Maroney's expression when he heard about it, it was something like, it's goddamn about time. He was so relieved. So he and Walters both were relieved then?

VH: Oh yes. Maroney wouldn't have stayed much longer I don't think either.

#218 AK: No. Maroney couldn't put up with that.

- VH: Oh, he just couldn't stand it. We're talking about some of these bad guys but boy, I tell you, there's been some good guys that I've worked for. Starting right with Charlie Visser and Woodrow Wilson and Don Mackenzie. There's a guy that, gee, he was always a good guy.
- AK: Yes, he was a straight shooter. There's another thing, he could have been president.
- VH: Sure.
- AK: But he chose not to be.
- VH: He wouldn't stay there.
- AK: No, he didn't want that Toronto.
- VH: He actually quit.
- AK: He didn't want that Toronto environment.
- VH: No, he wouldn't do it.
- AK: It took a lot of guts you know, because that caviar taste in your mouth. But he didn't want any part of it.
- VH: Vern Taylor wanted it though. But Vern Taylor wasn't half the guy Don Mackenzie was.
- AK: Oh no.
- VH: Vern Taylor wouldn't give you a yes or no answer. With Mackenzie you asked him something and he'd say, what do you think, and okay, go ahead and I'll back you up. You never had to worry about it again.
- AK: That's right. No, because he'd given his word on it.
- VH: Dealing with the Saskatchewan socialism government down there, when I was down there and the Canadian Petroleum Association you know, there were a lot of goldarned devious dealings going on with that son-of-a-bitch. . .
- AK: Brocklebank???
- VH: Brocklebank wasn't so bad. It was Tommy Douglas and the assistant. Brock himself, he told us one time, he said, you know, I'm not so sure but this is a pretty good job. Tommy was the guy, he was a real socialist. He used to give us all kinds of . . .
- AK: Oh yes, and he was in the kind of position where he could really rap you. He was deputy minister and I remember going to see him when I was with the Board. You could just tell that there was . . .
- VH: Oh, ??? And with Imperial being in the Canadian Petroleum Association and all the other little companies, and bigger companies too, down there in Saskatchewan, but they had just as many votes in the association as the big companies. And they didn't always see eye to eye. So you know, I'd have to phone Mackenzie and say, I'm outvoted on this thing, there's nothing I can do about it in the association. He'd say, that's okay, go along with them. If you can't do anything about it.
- AK: Don was what, general manager in Calgary?
- VH: Yes.
- AK: Yes, he moved in after Armstrong moved away.
- VH: Yes, let's see, when did that exchange take place between Vern Taylor and Don Mackenzie, I forget.

#265 AK: Yes, because Vern went down a couple of times and then came back.

- VH: I was in Saskatchewan at the time, so it must have been in the 50's.
- AK: But you served on the CPA committee there did you, in Saskatchewan.
- VH: Yes, I was actually chairman the last year I was there. I've got a lifetime membership in the Canadian Petroleum Association.
- AK: That's good. Did you think that the CPA did, because of all the different views, like the Texaco's and the Gulf's and the Shell's, all kind of big daddies in their own right, did they really get a consensus at times or were they still kind of quarrelling among themselves.
- VH: I sat in on a meeting in Calgary when Don Mackenzie was chairman of the Calgary association. He was a master you know, all had different ideas what to do and Don would just sit and listen and talk a little now and again. After a couple of hours of everybody having 10 different opinions, Don Mackenzie would summarize it and say, I think the consensus of the group is this. And he would write it out and read it and say, this is what and everybody would nod their heads.
- AK: Sure, because they'd all had their say.
- VH: Yes, and Mackenzie had the ability to do that, without having any power to . . .
- AK: No, because he could have been outvoted. The chairman didn't necessarily have any . . .
- VH: Hell no. In Saskatchewan we had an awful time because of the government. They decided to put this road allowance tax back on you know. The CPA was just up in arms so we made an appointment with, it was Tommy Douglas himself, to see him to protest this. so we got over to his office. One of the guys there knew his secretary very well and they got us an appointment to see him. Told her what it was about and everything. So we walked in there and told Tommy Douglas that the Canadian Petroleum Association just couldn't go along with this, it was a terrible thing. He said, you fellows are a couple of days too late, it's already at the printers. That little Baptist bastard. I lived 2 doors from him the whole time I was in Regina. I got to know him. One time in the barber shop in the Saskatchewan Hotel, there was a barber there that owned the shop and he wasn't a socialist. But all 5 barbers he had working for him were real NDP or CCF. So one day I was in the chair and Tommy Douglas came in and sat in the next chair. One of the barbers was cutting Tommy Douglas's hair, I could hear him talking and he said, about a pension plan for barbers. Tommy Douglas turned to me and he said, you know, these barbers, they've been after me for years to get a pension plan for them. Maybe we could work something out if we could figure whether to put them in the category of the mentally retarded or . . . Gee, there was a silence in that barber shop. He lost 5 votes right there. Tommy got up and went out and you should have heard those guys. Why, that little Baptist preacher son-of-a-bitch, he's been telling us all these years he was going to get us a pension plan for barbers. He just said that for a joke you know.
- #338 AK: Yes, of course, it didn't go over very good.
- VH: Oh boy, talk about a lead balloon. And they'd all been voting CCF since 1943. We were in Wilcox when the CCF got in there. . .
- AK: Yes, and then you had to move out quick.
- VH: Yes. They were going to take the refinery and everything else over, you know.

AK: Yes, well, they took that one bus line over you know.

VH: Oh yes. They took everything over that was paying. And of course, the Co-op refinery, they would buy all the requirements??? from the Co-op refinery. Until the Co-op couldn't supply them and then they'd . . .

AK: So they had first . . .?

VH: Yes. God, they were terrible. But I got to know Father ??? Murray very well. When we moved up there, I went up a couple of weeks ahead of time, knowing we were moving a rig in there. . .

AK: There were 2 other stories that Vern told, one about Rod Morris's mother-in-law and the \$100 bribe and the other was the condom sandwich set up by Rod in the Dawes house, in which this driller bit into it. Then there was this short episode about Mike Woodhead who met Tip in the chicken house at Redwater. This is the end of this interview, which concluded about 6:00 p.m., August 17th and many thanks to Vern Hunter for his excellent interview. This is the end of this tape, thank you.