

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Harry Webster

INTERVIEWER: Susan Birley

DATE: September 1983

SB: It's September 1<sup>st</sup>, 1983, Susan Birley interviewing Harry Webster at his home in Calgary. Mr. Webster I wonder if you'd like to just tell us to begin with, where you were born and raised and a bit about your early background, were you born in Alberta?

HW: Yes, I was born in Morningside, Alberta which is just north of Lacombe and we lived there until 1915 and then moved to Wetaskiwin, at which time my father retired. In the meantime of a three year period we were in Wetaskiwin he was looking for a place to retire to and picked the Kootenay Valley, Creston, B.C. at which place I received most of my schooling.

SB: So you stayed in B.C. for how many years then?

HW: Well, in 1929 I went out to Vancouver to look for a job and got a job with B.C. Concrete and worked with them for 3 years at which time I came down with spinal arthritis and spent several months in the hospital. It was 2 years before I was able to work again and at that time I came back to Alberta and was looking for a job and happened to run into a fellow by the name of Shorty Mann of A. C. Mann Construction Co. I hit him up for a job and he told me to report to the hotel in Black Diamond the next morning and he put me to work, rig building. Shorty was in the construction business and at that time was building wooden derricks for Royalite and other companies.

SB: There weren't any steel derricks around at that time eh, it was all wooden derricks being used?

HW: Yes, it was all wooden derricks at that time until the summer of 1937, we built our first steel derrick.

SB: How did you go about building the derricks, where did you get the wood first of all?

HW: The lumber was mostly fir, 2" rough lumber. Various lengths which was ordered I imagine at the right lengths. Because the derricks at that time were a 26' base and they were about 136' high. So the bottom timbers had to be at least 26' long. The legs were all 14' timbers, 2x12 planks and the girths were also 2x12 and the braces were all 2x8.

SB: How would you choose a site, would they just kind of go by where there had been a seep or something like that?

HW: No, the locations were all chosen by the oil companies. I think at that time they all had to be drilled at a certain place on the quarter section or half section or whatever, it had to be in the centre of the section, what you call legal subdivision. That would all be arranged before we came on to the location. Then the lumber would be ordered and the big timbers for the foundation. The corner foundations were either built up by big timbers or a solid concrete block. The derrick was built on top of those.

#041 SB: How many people were usually employed building derricks?

HW: There was a crew of about 8 people. There was a foreman and then 4 derrick men and then 2 other men working on the floor. And Shorty was always there also, so we had a crew of 7 or 8 men all the time.

SB: And did it take very long to get a derrick up, how long would it take?

HW: We could put up a wooden derrick in about a week, cut out the timber and assemble it and build it in about a week. Then after we had the derrick built then the oil company would move in the drilling equipment and then we would complete the various buildings, such as the engine house and the pump house and the dog house and the boiler house and the walks and the pipe racks.

SB: Do you have any idea how much it cost to build one of those?

HW: I actually haven't, I wasn't associated with that part of the job. I would think in those days probably 25 or 30 thousand dollars to build a derrick.

SB: And how much were your wages at that time?

HW: I started out at \$6 a day. I think I was probably getting \$6.75 after a year or so, or within a few months probably I was getting \$6.75.

SB: Did they hire most of the other people from the communities around there or where did they come from?

HW: The drilling crews you mean?

SB: No, the people helping build the rigs?

HW: They were mostly local people at that time. In fact, I guess I was one of the few outsiders on that particular crew, I think they were all local men.

SB: And so you were building in Okotoks and Black Diamond and Turner Valley, the whole area?

HW: No, we didn't get as far as Okotoks, we were strictly in the Turner Valley field. And at that time mostly in the southern part because of the Turner Valley discovery, Turner Valley Royalties that is.

SB: So I guess there wasn't too much activity at that time, during the Depression or did you notice, was it sort of the major employer in that area or what were. . .?

HW: I think the discovery of this Turner Valley Royalties well started things booming. This is what started the industry going again there.

SB: And what year was that?

HW: I went out there in the late fall of 1936, probably November I think it was. As I recall, that was a very severe cold winter with a couple of really bad snowstorms. As I remember, one derrick we were in the process of building, we had it probably 2/3 of the way up and it wasn't properly guided I guess, to withstand a storm and we got a real blizzard over the next couple of days and it blew this derrick over so we had to start all over again.

SB: Did you take it all apart and use the same timber?

HW: Yes, we had to dismantle it. Wherever they weren't split we could use them over again.

#079 SB: So you worked all the way through the year, regardless of the weather or anything else?

HW: Oh yes.

SB: And where did you stay while you were working on the derrick?

HW: I lived at the Black Diamond Hotel which was a very good hotel at that time and they had a dining room connected with the hotel. So I had all my meals there and they put up a lunch and so on.

SB: Was Black Diamond very big then, what was the population?

HW: That would be pretty hard to say but I would think it would be 2,500 probably. Of course, Turner Valley was bigger.

SB: How long did you stay building rigs then?

HW: Until the spring of 1938 at which time I joined the drilling department with Royalite Oil Co. In between, when we were building derricks, whenever we were in between jobs or something Shorty Mann would usually try to get us a job with the Royalite Oil Co., either in the machine shop or the tool warehouse or what they used to call the bull gang just to keep up busy and to hold the crew together.

SB: Were you building the rigs mostly for Royalite or who were some of the companies that you were building for?

HW: Yes, we built all of Royalite's rigs and other companies as well, I can't remember the name of the oil companies but I remember there was one, Granville well. We built another one down in the south end of the province, north of Lundbreck for another oil company and I can't remember the name of that oil company.

SB: And they didn't use the derricks again, once they built them for one well did they?

HW: No, usually that lumber, it was fir lumber and when it dried out it was just so hard it was almost impossible to drive a nail into it. There were a couple of occasions where we did salvage enough lumber to build what we called a production derrick, which was quite a bit smaller than a drilling derrick.

SB: Do you know how many feet these derricks would be drilling down to?

HW: They were capable of drilling down to 14-15 thousand feet if they were properly constructed.

SB: So they were mostly for drilling and then they'd be put into production if something was found?

HW: Yes, and after that the derrick would be dismantled.

SB: How did they put them into production in those days?

HW: They drilled the well down to the top of the producing zone and then they would run production casing and cement that in there and then drill into the production zones after they had the casing all cemented in and headed up and under control.

SB: And the oil would just, there'd be enough pressure to make it come up the casing or...?

HW: After the well was drilled to its total depth, that is through the producing zone the drilling fluid would be displaced with an oil. Then there was sufficient pressure there to produce the well.

#119 SB: So you didn't have pumps or anything like that?

HW: Not in the Turner Valley field in the early stages. Possibly later on there were some pumps put on but there was sufficient gas pressure there to produce on their own, flowing wells.

SB: So when you started first working for Royalite, who hired you or who was the head of the operation at that time?

HW: Charlie Visser was the drilling superintendent and he was the one that asked me to come to work for them. He was a real good, well known man and just a real working man's friend, a tremendous person. Previous to that I had worked on shifts for them. Whenever we weren't busy or something he might get me to load on an odd shift, if they were short handed somewhere. That way I gained the necessary experience to work on the rigs.

SB: Did they have just one crew working on a rig at that time or would they use several shifts?

HW: There were 3 crews. They changed at 8:00 in the morning, 4:00 in the afternoon and midnight. Of course, the midnight shift was always called the graveyard shift.

SB: I should have asked you if you remember the names of the other people who worked building the wooden derricks with you?

HW: Yes, that might be interesting because I'm sure there's one or two of them still around. Bud Williams I think, is the only one that I know of. Let's see now, the foreman was Vern Perry who got killed, Christmas time 1937. Matt Matlock, Bud Williams, Bill McKellar, Freddy Stevens, Jack McC Calder and myself and of course, Shorty Mann.

SB: And did they all carry on in the oil business or did some of them go back to whatever they were doing before?

HW: Bud Williams was working on production for an oil company and last I heard he was down in Saskatchewan but I haven't seen him for so many years I can't remember the last time. Matt Matlock, I think he is long gone. Bill McKellar he was a local fellow down there, I think they were farming, farm boys and he probably stayed with the farm. Jack McC Calder went into construction here in Calgary, McC Calder Brothers I think it is. They build houses right here in Calgary, still does. Of course Shorty Mann is long gone. Fred Stevens, I don't know what happened to Freddy.

SB: So you yourself though went on and started with Royalite. What was the first job that you had with them?

HW: I worked as floor man. That was the first job on a drilling rig, you worked as floor man.

#162 SB: What were the duties of a floor man?

HW: It was the duty of the floor man to rack the pipe on making trips, pulling out of the hole. Also to keep the shale shovelled away and collect samples and wash up the floor of course, after a trip, that was one of the big things. Generally keep the rig in good shape, clean and so on.

SB: I guess you also got a feeling for how things were running, what the procedures were on the different parts of the rig too?

HW: Yes. And after you had worked for a time at that, as the opportunity came up you were promoted then to working either cathead or derrick man.

SB: And what were they, what was the cat head for instance?

HW: It was his responsibility to look after the motors and the equipment and making trips he would spin the pipe in. He was more or less in charge of the operation under the driller. Then the derrick man, in making trips he worked up in the derrick and unlatched the

elevators as the pipe was pulled out and stood the pipe back in the derrick. If it was running in the hole he would latch on to the pipe while the blocks were still in motion and hold the pipe as it was guided over to put it down to connect it to the other pipe that was sitting on the table. It was also his duty to look after the mud and the mud pumps.

SB: Did you have anybody that specialized, like say a mud man at that time or did that come later on?

HW: That came later on. I think probably the driller did have some recommendations from the office as to what the mud quality should be. Then it was up to the derrick man to follow up those instructions.

SB: So you were drilling with Royalite, mostly around Black Diamond and Turner Valley still?

HW: It wasn't that near to Black Diamond, it was mostly either north of Turner Valley town or south of Turner Valley, right down as far as Little Chicago and Little New York and as far north as the Sheep River.

SB: So do you remember, say on those early crews, some of the other people that you worked with?

HW: Yes, George Burke was probably the first driller that I worked for steady. Previous to that I had worked with Ivan Caloney and a few of those other old timers. When I was rig building I'd go out on spare shifts, probably when they were short handed. But George Burke was the first driller I worked for. then his brother Frank Burke, Dick Knights, Ivan Caloney, Ralph Bennett. They were the main ones, then in 1942 I got promoted as a driller and went out on exploration work on a drilling rig down north of Jenner. From then on we stayed on exploration work in the southern part of Alberta. In fact, all the way from north of Edmonton right down to the border, from about 1949. I worked as a driller and probably in about 1946 I was set up as a tool pusher down in the Taber area. As I say, we worked pretty well over the southern half of the province. Made some discoveries, around Taber and some small gas fields up in Kinsella and Minburn and that area.

#216 SB: Was that all for Royalite, what time did Royalite change over, I understand it was bought out at a certain point?

HW: I was working down in the Taber area until about the end of 1945, pardon me, in the Lethbridge area, we were drilling wells just south of Lethbridge. The 1<sup>st</sup> of January I was sent up to a rig at Minburn and I worked there and I think in the spring of 1946, Imperial Oil then took over their own operation of the exploration wells and of course, the men that were with Royalite in Turner Valley stayed with Royalite and the ones that were out on exploration work then went over to Imperial. We didn't lose any seniority or anything in the change. I stayed with Imperial then, until March 1949, at which time a friend of mine, Boyd McIntyre and I went into the drilling business on our own under the name McIntyre Webster Drilling Ltd. We bought a Cardwell trailer rig from Cardwell Manufacturing Co. through the salesman called Len Walker, who you'll probably run into at some point. We operated until about 1952, at which time we sold out to 3 oil companies by the name of British Empire, Canadian Fina Oil Ltd. and West Canadian Petroleums. We operated under their management until about 1958, at which time they

sold out to Seaman Engineering Ltd. In 1952 my partner Boyd retired and I stayed on as manager of the company, that is McIntyre Webster Drilling Ltd. After they sold out to Seaman Engineering I stayed with them till the spring of 1959 as a drilling superintendent. Shortly after that, during 1959 I think they bought out the Hightower Company and then of course, the rigs all went under the Hightower name. I retired from them in the end of May 1959, at which time I took 6 months off and took a holiday trip down east, to New York city and so on and the Maritimes and came back. At the time we had sold out the president of Canadian Fina, Mr. Netesku, had offered me a job to come to work for them. So in September '59 I moved to Calgary and went to work for Canadian Fina Oil Co.

- #269 SB: I wonder if we could just go back to working for Royalite in about 1936. Where was the office in the Turner Valley field located?
- HW: The Royalite office was located right in the town of Turner Valley. That was the operating headquarters, of course, the head office was in Calgary. At the time I went out there Sam Coltis was in charge of operations out there, I couldn't tell you just what his title was at that time but he was the head man there.
- SB: Charlie Visser, was he the next man down or was he just in charge of the field operations?
- HW: Charlie was a driller at the time I first went out there but he was later promoted to drilling superintendent or tool push. Floyd Walker was also there as drilling superintendent.
- SB: So did they work in other areas besides Turner Valley field, were they doing exploratory work outside of that area?
- HW: I think exploratory work started, possibly in the late 30's. We drilled a well in 1938 at Lethbridge, at which time George Burke was in charge.
- SB: So did he feel that it was worth staying around that area, drilling some more?
- HW: The well we drilled, I believe, turned out to be a very small producing well. It probably wasn't commercial at that time. There were several other wells drilled in the area without too much success. So I don't think the Lethbridge area was too interesting from the results we had.
- SB: You mentioned you drilled another one out at Cardston?
- HW: Yes. Vern Hunter was in charge of drilling a well down on the Blood Indian Reserve out at Cardston. I'm not really familiar with the results of that well. As far as I know they didn't do any further drilling in there so I'd have to assume that it was not that successful, or commercial.
- SB: When you were getting the machinery for the rigs, where would you usually get it from, when you first started?
- HW: The equipment that Royalite owned at that time, the original equipment, was all broken down into component parts, like the jack shaft and the drum shaft and the cathead shaft and in rigging up each one of those had to be assembled at the time. Later, in 1937, they started unitizing the draw works and all the various shafts were mounted on the framework and were permanently assembled, which made it a lot easier rigging up the equipment in preparing to drill.

#323 SB: And you worked for awhile in the Royalite machine shop?

HW: For a brief period I worked on one of the first draw works that they assembled or unitized. I think I was there just as a helper, helping ??? the chain guards and the guards over the drum and so on.

SB: Was safety a big problem in those days or how did you handle safety working on the job?

HW: As I recall, there were very few accidents in those days. I think the men that were employed were good workers, used to working around equipment, probably farm boys and they were just all around good working people. I can't recall seeing very many serious accidents. Myself in the 33 years that I worked in the oil business I never had a lost time accident myself.

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### Tape 1 Side 2

SB: So when, if you ever did have any accidents on the rig, were there hospitals around or what would the procedure be if you had someone injured?

HW: Yes, there was a hospital in Turner Valley town and 2 very good doctors in Black Diamond, Dr. Harry Lander and his brother Dave. Any thing that couldn't be handled or taken care of there, they were taken immediately right into Calgary hospitals.

SB: Did you have trouble with transportation, were there very good roads at that time, connecting the different town sites and connecting Calgary with that Turner Valley area?

HW: At that time the roads were mostly gravel roads and probably not in the best condition at any time, especially in the spring break-up time, they were inclined to get pretty muddy and so on. Of course, in the winter time they were badly drifted with snow at times.

SB: So did you have to shut things down when break-up occurred or did you just keep working right through?

HW: In the Turner Valley field we operated all year round. There was no paved roads out there at that time so there was not that much damage in moving equipment and so on.

SB: when Royalite was working around Turner Valley how many rigs did it have in operation?

HW: I would think the most we ever had would be about 8 rigs. With 5 men to a crew so that would be 15 men to a rig.

SB: But Royalite continued to explore a few other areas right up until Imperial took over its exploration activities. Did any of it occur as a result of seismic exploration or was it all just wildcat plays.

HW: No, I think it was probably covered by seismic prior to them picking a location in the various areas. I think that would be the prime reason for drilling in those areas.

SB: When do you remember the first seismic crews coming in?

HW: As I recall the first seismic crews would probably be in the late 30's, 1938, '39 probably.

SB: And I understand they were mostly Americans that worked on the seismic. Did you notice at that time if there were a lot of Americans in the field or on the crews?

HW: Actually I was never in contact with those seismic crews so I really couldn't say whether

- they were Americans or not. I did know one fellow that went out, Frank Hawkins. He was a local boy from the valley. Apart from that I couldn't really give you an answer to that.
- SB: Were there a lot of American people working for Royalite? I guess a lot of people had come up from the States because they had previous experience drilling, did that still hold true in the late 30's?
- HW: No, I think they were primarily Canadians working for Royalite at that time. No doubt there was the odd driller probably that had come up from the States. That is of the Royalite crews. I'm sure that other companies probably had some Americans working for them.
- SB: So they hired a lot of local people then, from right around the area?
- HW: Yes.
- #058 SB: So how did the outbreak of the war affect operations for Royalite?
- HW: It certainly increased the demand for oil. Royalite started drilling more exploration wells. The first well I went out was a well drilled at Jenner, just north of the Red Deer River. I think that it was a small producer but not a commercial well. However that did lead to other wells in that area and I'm sure that there's quite an oil development down there, oil and gas in that general area. At that same time, in 1942, Royalite increased their operations up at Norman Wells. Some of the crew that had been on the rig at Jenner was sent up there. That's how I come to be sent from Royalite out to this rig at Jenner.
- SB: Did you change the type of equipment that you had been using in exploration work from what you'd been using just in drilling and production work?
- HW: When they started exploration work these big derricks and equipment that was used in the Turner Valley was replaced by jackknife rigs and more portable equipment which was a benefit in moving the equipment and less time to rig it up. The steel derricks were already assembled in sections and it was just a matter of putting them together and raising the derrick with the draw works.
- SB: Did your job change that much when you went into exploration work or was it still basically the same operation?
- HW: It was basically the same operation, only that we were usually farther from supplies and we were on the move all the time. We had either a trailer or something like that to live in. In the small towns there was very little accommodation available for drilling crews so we had to more or less provide our own.
- SB: At that time I understand you were married were you?
- HW: Yes, I got married in 1941 and of course, lived in Black Diamond. It was the next spring, in 1942, that we went out on exploration work so that changed our home life considerably.
- SB: But you brought your wife with you to all the different locations you worked in?
- HW: Wherever we could find accommodation, yes. I think it would be about the latter part of 1942 that then we purchased our own little trailer and from then on, we lived wherever the rigs went. In the small towns.
- SB: When did the supply companies first make an appearance in the oilfield?
- HW: Of course, in Turner Valley there were several supply companies, National Supply and



Oilwell Supply and Rothland??? Supply and probably others. Some of their warehouses were stationed in Okotoks. But after exploration work started they expanded to all the different areas, like Edmonton and Redwater. As they went further north they were stationed all over the place, Grande Prairie and so on, Fort St. John.

SB: Can you remember who some of the people were, would you have been dealing with the salesmen when they came out to the rigs, or who would usually handle that part of it?

HW: Most of the purchasing of course, was done from the Royalite office, except for supplies like diesel fuel and oil and things like that, that we required on the rigs. Otherwise they were pretty well sent out from the head office. That is, ordered from the head office. If we required something on the rig then we either phoned it in to the Royalite office. Drilling bits, that was handled a little differently. They were delivered right to the rig by the various bit company salesmen.

#110 SB: Do you remember who some of these early salesmen were?

HW: 2 that come to mind is Red Myles, who worked for Reed Roller Bit Co. We used to call him Big Red and there was another fellow that worked for him, I can't remember his name, we used to call him Little Red. They were the 2 salesmen that I can recall right at this time.

SB: Just before Leduc came up Imperial had a long stretch of just dry holes. Did Royalite figure as part of that exploration work when they were trying all over the province?

HW: Yes, up until 1946 Royalite was involved in all the exploration wells for Imperial. They did they drilling for Imperial and there's no doubt about it, we drilled a good many dry holes before the discovery of Redwater and Leduc.

SB: Were you in the Redwater area when they made the first discovery, were you connected with that in any way?

HW: No, I wasn't connected with the discovery well. We drilled there later of course, after we had formed the McIntyre and Webster Drilling Co. We drilled for Royalite in that Redwater field.

SB: So it seems like Leduc kind of spurred on a lot of enthusiasm for the oilfield and exploration. I guess a lot of people started up their own companies soon after that and you were one of them. Could you just go into what made you decide to start off on your own?

HW: Certainly the discovery of oil in Leduc opened up opportunities for many people in all fields of the oil business. I was approached by a friend, Boyd McIntyre, to go into the drilling business and we formed the company McIntyre and Webster Drilling Co. This was in March 1949. We were awarded a 4 well contract with Royalite Oil Co. in the Redwater field.

SB: Did you have your own equipment at that time, what was it?

HW: At that time we bought a Cardwell drilling rig, a trailer rig, from a salesman by the name of Len Walker, who was Cardwell's representative at that time. The various other equipment, we bought some from Oilwell Supply, and our drill pipe and so on we bought from Royalite Oil Co.

SB: Did you have enough capital to start off or did you go to the bank for it?

HW: We were able to make arrangements with the bank to finance us and it worked out quite

successfully.

SB: So did you get any production out of. . .oh yes, you were drilling for Imperial then. Was there any reason for them not doing their own drilling or did they usually contract the drilling out?

HW: Royalite picked up one of these leases in Redwater field. Their own rigs I guess, at that time, were pretty well all tied up on drilling so they contracted the drilling out to several drilling contractors and we were fortunate to be one of them.

#157 SB: Did you carry on after that, did you find that it was successful being on your own?

HW: Yes, we were able to get contracts with other people, as well as Royalite and we did some drilling with Imperial Oil. In fact Imperial Oil kept us drilling steady there for about 2-3 years. Both in the Bon Accord and around Opal and around the Redwater district and also over in the Bruderheim area.

SB: Did you have crews working for you, were you involved working on the rigs as well?

HW: Yes. I lived right out at the rig and Boyd did also. We got a crew together that stayed with us for quite a few years.

SB: Who were some of the people on it, do you remember?

HW: Our drillers were Walter Clark and Lynn Donaldson, Harold McIntyre and Joe Mascovick. We had a couple of chaps, Rosack, and Freddie Alderman I think it was and Johnny Pitman. Of course, this is going back a long time, it's pretty hard to remember all those boys that worked for us. I still keep in contact with some of the, especially Lynn Donaldson and Harold McIntyre and Joe Mascovick.

SB: Did you get production out of the wells that you were drilling for Imperial in the field?

HW: Oh yes, most of the wells we drilled in the Redwater field and in the Bon Accord field were real good producing wells.

SB: So they would put them on production?

HW: Yes, we would keep the drilling rig there until the production casing had been run and the tubing had been run and the well brought into production. Then they would release the well and we would go on to the next well.

SB: So where did you go after working on the wells in Redwater?

HW: We moved from there back to a well north of Redwater and then we moved out to the Bon Accord area where we drilled several wells for Imperial Oil. In around the Morinville area and Magal???, in that general area.

SB: And were those good producers as well?

HW: The ones at Bon Accord were real good producing wells. The others were more or less exploratory wells. I think some discoveries were made and we also drilled some dry holes in that area.

#199 SB: So did you continue on with your partnership for quite awhile?

HW: We continued our partnership until September 1952 at which time 3 oil companies approached us to buy us out and we eventually came to terms on it and they took over the equipment. Boyd retired and I stayed on to manage the company until 1958.

SB: How many rigs did you have at the time that you sold it?

- HW: We had 2 rigs at that time. In 1951 we had ordered our second rig and had it operating.
- SB: Was it the same as the first one?
- HW: It was a larger rig, it was a different type of rig. The first one was a trailer rig with a telescoping derrick and it was all on wheels. The second one was what we call a jackknife rig. A capacity of 8,000' where the other one had a capacity of 5,000'.
- SB: So did you work in any other fields, or when you were managing it, what were the responsibilities then? Did things change that much under the new company?
- HW: No, it really didn't change any because we still had to get our own drilling contracts whenever they didn't have anything for us to drill. But they had considerable work of their own that we drilled. We moved up to Gordondale and drilled quite a few gas wells up there for Canadian Fina. West Canadian, they had wells to drill down in the Stettler area. Whenever they didn't have anything, of course, we had get contracts from other sources.
- SB: What about the 3 companies that bought the company from you, were they very large? Like say, British Empire, what was their background?
- HW: I'm not too sure at that point what their background was because they weren't a well known operator at that point. They did, I think develop into a fairly large company but they sold their share about a year later to the other 2 companies. So I really never got too well acquainted with anybody in that company.
- SB: What about West Canadian Petroleums?
- HW: They were a fairly large company and had fairly large land holdings, mineral rights. They were also in the coal mining operations down at Blairmore, under West Canadian Colliery I believe it was.
- SB: Who were the head people?
- HW: Mr. Rusee??? was the president of West Canadian Petroleums. At that time Paul Evans was the manager. Of course, with Canadian Fina, Mr. Netesku was the president of Canadian Fina and Ted Baw was the manager.
- #247 SB: Had any of them had experience in the oil business before, did they have any rigs of their own before they purchased your company?
- HW: No, they didn't have any drilling equipment at all.
- SB: Was Canadian Fina very well established at that time?
- HW: They moved in here, of course, Petrofina Brussels was the parent company and Canadian Fina was the subsidiary company. Mr. Netesku I believe, came over here about 1950 and started to acquire some acreages and so on, oil leases, and developed it into a real big major oil company.
- SB: So you eventually retired from that company, in what year, 1959 or something like that?
- HW: 1958. We sold the rigs to Seaman Engineering which later became Hightower and in September 1959 I moved to Calgary to go to work for a drilling superintendent for Canadian Fina.
- SB: How did you manage to get that position?
- HW: I guess seeing that I'd been working for Canadian Fina, West Canadian group they probably had an opening for me and as they knew me they probably thought I could fill

their bill there.

SB: Were there many other people in Canadian Fina at that time or what was the size of the office staff, the executive staff?

HW: At that time I would think there must have been probably 75 people involved in the Canadian Fina group. But then in 1960 they amalgamated or took over Western Leaseholds and Calvin Ltd. Of course, when they all came together that really enlarged the staff.

SB: And had they bought out West Canadian Petroleums as well or were they . . . ?

HW: No, they were a separate company. They only had a partnership in our drilling rigs together.

SB: Oh yes, I see.

HW: No, they were an individual oil company.

SB: So by 1959 did Fina have a lot of their own rigs besides those?

HW: No, they didn't have any other rigs, no, all contract drilling.

SB: So you resigned finally in 1959 and began working for Fina, what was your position then?

HW: Drilling superintendent.

#293 SB: And what did you do, supervise all 3 rigs?

HW: No, we didn't have any rigs at that time, we contracted all our drilling. As I mentioned January 1<sup>st</sup>, 1960, when Calvin and Western Leaseholds came over to Fina, Western Leaseholds drilling superintendent, who was Mr. Mac McGee was the senior man. But he was retiring in a year or two so I was assistant drilling superintendent till the point that he retired, which was supposed to be in 1962. But in 1962 I was requested to go on loan to the parent company, Petrofina Brussels, for an exploratory drilling program in South America, in Argentina. They requested me to go down there for a year, which I did. So I was in Argentina from June 1962, till the end of May 1963. But Mr. McGee had planned to retire in June of 1962 but when this deal came up he agreed to stay over another year until I came back.

SB: That must have been quite an experience working in South America.

HW: Well, it really was. Of course, I didn't know a word of Spanish when I went down there so it was difficult for me.

SB: Were the working conditions difficult?

HW: They weren't actually difficult apart from the language barrier. But we were fortunate to get an Italian drilling contractor to do our drilling down there. Of course, this was another complication for me because besides Spanish, then I was dealing with Italian. It was all Italian crews. Of course, our own people from Brussels were all French people so I was trying to deal with 3 separate languages. That was really the only difficulty involved.

End of tape.

Tape 2 Side 1

SB: September 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1983 and this is the 2<sup>nd</sup> interview with Harry Webster. Mr. Webster I

wonder if we could carry on with when you assigned to Argentina, how did you come by the assignment, who was responsible for sending you that way?

HW: The circumstances were a little bit unusual in that our drilling superintendent Mr. Mac McGee was retiring and I had been the assistant drilling superintendent and was going to replace him. It so happened that we were giving a retirement party for him at our house and all the arrangements had been made. In the meantime I had gone on a tour down to the Howard Hughes bit factory in Houston. They had sent their Hughes plane up to pick up about a dozen of us in the oil industry here in Calgary and took us down there for 2 or 3 days and gave us a tour through the plant and their other manufacturing services. On my return Mr. McGee phoned me and said that he'd been requested to stay for another year provided I would go to Argentina for a year. So it turned out that the retirement party was a going away party for myself. Anyway, it turned out that our president, Mr. Netesku, was over in Brussels for the annual meeting and it came up that this drilling partnership had been formed in Buenos Aires in Argentina. A group of businessmen in Buenos Aires had formed a partnership and pooled their resources and bought a mineral lease from the Argentine government. But they were merchants and doctors and lawyers and businessmen and so on and they had no knowledge of the oil business. So they had entered into an operating agreement with Petrofina Brussels. At that time Petrofina Brussels didn't have any drilling personnel that they could send down there so it was requested that they get some help from Canada. It turned out that Mr. McGee had agreed to stay for another year, it left me free to go down there so I was asked if I would go. Which I eventually said that I would go. If there was anyway I could help the company I'd be glad to go.

#037 SB: What was the name of the group that these businessmen formed.

HW: It was run under CADEPISA and that stands for Company Argentina for the Development of Petroleum and Industry in South America.

SB: So what was your first duty when you decided to take on the assignment?

HW: My first duty really, was to learn all the government regulations down there and then make up an order for everything that would be required for the drilling of 12 wells. All this material had to be ordered in from the States or Europe. After that was completed then we had to survey the lease, to best evaluate the lease which was called El Vajay. It was 5 miles square. We surveyed it to completely cover the evaluation of that lease.

SB: Had anybody else drilled there previously?

HW: Oh yes, the government had already drilled 3 wells on that lease. And they did have 2 good producing wells which had eventually turned to water, which we thought was due to poor cement jobs and we did recomplete them and make wells out of them.

SB: So were you able to get any information about the area from any previous reports?

HW: Oh yes, we were able to go to the government offices and get the reports on these wells, which was a big help to us.

SB: Did you have any troubles with translations or did you learn to speak the language?

HW: No, that was one of my main problems, was the language. I didn't know a word of Spanish when I went down there. Over the months I did pick up a lot of Spanish but our

biggest problem was of course, our own office people were all from Brussels and they spoke French. We eventually hired an Italian contractor who had just finished drilling a 500 well contract for the government. So we did have the best of their crews and the best of their equipment so we were real happy about that.

SB: And then you had the Italian language to have to understand as well I guess?

HW: Yes, there was only one on the Italian crews that spoke any English at all and that was very little. They did speak some French but the other problem of course, was half the crews had to nationals, which of course was Spanish language. So I had 3 languages to contend with and I really didn't master any one of them but I did learn enough to get by on anyway.

SB: Were there any major problems arose as a result of the 4 different language groups?

HW: Not really. One thing, our manager, who was Joe Necase??? from Brussels, they hired an interpreter for me. He was a well educated boy but he didn't know anything about the oil business. So we did run into some complications in that respect, in that there are certain words in the Spanish language that can be taken in several ways, depending on the interpretation of it. But anyway, it all worked out pretty good. I was on the job all the time. We had a labour crew of 6 men who did all the labour work, like hauling the cement and the mud materials and laying the water pipelines and so on. but through this interpreter and me working with him, we got along pretty good.

#080 SB: Did you have any problems getting the supplies that you ordered for the wells?

HW: Yes, that was a real problem. We ordered all these supplies in June, some from the States and some from Europe, but shortly after that there was a transportation strike in Argentina and all the telegraph, post offices, telephones and all communications was just shut right down. So it was about into September before the strike was settled again so we had a long wait there before there was very much accomplished.

SB: Where did you live while you were there?

HW: I lived in a little town about 1,200 miles south of Buenos Aries, a town called Commodore Arivadavia, that was our headquarters for the drilling program. Our operations were south of that, southwest about 125 miles, maybe 80 miles south along the coast and about maybe 45-50 miles inland, towards the Andes mountains.

SB: What were the living conditions like, was it fairly modern or were you living in almost traditional style?

HW: At the beginning I lived in a hotel that was fairly modern. Of course, their food was considerably different to ours but that's something you might expect in a foreign country. But later I moved into the better hotel downtown, now I've forgotten the name of it but anyway it was a real modern hotel. Living accommodations there were real good.

SB: So you eventually were able to start drilling. How many wells did you drill there?

HW: Our contract was to drill 12 wells, to evaluate this lease. We still didn't have our supplies by the 1<sup>st</sup> of November but due to circumstances between another oil company that was drilling for the government down there, we were able to get supplies from them with the arrangement that we would replace them when ours came in. So this enabled us to get started drilling early in November. I think we sputted our first well, I think it was about

the 5<sup>th</sup> of November.

SB: So were you able to proceed fairly smoothly?

HW: Yes, from there on things went real well. Our biggest problem of course, was water. The Rio Deciada River, which runs through that district dries up in their summer, which is our winter months here. That was really the only supply of water. So we discussed this problem with a farmer there that owned land on the lease. He said there was only one possibility of getting a supply of water and that was to find a patch of what they called water grass. Which is a round bladed grass and the roots will go right down to a water supply. So he volunteered to help us try and locate some of this water grass and we spent several hours wandering over the lease looking for this. This was down on the river valley level. We eventually did find 2 patches of this grass so we decided it was worth a gamble to start digging and find out so we did haul a cat in. After getting down about 6' into the gravelly soil we did hit a good strong flow of water. In fact, before we knew it the cat was in about a foot of water before he could get out. So we decided to try it, test it with a water pump. So the next day I took out a water pump and we hooked it up and pumped water for, I think it was about 8 hours steady, a 2" stream. We didn't lower the water level one bit so we decided that the farmer was right. To be on the safe side, to guarantee our supply of water, we decided to dig the other hole too, over by the other patch, which was about 2 or 3 hundred yards away. We dug it in the opposite direction, crossways to what we dug the first one and again, we hit a good supply of water. So that was one of our main problems solved right there.

#139 SB: When you had your equipment brought in, how was it transported, was it shipped down to you from the States.

HW: Yes, the equipment all came in by boat and arrived at port of Desciada, which was about another 300 miles south of Commodore Arivadavia. All our supplies then was unloaded there and transported by truck out to the lease.

SB: So you didn't have to build any roads or anything to get out there did you?

HW: No, we just used the country roads that were already there.

SB: So were any of the wells successful?

HW: Yes, we had fairly good success, about 50% success. I think we had 5 fairly good oil wells and one good gas well out of the 12 wells.

SB: Were they able to put it into production and market it right away, or how would they get it out of there?

HW: There was a good demand for oil down there and it was all trucked to one of the government batteries. Later I think the gas well was eventually hooked up to a pipeline that was built right from that field into Buenos Aries. It was about a 1,200 mile pipeline.

SB: What about the local people, did you hire many people from the area around the well?

HW: For our own personal work the only people we had was this labour crew of 6 men and the foreman. Otherwise the contractors had his own drilling crew. They had a camp which was about 15 miles away. They had been drilling for the government, with several rigs. In fact, they just finished a 500 well contract so they had a large camp established. The men worked 12 hour shifts and came out by bus to our lease.

SB: Then with the local people, did you have any trouble training them or were they fairly quick to learn?

HW: The labour crew? They took fairly close supervision all right, but this foreman worked with them all the time and he and I could converse well in English so there was really no problems there. They were a good working crew and we got along good. There's one thing down there, a person if he's hired for a truck driver, that's all he will do. He will not help to load or he will not help to unload. So you have to have a crew there when a truckload of pipe comes in, you have to have a crew there to unload it. Otherwise the truck driver will just sit in the cab until somebody will help.

#180 SB: That's not because of any unions eh, it's just their attitude?

HW: It's their attitude. They come out all dressed up of course, and their cabs are just spotless inside. But they do have very strong unions down there. In fact, one night, just before midnight, somebody came out to the rig to say that the crews were to go on strike. Of course, it was only the national ones that belonged to the unions. The Italians, they had no part in the local unions. So that meant that all the national boys quit work at midnight. In order to get organized for this strike I had them pull out of the hole before midnight and then we had to reorganize. But for a matter of a couple of weeks there, we had a lot of men from the camp, there was cooks and there was truck drivers and several other people working on the rigs. I went out and did my share also. But eventually they got the strike settled and things got back to normal.

SB: Is there anything that you remember as being outstanding, your experience in South America?

HW: No, I think that our biggest problem there was lost circulation of course, on the surface. It was a very gravelly soil down for about 600' and that was our main problem. Once we got our surface pipe cemented in things went fairly smooth.

SB: Would you like to go back to South America if you had the chance?

HW: I would like to go back for another visit because I did make some real good friends there and we still keep in contact with one of the families. 2 of the families that owned land on this lease were Scottish descent. Their parents had come out in the late 1800's and settled in there, bringing in a small flock of sheep and enough lumber to build a small house and get established. The farms had stayed in the family so it was the second generation. They also spoke English, which was fortunate for me so I spent many pleasant visits with them.

SB: So you eventually were able to return to Canada, did you make it within the year?

HW: Yes. We completed our 12<sup>th</sup> well. Of course, I had been away from my family long enough at that point that I was ready to come home. So the manager down there would have liked me to stay for another month or so to help complete, rework 2 of these wells that the government had previously drilled. We did work over 2 of them and one was successful and the other one, they were still in the process of cementing off the water flow when I left.

#224 SB: So when you returned to Canada did you go into retirement again?

HW: No, I had 2 or 3 weeks holiday coming to me, which I took and then went right back to work with the company and Mr. McGee, he left within 2 or 3 weeks after I returned. So I



was back in full swing again.

SB: And what were you involved with when you came back?

HW: I think our first job probably was a well that we'd drilled up at Gordondale. He'd already programmed it and this was to be drilled with gas into the producing zone. We drilled down to the top of the producing zone and ran our casing, using regular circulation. Then we switched over to drilling into the producing zone with gas. This was to eliminate any water erosion from the drilling fluids.

SB: Was it a successful well?

HW: As I recall no, I don't think it was. I think we got water anyway.

SB: Were there many wells up in that area?

HW: Yes, we had drilled previously drilled, a lot of wells when we were operating under the McIntyre and Webster Drilling Co. They were reasonably good wells, they weren't big wells but they were good economical wells.

SB: Then did you have any other. . . well, what other wells did you work on next?

HW: Well, I think that we drilled a well or two in the Wildcat Hills area, north and west of Cochrane. Also we were drilling producing wells, development wells in the Windfall field, out northwest of Whitecourt.

SB: So as drilling superintendent would you be mostly in the office in Calgary or would you spend much time in the field?

HW: That time was spent mostly in the office, programming the wells and cost estimating and dealing with the partners and assigning the different services to that well.

SB: What would be involved in programming?

HW: A detailed program is what kind of casing you're going to use and what kind of a mud program and what depth you're going to drill to, what zones you have to require coring for the geological department, and drill stem tests.

#267 SB: So are you working with the geologists on the programs?

HW: Yes, they write up a program of what their requirements are, giving you the different formation depths and formation pressures and so on. Then you would have to put the well out for contract drilling, have to put out a bid letter for that and receive the bids from the various contractors. Of course, then you had to deal with the government on getting a license to drill, then there is lease work to be done, to prepare the lease for the drilling rig. It was usually in heavy timber country or sometimes in muskeg country too, which created difficulties.

SB: Then the next stage, before you went to drill the well, would you be hiring the crew. No, I guess the drilling contractors would handle it on from there on would they?

HW: Yes. The drilling contractor had their own crews and they provided their own camps or transportation. We provided a drilling supervisor on the lease from the time the well was started until it was completed.

SB: Who were some of the drilling contractors that you hired while you were working for Canadian Fina?

HW: General Petroleums, Commonwealth, Hightower, Cantex. We used pretty near all of them. It was put out on a bid basis and normally we would choose the lowest bidder

providing the equipment was comparable.

SB: And did the drillers, was the driller the top man on the rig, the one that was responsible for all the operations?

HW: The tool pusher was responsible. He normally lived on the lease all the time, 24 hours a day. He was in charge of the complete operation. Of course, our drilling supervisor, he was out there too.

SB: Who was your drilling supervisor at that time?

HW: We had 3 drilling supervisors. One was Jim Ancole, Harold McIntyre, Ted Rhoda, Larry Chalmers and Al Henderson.

#311 SB: Did the tool pushes have a lot of, say autonomy at that time, were they still kind of making the major decisions on a rig or was it mostly your responsibility or the drilling supervisor?

HW: We set our a program. If it was on a footage contract, it was up to the contractor to comply with our requirements. But any testing or coring or anything like that was done on a day work basis, under our drilling supervisors supervision.

SB: Are there any tool pushers that you can remember that were real characters or stand out in your mind?

HW: Not really. They were usually pretty good men and well qualified for their work.

SB: So you continued working as a drilling superintendent for how many years after that?

HW: Until Dec. 31<sup>st</sup>, 1969. At which time I took early retirement.

SB: I guess by that time you'd worked in most of the major fields around Alberta?

HW: Yes, I think we had worked in every area in Alberta. And also lived in many of the smaller towns in Alberta. And also northern B.C.

End of tape.

## Tape 2 Side 2

SB: So when you were working around Alberta, could you go right back to the early days and just mention some of the towns that you worked in while you were drilling?

HW: I worked in Turner Valley oilfield until the spring of 1942 and then went out on exploration work, under the supervision of Royalite who were drilling Imperial Oil exploration wells. Some of the towns we worked in were Jenner, Tilley, Rolling Hills, Vauxhall, Taber, Bow Island, Lethbridge. Then in 1946 I was transferred up to Franks 1 rig, which was working in the Minburn field east of Edmonton. We had a camp set up at Minburn for that winter and then we moved down to Irma, later to Two Hills, Tofield, Morinville, Camrose and also Provost. Then later, after we'd formed our own company we drilled in the Redwater field, Leduc and Gordondale in northern Alberta and Fort St. John, Dawson Creek and Boundary Lake in B.C.

SB: So you got to know quite a few people I imagine while you were moving around. Would you like to mention the names of some of the people that you started with in Turner Valley?

HW: My neighbour was Sam Sewell, who is now retired of course, and a long time resident of

the Calgary area. George Burke I think was one of my first drillers that I worked with. There's Bob Stanhope and also George Burke's brother Frank, and Dick Knights, Ivan Caloney, Ralph Bennett, John Fisher. Those are a few of the drillers that I worked for in the Turner Valley field.

- #044 SB: How about later on, you spent quite a bit of time working for Imperial on exploration and lived in several of the towns for quite a few years, do you want to mention some of the people that you worked with quite a lot?
- HW: The oil company people or the local residents?
- SB: Yes. Well, I guess both, I guess first of all the oil company people.
- HW: At that time in 1946 Imperial Oil took over their own exploration work. We were under the supervision of Charlie Visser who was the drilling superintendent and Tip Maroney. They were the 2 main ones that I dealt with.
- SB: Then what about all the other people that were living in the towns or working on the rigs?
- HW: We didn't actually get to know too many of the local residents of the smaller towns as we were never in a town too long, probably a month or so. We would get to know probably the Imperial Oil dealer and maybe the lumber yard manager and one of the bigger store keepers or something like that. Depending where our camp was located, we would get to know some of the neighbours there.
- SB: I understand you worked with Mel Pope at one point, or several times I guess. Where were the different fields that you knew him in?
- HW: Mel Pope and I went out the same day, from Turner Valley to Jenner. We worked together for a good many years, mostly in the southern Alberta areas and also up in the Minburn district.
- SB: I understand you stayed quite a while in Taber was it, did you get to know quite a few people there?
- HW: Not really, not of the local people. Of course, we had our own drilling crews which we pretty well stayed together. Actually we didn't get to know too many of the local people.
- SB: Who were some of the people on your drilling crews that you hung around with at that time?
- HW: Well, there was the Pope's, Mary and Mel Pope of course and Gerry and Dot Gingras??? and Lilly and Fred Gould and George and Helen Kirkpatrick. And the Bennetts and Al and Vicky Smith and Frank Hunter and George and Irene Fife and Roland and Mary Kane were a few of them.
- SB: And you ran across Aubrey Kerr at one point too, was that in the same town?
- HW: Yes, my first recollection of Aubrey was at Taber. He was the geologist for that district and he had an office in Taber and supervised the geological work on the wells from there. That would be about 1944 probably, '45, somewhere in there.
- SB: So when you used to get together with all the other people, did you. . .I guess you had to create your own entertainment a lot of them time. Did you have musical people or what would you usually. . .?
- HW: Not too many. We usually had the local country dances and as I recall, we did quite a bit of bowling. Of course, I was always interested in fishing and hunting in the fall, duck

hunting and goose hunting and antelope hunting and so on.

SB: So I guess everyone was a pretty close group then, when they were moved around so much, they valued the friendships that they had?

HW: Yes, we certainly did. We still regard them as some of our best friends.

#089 SB: I guess when you retired from the company you didn't stay retired very long did you. Mr. Netesku would keep in touch with you, and I imagine he held you in high esteem since he recommended you for several jobs afterwards.

HW: He probably did. As was demonstrated by, the year after I retired, I was requested to join a geological survey party on Spitsbergen. This came about in my last year with the company, the last few months actually. They had asked me to program the drilling of a well on Spitsbergen and assist them in choosing the contractor and the equipment that would be required and so on. In fact, they sent an engineer by the name of Marcel Castellain over here and we worked together for probably a couple months on this program. That was the last major program that I did for the company. That was in 1969. But they had a little trouble with regulations with the Norwegian government in trying to get permission to do any drilling on Spitsbergen. This carried on into the next year, 1970, at which time they sent a geological survey party to Spitsbergen and requested me to go with them in choosing drilling sites and so on. At the time we were on a holiday out in the Okanagan Valley and I was contacted there. We came back to Calgary and left, I think it was in about the middle of August. We were immediately booked to go to Oslo where we were to meet some more of the people from Brussels who were going up there. The geological survey party had already been out for 2 or 3 weeks, using an icebreaker boat called the Norvarg and 2 helicopters for doing their geological survey work. They operated from the boat, I guess I should call it a ship. So Clarice and I both went to Oslo, she was going to have a little holiday there while I was out on the crew. After I arrived in Oslo about half a dozen other people came up from Brussels to join us and we flew to ??? which is on the north end of the island and boarded a passenger boat for Spitsbergen, which was going to Longyearbien, which is about halfway up the Spitsbergen Island on the west side. We met this crew up there with the Norvarg and boarded the Norvarg and then headed south down into Hornsen Bay, which was their main area of interest. After spending 2 or 3 days there we eventually did pick a location that was accessible only helicopter.

SB: Had there been any geological reports before that that you could go by?

HW: Not to my knowledge.

SB: So you were mostly just looking at the surface geology?

HW: Right. There had been no previous drilling done on there.

SB: I guess seismic wasn't really practical?

HW: No. It's about 3/4 covered by glacier so . . .

SB: It would be a little difficult.

HW: Yes. We did pick a location right up on the top of a mountain I guess you would call it, possibly about 2,200'. Picked a location there but it was never drilled.

SB: I should have asked, this was the Geological Survey of Canada was it?

HW: No, their own Petrofina SA geological party.

#142 SB: So were you prepared for the weather up there or did you have to get any special equipment to be able to go up into the field?

HW: Yes before we left Oslo we were all equipped with survival equipment, supplied with winter clothing right down to underwear and socks and overshoes and parka coats and sweaters and so on. We each had our own clothing. This was necessary because once we left the boat by helicopter then we were on our own and on one occasion in particular a fog moved in which is really dense over there. And it just moved in on very short notice and we were unable to get back to the boat. So we were out there for several hours before the fog cleared up and we were able to continue. This was the reason for having emergency rations and being equipped with winter clothing.

SB: So how did the drilling proceed up there?

HW: After we covered Spitsbergen we moved over to another island called Edgeoya, which would be on the east side of Spitsbergen. We spent considerable time there. As the survey party had already been there they had eliminated certain locations and were interested in one or two. We picked one because of the accessibility for drilling location. We staked that and that was drilled the following year. Then from Edgeoya we moved over to another island called Hopen Island, which would be south and possibly a little bit east and we staked 2 locations on that island.

SB: What type of drilling equipment were they using?

HW: It was necessary to have a helicopter rig, which the components right now are small enough it can be handled by a helicopter not over 4,000 lb. packages. This was loaded in Montreal on Petrofina's own boat which they purchased for this particular job and taken over there and unloaded by helicopters. Also hovercraft, which was used in hauling the equipment from the boat over to the shore and eventually up to the location.

SB: So you didn't have any trouble getting anything together, the weather didn't pose any more problems did it?

HW: Yes, the weather was a big factor in that operation, because of the fog. It would move in just very rapidly and because you're so close to the ice pack there fog comes in very sudden.

SB: And where did the people stay when they were working on, say the survey party or any other part of the party.

HW: We lived on the boat. They had good accommodations and a good dining room of course and so on. This was an ice breaker boat so it was well equipped for pretty well any conditions.

#188 SB: And did they have any success in drilling the wells?

HW: I think they did. It was more or less on what we call a tight hole basis. I think they did find gas but probably not in commercial quantities because after the 2 wells were drilled, one on Edgeoya and one on Hopen, I don't believe there was any further drilling operations in that area. So I would tend to believe there was nothing commercial there.

SB: And how long did the entire operation last, while you were involved with it?

HW: I was only over there less than a month, covering the 3 islands and then returning to ????. When we left Hopen Island there was a storm moving in which of course the captain knew about by his radio connections. He was very anxious to get started for home so we did pack things up in a hurry and we ran into a real storm. I imagine there was 30' waves or better. I know at one time the waves were coming right over the deck.

SB: Were there any animals or anything like that in that area?

HW: We didn't see any polar bears but we did see some of the northern reindeer. Mind you before we landed on Hopen Island, which is only a small island about 1/4-1/2 mile wide at the most and about 6 miles long, we did cover that with a helicopter before landing to check for polar bears. But not seeing any we felt much safer. But there was a radio station on Hopen Island, a weather station and we did visit them.

SB: Were there any native people that travelled into that area hunting or anything?

HW: I think probably there would be some Norwegian people go up there for the polar bear hunting? In fact, after I returned I read a story in the Readers Digest called the Year Long Day. This was a chap, a Norwegian boy that had gone up there for the winter hunting. They go in by boat late in the fall and have to stay there till the boat comes back the next year. So it was a very interesting story and the interest to me was that we saw his cabin on Hornsen Bay. I was real interested in that.

SB: I was wondering, with Canadian Fina, when did you first meet Mr. Terhan Netesku?

HW: I think in the spring of 1952, when they became interested in buying our company.

#233 SB: What was the reason that they chose your company, did it have a good track record?

HW: I think we had a pretty good record at that point. And we were small, we only had one rig at that time. Pardon me, we had ordered our second rig, that's right. They probably thought that it would be of benefit to them in drilling some of their locations.

SB: So you kept in fairly. . . was he centred in the Calgary office?

HW: Yes. He actually came out here from Brussels and formed Canadian Fina Oil Company, in about 1950 or '51.

SB: So when the first company was first formed, from that time it must have grown quite considerably over the period that you worked for it did it?

HW: Yes, they were an especially active company. I think they were in the top 12 major oil companies.

SB: So were they involved in other areas besides Alberta?

HW: Oh yes, they had leases in Saskatchewan, fairly large holdings in Saskatchewan and Alberta and B.C.

SB: What were some of the fields that they worked in in Saskatchewan?

HW: Estevan and Weyburn and Oxbow probably were the main areas.

SB: Did you go up in the Arctic at any other time?

HW: Only on one occasion did I ever work in the Arctic and that was in preparation, in making plans to go to Spitsbergen, I was requested to go up there and investigate the possibility of moving drilling equipment from the Arctic, by Hercules plane. I worked up there with Pacific Western for about a week on one of their big Hercules planes. We worked 12 hour

shifts, moving drilling equipment from Fort Resolute and Bathurst Island over to Melville Island and also down to Aklavik, Inuvik and back up to Resolute again.

SB: Was there any other oil activity going on up there when you were there at that time?

HW: Oh yes. At that particular time there was a blow-out on King Christian Island, which took several months to kill.

#276 SB: Whose company was that under?

HW: I think it was under. . . Hightower were the operators and I'm not sure which oil companies were involved in the partnership.

SB: And I should have asked who the drilling contractor was when you did the operation on Spitsbergen Island?

HW: After they had cleared all the necessary permits with the Norwegian government, then we put out bids for a drilling contractor and eventually chose Commonwealth Drilling Co. who supplied a portable helicopter rig, with all accessory equipment. This was all loaded by train and shipped to Montreal and loaded on a boat which had been purchased by Petrofina for this particular operation. All the necessary drilling supplies and casing and fuel etc. was loaded on this boat and taken directly to the Edgeoya location.

SB: Had they had experience drilling in Arctic conditions before or were they just the best bid or the lowest bid? What were the reasons for choosing them?

HW: They had experience, I believe they were in partnership with Hightower Drilling in the Arctic operations. I think it was considered they had the best available crews and equipment for that particular job.

SB: So over the years, do you see that there's been much of a change in the oilfield in terms of the type of people that are working in it or anything like that?

HW: I think there's been a definite change in the personnel on the rigs. In the old days they were pretty hardy people and all good hard working people. I think now it's got down to people that probably have not been used to working at hard work or working around equipment. This is the new people of course, after they've worked for a few years why, of course, they get the experience and become qualified people. But there was such a boom in the oil business and of course, it required a lot of new personnel and we did get a lot of people that were not really qualified to be on the rigs. But there was a shortage of men and we had to train them.

#327 SB: Are there any periods that you enjoyed more than others, any periods or places that you enjoyed working?

HW: Never having seen a derrick when I came to Turner Valley, I probably look back on my experience there as the most interesting. They were deep holes and it probably took anywhere from 6 months to a year to drill a hole. After I went out on exploration things moved much faster and they moved around a lot but I still look back on Turner Valley as the main point of my experience I guess.

SB: Were the field conditions much different then? I heard people say that there would be a few feet of ice on the rig floor and you know, collecting samples you'd have to pick them up off the rig floor and things like that. Did you remember anything like that?

HW: No, I'm not quite that bad I don't think. In real extreme cold weather which we did get, we got up to in the 50 below zero Fahrenheit temperatures, probably in January and February. And it was very difficult to keep the derrick floor clean but in most instances we had boilers for heat and we did have hot water and so on and steam which we could keep the floor clean. As far as catching samples, they were usually taken off the shale shaker and washed. So I can't recall any problem there.

SB: Well, thanks.