

**Narrator:** Dennis Hunter (DH)

**Company Affiliations:** Manitoba Pool Elevators

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**Summary:** Retired general manager of Manitoba Pool Elevators' terminal operations Dennis Hunter discusses his ascent through the company during his career. He describes his first position as a country elevator manager and shares the major challenges of the role, like working with old equipment, performing manual labour, getting car allocations and orders from the Canadian Wheat Board, and competing with other companies. He recounts the period of consolidation of country elevators as well as the beginning of inland terminal construction. He then discusses his move to head office working in the car allocation division before becoming a district then regional manager of country operations with added responsibility of liaising with the board of directors. Hunter discusses his change to terminal elevator management and shares his first experiences in Thunder Bay. He recalls major changes to the terminals to increase efficiency, like computerization and automation, and he shares his positive impressions of the terminal's work ethic and cooperation with competitors. He shares vivid memories of Thunder Bay, like labour strikes, Christmas parties, and visits with senior management. He describes his interactions and relationships with various organizations, like the grain handlers' union, Grain Transportation Agency, Lake Shippers Clearance Association, and Canadian Grain Commission. Other topics discussed include the closure of Pool 3, the amalgamation of MPE and Alberta Wheat Pool into Agricore, health and safety concerns, and the increase of cleaning grain on the Prairies.

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Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: This is Nancy Perozzo interviewing Dennis Hunter in Winnipeg on November 21, 2012. Dennis I would just like you to say your name and who you work for.

DH: Okay. My name is Dennis Hunter. I started with Manitoba Pool Elevators in 1967 in the country division, and I worked there through the ranks to the regional manager. In 1985, I finally got the position of terminal manager of the terminal operations in '85. In 1992, I got the position general manager of the company but still the responsibility of Thunder Bay.

NP: Good. A good, long career. How many years? Do the math for me.

DH: 31 years.

NP: 31 years. Did you have a farm background?

DH: No, I didn't. My dad managed the Beaver Lumber, but I am fortunate, I guess. I've always spent all my time with my friends on the farm. I like the farm.

NP: So how did you get involved?

DH: I used to work for British American Oil, and the guy running the grain elevator asked me one time if I'd be interested in going to country elevators. So I started out there and proceeded through the ranks for 31 years.

NP: And where was that?

DH: In Carman, Manitoba.

NP: So that's where you grew up?

DH: I grew up in Carman, yes.

NP: Did your family farm?

DH: No. No. There is no farming history. But as a kid, I don't know why, a friend of mine, he wanted to come to town, and I wanted to go to the country, but I enjoyed the country. I helped people in my spare time farm, too. I enjoyed going out and driving the tractor and that so, and dealing with the farmers as a whole, too.

NP: So what was your first job then with the company?

DH: Grain elevator. Running a grain elevator.

NP: So straight off the street into running a grain elevator?

DH: I trained first. I spent a year training how to run a grain elevator. Then I run a grain elevator. That's buying grain from the farmers and delivering it to the boxcars, which eventually got to Thunder Bay. That's where I started. I spent a year there training. Then I spent six years doing that before I came into head office.

NP: Now I know this is asking a lot to go back to the early days, but can you describe what it was like to run an elevator? What the challenges were, what the highlights were for you? What the surprises might have been?

DH: The surprises to me, because I never run one before and where I grew up, there was electricity. One of the big things when I started training an elevator, not realizing that the electricity was one thing, but they were still operated by diesel and gas engines, which was quite an operation compared to pressing a button. You had to start this big, one lung diesel up and then operate it there. It was quite a change. Some of the equipment, we had no dust equipment. I enjoyed it but it was a pretty tough slug in the olden days because we had very little equipment and flat bottom bins, where there's no hopper bins. A lot of these old elevators, you know, a lot of it was manual labour.

NP: For those listening to this who wouldn't know the difference between a flat-bottom and a hopper bin, can you describe why the flat bottom was so much more problematic?

DH: Well, a hopper-bottom bin would be you just open and slide and the grain would run out. A flat-bottom bin, it's flat and you had to shovel it out. There was no hopper to it. You had to push it out the hole, and the other one just slid out. and it was--. They put up annexes in the wartime. They called them over-guard annexes, and they were just for temporary storage, for flat-bottom bins, but that temporary storage lasted 50 years. [Laughs]

I guess in the terminals, we had big steel tanks at Pool 3, and that would be the closest thing. They were flat bins and you had to get an auger to run around the outside to bring them to the centre, so they had some of it down there but not as much as we had in some of these old elevators.

NP: What did you like and dislike about that job?

DH: I actually didn't--. They were the same dirty jobs as say where we did, we run an elevator in those days, we used to get some help once in a while, but normally you do everything. You went down and cleaned the boot, cleaned the grain, weighed the grain, inspected the grain, and you did all the fixing. It was pretty well you're a one-man operation. Where the terminals the difference is you got a maintenance crew and electricians and that. We had that, but if we were busy, they'd have to send them out for miles to get there. So a lot of this work we had to improvise ourselves. We didn't know, and we weren't unionized in those days so there was no picking and choosing. You had to do it all.

NP: Physical labour, which isn't always a bad thing. So what did you like best about running a country elevator?

DH: Really, it was interesting. I liked the grading part of it. I liked the interaction with the farmers. You know, I dealt with them before when I worked for an oil company in the country, but I really enjoyed purchasing grain from the farmers. You learned the farm supply chemicals, fertilizers. It was never a boring time. There's always fertilizer time, and then it was chemical time, and then grain time.

One of the biggest problems we had in the olden days was a very poor car-allocation system. I can't remember the years, but you likely have that, before they straightened out this allocation system, it was the biggest [inaudible]. In our day, a case of beer would get you boxcars because if you had an order and if there was 30 cars in the train if you could get the conductor to like you the best or give him a little bit, you would get extra cars. You got to play little games to do this, where it wasn't really fair. When I started out with a small elevator, I may get more cars than the guy in the big one because if I knew the guy, and we had a local board of the elevator gave me a few dollars to treat them. You played games with it. And of course, the games got to be kind of fun, too, trying to get more cars than the other guy.

NP: But everybody else would be doing the same thing wouldn't they?

DH: Oh sure, but some of them wouldn't, you know. It depends. You yell at a trainman, and you may not see him for a while either. So you had to be pretty diplomatic in those days. The biggest thing we had--. And that was fighting with the railroads and the Wheat Board.

NP: What kind of fights would you have with the Wheat Board?

DH: Oh, not getting enough orders. They were the ones, eventually when they did straighten it out, they would put on—say every line was a block, say I was block 61—they'd put 50 cars on the block. Well, it wasn't enough cars on the block, and of course when you get allocated, you may get two cars where you needed more, But the Wheat Board had control of what block you put those cars in. You might not get any. Maybe that's not the kind of grains they want. Later on, I have to do that job, like allocate the cars, so there was certain types of grain that was required, and if I didn't have that, I didn't get the cars.

NP: So as you move through the system, you realise what other people were up against.

DH: Yeah, I realize. In fact, it ended up one of the first jobs I had in office was dealing with the Canadian Wheat Board, and we had lots of difference of opinion, but I respected theirs. You could understand what they were doing then. But when you're a country elevator guy, farmers all mad because the elevator's full, and you can't take their grain in. You're getting static, so you got to move it down the line someplace. Blame it on somebody else. [Laughs]

NP: Carman was where your elevator was?

DH: No. That's where I was supposed to start, just outside of Carman, but the manager there got sick that I was supposed to work for, so they moved me to a small little siding called Cardale. It's gone now, just a little town but a big elevator. Lots of little towns had big elevator points. It was a big, big elevator point.

NP: Were there competing elevators there? Or were you the only one?

DH: Not there. I was the only one at that place. Other ones I competed with. That place there was only one elevator. Some elevators had opposition, some didn't have any, depends where you were situated. A number of years ago we bought out Federal Grain. I guess maybe it's in your books. When we bought Federal Grain out, they were our competitor in many places and a lot of places we didn't need both elevators so we closed one, or one manager would run both elevators. I would say the Pool elevator manager got to run them, maybe the Federal guy did, he may have be better. So that took away a lot of opposition at that time because they were a big company. I think when I started, we had like 445 elevators.

NP: And when you left?

DH: Oh, like--. I don't know. There may have been 100 when I left, and I don't know there's not very many left now, when you go through the elevator. Some guy years ago told us in a meeting at one time there's only going to be 15 elevators in western Canada. He was doing some study and I thought they were going to hang him, but he's awful close. [Laughs]

NP: So that was within the Manitoba Pool system?

DH: No, not Manitoba, but I can't remember the person in Manitoba. They're talking about the future of elevators. Well, he said, one time there's not that many years. And people thought that he was nuts. Well, he's not far out, because the big elevators they've got throughout Manitoba, there's not many left. But they're big and they're efficient and that had to go.

I know in my job one of the hardest parts when I was in the country end of it was trying to close the elevators. It got personal with the farmers, like that's my elevator, so that was really hard. I had to go to many meetings. I wasn't very well-liked because there's four elevators and you guys have to make your mind up which one was going to stay, because it's only going to be one of them. Well, if some of them didn't make their decision, then there ended up being none. They had to go way down the road to do it. Everywhere else, if you had to make a decision, then you didn't have many friends in that area for the rest of your life. [Laughs]

NP: When you were working in the country, you didn't have a competitor right beside you.

DH: No, but that didn't matter.

NP: What was the competition like?

DH: It was tough. To me, Manitoba goes back in the later years. Manitoba's a tough competitor. The farmers here, they have their permit book. They carry it with them. And if you can't give it to them, it's not hard for these big trucks to go down the road. And today a lot of people go right on the farm and buy it. They go to the farmer, and they tell them, "I'll give you this for your grain, and I'll pick it right up in the farm." So it really doesn't matter where. Your opposition is all over the place because we used to grain from our southwest corner had pretty good grain and we used to truck it all the way down to just outside of Winnipeg and mix it all up there just like the terminal does.

When I took over, we tried to do a little more like the terminals. The terminal would bring their grain in, and one of the ways they make money and that's blending grades. That's really what kept Pool going. Put money back into the terminals and some of the country is their blending opportunities. In the old days, you had elevators all over the place it just wouldn't work. You couldn't get a big truck in some of the small elevators anyways.

NP: Because it was a Pool elevator and the whole history of the development of Pool elevators, even though farmers weren't silly about it, was there loyalty?

DH: Oh yes. There was people that, even right today, even with the Canadian Wheat Board, the biggest percentage of Wheat Board people were Pool Elevators' people. We had really loyal people. But the problem we ended up with, the larger farmers weren't that loyal. The larger farmers, they figure we're bigger, and they could demand better deals, and we couldn't do it. It didn't hurt them down the road. Where the smaller farmer, he wasn't equipped to market his own grain. He needed the Pool to look after him.

Everybody's equal in the Pool. Where the larger farmers, they told me, "Not everybody's equal. I got 10,000 acres, and the guys got 3,000 acres." That's the way it is. You can't compete, then down the road you go. That happened a lot. Even out in the area I am, my son-in-law married a very large farmer area out there, and it don't matter. They can pretty well dictate, and they got big trucks, and they can haul it down to the States themselves. They do their own marketing. It's very unfortunate they did away with the Wheat Board, but some of these guys could care less.

NP: I want you to think back to those six years that you were--. Any stories that stick in your mind about your six years?

DH: In the grain?

NP: Out in the small elevator.

DH: It was an interesting six years. I moved, and I liked the job, and I did pretty well in it. I think I moved eight times in ten years, eh, trying to get bigger elevators, going from a smaller one. As soon as another one come up in those days, you put your name in for a bigger one and a bigger one. I met lots of people, lots of good people. I was fortunate. My wife said one of my detriments, I loved playing baseball and hockey, and I was pretty good at both sports. So wherever I went, the farmers always enjoyed sports, so I used to get away with murder in an elevator with sports. In fact, one place, if there was a ballgame on and I was playing, I was just told to shut the elevator down. In those country days, those were good times, actually, not for my wife. She's raising three kids with me not home quite a bit of the time. But the people were really good. Wherever I went I suppose they were all good people. I met them all over Manitoba. So that's some of the better parts I had.

I started in Cardale, and I was there for not quite a year training, and then I went to a little siting called Chillon and it was two elevators and two diesel engines, one in each operator. I spent three years there, and then I went to a place called Brookdale, and I

spent about two and half years there. Then they built one of the first high-throughputs in Manitoba just out of town there, great big one for this super, move these hopper cars and all that—one of the big ones first started anyway.

NP: And where was that?

DH: Just outside of Brookdale. It was a new siding, and it was on a main line. They didn't care where. They weren't going to build them in town. They needed lots of trackage, so they built this great, big, humungous elevator. So I spent a year going around, visiting all the farmers to get them all to haul there. I think I bought grain for two months there, and then they moved me into head office. So I never got much chance to operate it. But that time that was the [inaudible] elevator. There was just two or three of them being built at that time. That was back in the early '60s.

I guess they built some of these new, high-throughput elevators. With the speed, they were the start of what's happening today, where there's 50 car spots, and you load a car in ten or fifteen minutes where before it would take you an hour so. They were getting geared up for the change. Basically, I enjoyed the grain industry.

NP: And then you moved.

DH: Then I moved into Winnipeg. I spent a year in Winnipeg in car allocations, working with the Canadian Wheat Board. That's when I learnt--. Now I would get the car, and I would allocate to the managers, and the managers would get mad at me because they didn't get enough cars. It was reversal to what I used to be, so I learnt the other side of the fence now.

I spent a year in head office in the car allocations system. At that time, when I spent a year in Winnipeg, one of the jobs I did have, I guess they were training me for the future, is I spent time, a week or so, in Thunder Bay. They sent me down there before my time. I never ever realised I'd be running Thunder Bay at that time. But I spent a week there, and that's when Johnny Mallon was the manager down there. Ken Clifton, I think, would run the Pool elevator. He was under Mallon, but Kenny Clifton was the guy that toured me around at that time. I was getting all ready I guess to someday to take my present position of general manager.

NP: Asking you to think back to when you had your first experience down in Thunder Bay. Any thoughts about--.

DH: That first experience that was when somebody, I guess, you might say the guys wouldn't hurt if I told on them anyway. One of the comical things is that it ended up the first meeting we had was in the Airline Hotel down there with all the staff.



This Fred Beaudé that I took over, he was still the manager. At that time, I went there the staff had a little bit too much to drink. Anyway, he introduced me, but that's when I thought, "Holy hell, this is crazy." They're arguing amongst themselves. Then one of the guys got into nepotism. One guys going to haul the lazy electricians. Anyway, it was kind of comical. It was just a little bit too much liquor. After, when I took over, I mean the manager was running it down there and that was the guy named Ron Trewin. He run it for me when I first started down there. And [inaudible] and some of these guys were slowly sliding under the table. It was always funny. The guy with the nepotism, he had most of his family working at the terminal. [Laughs]

Anyways, that was how I got introduced to Thunder Bay. I knew Thunder Bay before I went down there. One thing I always knew that it was a great work ethic down there. All the time I was there, I take them down to Thunder Bay, and I tried to get guys from Thunder Bay to come up here to meetings and tour the facilities up here because they had great work ethic down there. That was second to none. I think a lot of people, our management, especially our board of directors, they knew that. All the time I run the terminals, maybe a handful of problems. It was well-run operations and not just ours. I knew all the other terminal managers well. I knew a lot of the staff. It was a well-run operation down there.

When I moved down there, our terminal was a little behind times. When I took it over, it needed a fair amount of money spent on it. The guy I took over, Fred, was a good manager, but near the end he didn't want to spend any money, because when you spend money, it goes against your operation. You'd rather be making money. Sometimes you got to spend money. Of course, when I was taking over--. The staff down there, there was some key things I did for them, and they did some for me. One of the biggest things is put in one pass cleaning. I don't know if they ever talked about that when you were down there—the major things to our terminal, Mallons.

When I went down there, it was just taking too long to handle grain. We had two big terminals, but we could only take grain in on two shifts, which was 16 hours a day, but it would take us three shifts to clean it. We're always behind. You just couldn't get ahead. Sometimes we'd get plugged up that we couldn't keep up to our cleaning. I remember meeting with the staff and some of the guys like the Mallons and some of the end guys there, we decided to speed the operation up and put in what we call one-pass cleaning, where you could clean grain as fast as you could dump it. So you could actually clean grain. [...*audio skips*]

When they changed this car allocation system, and I forget—Dino Burella would know, he worked for the Grain Transportation Authority down there, and he would explain it a lot better than I do—but when you changed this car allocation system what you got in Thunder Bay is the amount of grain you generated in the country. If the country elevators for us generated 24 percent, we would get 24 percent of the shipments to Thunder Bay.

When I went down there, the country was doing really well, and we were generating more grain than we could handle. I knew if we didn't pick the handle up, that we were going to lose it. Somebody else was going to handle our grain, because you just can't operate having cars backed up. They wouldn't allow it. So that's when we decided to start spending some money and upgrade the terminals. So we upgraded both of them, and then we could go 24 hours a day, cleaning grain and unloading.

That was one of the biggest to them was computerizing a lot of our terminals. If you can imagine guys working up in the weigh scales and up on top of the elevator with their coveralls on and dust and everything else. We'd tell them they're going to automate the place, and you're going to run it from downstairs in the office, in a suit if you like. Well, I mean the look in their face.

It took a while, and they were really good. I think of all the guys we put through the computer course to run this. We only had one guy that couldn't do it, and it wasn't because we weren't going to give them lots of time. It just overwhelmed him. and so he had to go back in a position. That was scary for the boys, when they started out there, and of course, I said to them when we started this computerization down there, once we start computerizing this place down here, you guys are going to drive me crazy wanting more because once you start--. [...*audio skips*] And more and more. I knew that would happen, but that was a good problem to have.

They were always on my case wanting more computerization down there. But they did a really good job because I can remember they were all scared of it. They couldn't see the grain upstairs when it was doing it. They were just there. We used to load 40 cars, and then when they started all ready to go, we were down to 26. I can remember Gerry Speer going crazy because we're going the wrong way. I said, "Just give them time. It's going to take a little bit." Then we got up to 50 or 60 cars, but the scary part of the terminals--. I remember that for the staff. There was some younger guys out, didn't have a problem with it, but when you make major changes like that, it was quite an exciting time.

I remember then Herbie, we were doing things. He was having lots of problems, but every time you automate something, you lose some staff. We had good staff, and that was always a--. [...*audio skips*] Coin. That was a hard job he had because everybody was trying to do it because wages was a big part of our operation down there. It was a big part. They earned their money, but it was a costly part of the operation. So we had to make some major changes to cut some staff down.

Attrition didn't quite keep up with it. I know that not long before I left, we had a major retirement, which helped quite a bit to keep up with it. Our company was pretty fair with the staff down there, and I think 99 percent took it happily, their early retirement, because one thing I never liked to lose was old people. All my senior staff, they could all stay until they were 85 if they wanted because they were good employees. You had them, and I'd say to them, "You don't have to take the retirement." There was a lot of them.

NP: What did you like about the older staff?

DH: They were there. You never had to worry about not doing their job properly. They were always there. A lot of the young guys were good, but we had some really young guys that weren't as dependable as some of the senior guys. Some of them were, they'd just as soon have more holidays than they would work. But the senior guys, I never, never had to worry about them fellas. Usually in a lot of the cases, the senior guys always looked at the young guys [inaudible]. You never had to worry. The senior guys would look after them. We had a few instances, but they were good staff.

One of the hard things I always remember down there was the big thing when Russia quit taking all our grain. That really hurt us. All the grain, I don't know what percentage we dropped. There wasn't enough business. We never had enough grain for the one terminal. We kept trying to operate two, but it got so costly to operate two. And every year we'd fight with the city on taxes because they wouldn't give us any break on the taxes. If we don't use the terminal-- I never wanted to see it tore down. Every year we'd take the board of directors down there and meet with them. Oh yeah, they were always going to give us a break.

Finally, I told them. I said, "If you're not going to do nothing, I'm going to get rid of it." And I guess they didn't believe me because we were paying \$1.5 million in taxes every year, and we weren't putting any grain through it, and they wouldn't give us a break at all. So eventually, had to get rid of it. That was a good operating terminal. To replace it today would cost you hundreds of millions of dollars.

NP: Which terminal was that?

DH: That was Terminal 3, and it was the largest, too. But Pool 1 is a good terminal. We automated most of it, and it was a good, efficient terminal. But Pool 3 had those—I don't know if they're still there or not—those big tanks. They would hold a lot of grain. We used to just use them for storage, so if we were stuck, we could always store grain out in them because we used to store a lot of malting barley for the malting company next door, Canada Malt. We used to rent them one of those tanks just strictly for malting barley. Then if they need malting barley, we were able to move it across without cars. We could just spout it across. So it helped them out quite a bit.

We did pretty good there. It was a large and good terminal, too. We spent a fair amount of money fixing them up, automating them, painting them. That was hard when the grain business went down because I don't know what's left or not. There was 17 or 19 when I went down there, and now I don't know what's left, five or six?

NP: Eight operating.

DH: Eight operating, eh? It's kind of sad to see it like that.

NP: I'm going to back you right up because we sort of speeded ahead in your career. But if we--. I had asked you the question about what your first impressions were of Thunder Bay. What were your first impressions of terminal elevators, or had you been familiar with them?

DH: I was familiar. Like I said, I spent a week or so down there. One of the first things I did in the terminals, when I went down there--. Grain elevator terminals, it's a lot similar but mega times bigger than the terminal because we have cleaners in the country. We had things but we didn't have the reclaim systems they had. So one of the first things, like I was always--. I loved speeding things up, mechanical wise, so the first thing I did was got down there and spent time going through all the terminals and trying to get enough knowledge so that the guys couldn't BS me too much. So I had a pretty good idea. When they wanted stuff, I wanted to get familiar with it. They were good. They would show me what we were and where we should be going. They helped me a lot on speeding up the cleaning equipment. They impressed me with the staff.

The grain would come in there. We had top graders, cleaners, and reclaim system. I guess father to son down there, they all were careful. They all wanted to make money. I don't know what it was in that group down there, but they were taught to blend grains, and clean grains, and don't waste any, and reclaim, and make pellets and everything. That grain was to be used. And there was nothing left over. They were very efficient on the earnings down there. That's for merchandising grain inside the terminal. They did an excellent job. One of the best ones was the last there, if you interviewed him, Billy Mallon. Billy was one of the best merchandisers of grain that I've ever received.

NP: What do you mean merchandising grain?

DH: Let's say you want to make it easy, take two threes and make a one out of it. Each grain is graded because of something wrong with that grain, but if something else doesn't have that problem but something different, you can put the two together and maybe you can take a two and a three and make a two out of it.

NP: So blending.

DH: Blending grain. Yes, I call it merchandising. Blending is the easiest way, yeah. All the terminals there. Another thing I really noticed in the country—you talked opposition—Grain Growers. They were opposition, down the road whether next door to you or wherever they were, they were opposition here.

NP: They're competitors.

DH: Competitor. Everybody's trying to cut everybody's throat. I was no different, but down there, there was no advantage to that. If you were loading a vessel and halfway through the vessel you were having trouble making that grade, and it looked like from a two it's going to go to a three, because somehow you didn't have enough grain or something happened, you could call up any of those terminal managers down there and ask them if you could move the boat over and help me out. He would move it over, and he would help you contain that grade, because once that grade left, you took a major loss. He would help you out and they always reciprocated. Those managers down there, they wanted their share of cars. I have been to many meetings when those guys yell at each other, but they always got along after. There was meetings and then there was pleasure. But they always helped one another, so that nobody took a major loss down there. And I never did.

NP: I don't want to lose sight of how your career progressed, and we've sort of moved ahead to your later years, but how long were you in charge of terminals?

DH: I was 1985 till when I retired in '98.

NP: So did that cooperation last throughout that time, or did things get--.

DH: No, always had that cooperation down there. I know that we had some hard times, but I always, even if we were negotiating, I never liked to see them--. Never really was cocky about win or lose in negotiations. I never liked that word: "We won the negotiations," or "We lost the negotiation." I figured they should be treated fairly. And one time they weren't treated fairly, and I wasn't very happy.

I forget, maybe the second negotiations, but I'll never forget they got one percent each year, for three years. I didn't think that was fair. But that's what the guy gave them. The government guy come in there and settled the strike. He'd give it to them. I always thought that they weren't treated fairly, and the next time the guy come in and he give them what they want, but that wasn't what they wanted.

NP: What do you mean?

DH: I think he wanted more. This guy, I forget his name, I should remember because I wasn't too happy with him, but he come in and give the guys more money. He figured they wanted money. They wanted work guarantee, and he couldn't figure that out

himself. We tried to explain it to him. No—money. So they gave them money. Well, I said, he'd give money. We just found ways to cut costs because we couldn't afford it. Where they should've been doing the opposite way. So I figured a couple of times that it was a win. It wasn't a win. They win, lose. That year, I didn't think that was fair either. The guy telling them, I forget the guy from Ottawa, but he was telling me this is what they need. Well, he didn't read them very good.

It was always unfortunate. Many times, I was through three negotiations. Every one of them took a vote one in the three-quarter years. It wasn't good for morale. I hated-- I was down in Thunder Bay one time when they get the orders to lock him out. So I ended up, I said to the staff down there, "I'll do it." I said, "Not a very nice job but I said I'd go to it." Put the sign up. I hate locking people out.

NP: So how did that lockout--? Was John Mallon still the--?

DH: No. Ron Trewin was there at that time. The first one I think it was locked out was the second time. But the first one we went on strike. I can't remember now the years, but it was the-- Maybe it was the first one. But when we were out on strike, it was quite a while. But I'll never forget, when our employees came back off the strike—one thing I'll always be proud of them—when they came back off strike, they came back to work. They weren't mad. They weren't going to sabotage or anything else. They came back to work. I can remember they worked 79 days straight, seven days a week for 79 days. Today I wish I had my records because every record in Thunder Bay was broken.

I think it took six weeks or before freeze-up to catch up. But it was the most grains put through that terminal in the shortest period of time ever because the cars were there, the vessels were sitting there, and everybody went to work. I can remember some of our management, they worked 79 days straight, yes, without a day off. I'll never forget that. and not mad! Some had to make some money to make it back. They were good, I can tell you that. In fact, I think we'd like to start to giving guys days off. But the trouble is in Thunder Bay, if you're going to get one shift off, you start giving the next one off too because if they're going to work and make money, "I'm not taking time off." So it was hard getting days off, but they were efficient.

NP: When you went to the head office you were working in, what was the next step up?

DH: When I went in there that's when I went back out in the country and I looked after-- That time we had, say, two-hundred elevators and there was ten district managers running these two hundred elevators. I had twenty-five in an area roughly surrounding Selkirk out here. That's what I did for five years. What I mean by running, you had to go and check that they were doing a good job. You had audit the elevators—weigh all the grain up, and then they sold farm supplies and other commodities. You had to make sure that they were-- You were kind of overseeing the operations.

NP: What was that title?

DH: What was I? Region manager. Pardon me, I should back up there. That was district manager, that job.

NP: Okay.

DH: And I spent five years doing that.

NP: What did you like about that job and what didn't you like?

DH: I liked the freedom of the job. You're your own boss. Sometimes when you're your own boss, you work harder than you would there. I had no hours. Up in the elevator, I may have to do it on the weekend and stuff like that. I liked the job. Like I said, I had some good elevator managers and some I wish I never saw and doing that. I still had interaction. I had to go to meetings all the time. Farmers—they're all local elevators—so they'd have meetings, and they'd want me to attend because they weren't getting enough cars, or I was not treating the manager very good, or stuff like that. So I really looked after those 15 elevators plus the farmers, too. I had to kind of keep them updated in that area, too.

NP: You said some of the managers were good and some of the managers were not. What would you define as the good managers, and what were the problem ones?

DH: A good manager just basically the way they run Thunder Bay. They would buy their grain properly. They would blend it properly and ship it and make sure the farmers were treated fairly and keep up with their cars and their car shipments and make sure they don't lose money, like shipping cars with two and they're coming back three, stuff like that, just keep on. Some of the managers, they could care less. They were poor graders and then the hours, and they never shipped grain very well.

NP: Did you ever have to lay anybody off or let somebody go?

DH: Oh yes, not many, but a few I had to do. The ones that did go, it wasn't hard. You try to give them as many chances as you want, and when it's time to go they--. In fact I had one man, a helper one time, that always liked to tell that story. I tried and tried to keep him going. Finally, I asked him, "Is there any reason I shouldn't let you go?" "Nope," he said. "If my dad didn't make me work here, I'd have quit long ago." Now, over all the years, maybe ten or so, I guess you'd have to do. But normally I'm a pretty fair person. If I have to let them go, then nobody's feeling sorry for them.

NP: Something had come to mind and then flitted out again. Anyway, so that was five years.

DH: Then I went into--. That was out in the country. I run that in the middle of an area in the country. I was in the country. I lived in Selkirk doing that, but then I went back into head office. Now I think they'd convert me to a region manager. What that was, there was the same 200 elevators in Manitoba, but now I looked after the district managers. The job I had was now I reported to a region manager. I ended up overseeing a certain area from district manager who had to report to me. I also had, for a year, they call them service centres, and they were the 15 largest points we have in Manitoba. I also had to look after those, but I would drive to those.

I had to get out of the office, so I would have to drive. One of them was up in Minitonas, Swan River, another was Gretna, another was way in the southwest corner. So they're all over the country. So I used to have to leave the office for a long time to tour the country. I did that for five years. All these jobs are your budgets. One of the major things in the elevators is budget all these elevators. When you got looking after the region, the district manager when I was out in the country, I put a budget into the region manager. He would get his area and sort it out. Then there's only so many million dollars to go out. Who's going to get what. Then at that time the terminal guy down there, he would want most of it, so then I'd be fighting with the terminal manager.

The hardest part's needing so much stuff and only so much money to go around. Then of course the terminal budget in later on years when I run the terminal, I could have very well refused the terminal because the terminal usually justified how they can make the money because they need stuff. They do such a volume. Anything they do, the return investment was a pretty good turnaround. With the country, it really wasn't. So I guess as you go through the years the country really didn't make much money. It was always the terminal that subsidised the country.

NP: Was there anything different about regional manager versus division manager? The amount that you had to travel, but was it essentially the same thing but different people?

DH: Bigger people and then you had to deal with the board of directors.

NP: Ah, tell me about that.

DH: That was—and it's likely not public knowledge, too—the board of directors authorized the final budget. Of course, every board of directors looked after a certain area. There was somebody from the Selkirk area. Some were there. You can imagine eight board of directors all wanting this for their area. Now you got in-fighting with the board of directors. “You pat my back, and I got your back.” Some of the decisions were not very smart. We had to do that.



The terminal, to elaborate a little bit on the budget, on the terminal side at the same time, I'd have to put a budget in the terminals, and then the directors, every year, they would go and tour the terminals and look to see where we're going to spend their money and how you're going to make it. I guess that's where we had some pretty good staff down there, because the board used to tell me that I already talked to them, told them that when they come down, they had them rehearsed when it was time. The Mallons were always good at that, taking the directors and showing them how we could make money doing this. They kind of thought maybe we were overboard at times. You had to do quite a bit to get your share of the budget.

NP: So were you--?

DH: Oh yeah. I never went short. One of the things you always asked twice as much as you were going to get and whine when they'd take away half. But you'd be happy with the half you got. Everybody was playing games.

The only thing you knew, when I was region manager, I'd already been through it. So the district manager couldn't BS me because I'd already been through that system, eh? If you go through the system--. And lots of stuff they need, and you can justify it. But lots of stuff can wait another year. I was always a challenge. Thunder Bay, we were always treated pretty fairly in Thunder Bay. You could always show a return investment down there, and I say, one of the things I just going through my stuff, one of the saddest parts is looking--. [...*audio skips*] Six, '96 when we built it. When did we close? '99.

NP: Where was that office?

DH: Right on by the terminal, right at the end of Pool 1—beautiful office. We'd build a new office. It was nice. We spent a lot of money on that place for three years.

NP: During your time with Manitoba Pool, who was at the head of it?

DH: The president?

NP: Yeah.

DH: It started out with Jim Deveson and then--. Was Jim the first? Yeah, Jim Deveson was the first, I think. Jim Deveson—and oh, Jesus, it'll come to me—Fraser from Hamiota.

NP: Who was there at the--?

DH: Bill Strath and then Charlie Swanson. Every month we have a retirement luncheon. We used to get quite a number of people. In fact, we could run the grain business from it. We get a couple of CEOs, one president now, and we'd get a lot of our managers, our top staff, and chief financial officers. Everybody shows up. Charlie still comes. He lives out of Neepawa.

One of the things I always laugh with Charlie Swanson, when I was an elevator man at Brookdale, he was one of my customers. But he had nothing to do, president or anything, to do with the Pool except haul your grain, and he ended up being the president. He was the president, and a good president. Many times he'd been to Thunder Bay. Our management staff liked going to Thunder Bay. It was a good operation. It was good for the Christmas party to bring all the big shots from Winnipeg, and they could let their hair down in Thunder Bay. They used to have a great time.

NP: Sort of like the Las Vegas of the North. What happens in Thunder Bay--.

DH and NP: Stays in Thunder Bay. [Laughing]

DH: That's right. We used to bring all our wives. My wife liked it down there. Like I used to take her down there. That was part of her job, I always used to say, to entertain the ladies when she was down there. They were always a lot of fun down there. A lot of characters down in Thunder Bay. We used to have a great Christmas party down there. We had 450, 500 people in those days. We had lots of the grain staff there. One of the highlights always was having Frank Mazur there because Frank was a great guy. We've always invited him to our Christmas party, and Herbie would come along at the end, too, when he took over.

NP: Frank Mazur was there when you first started negotiating?

DH: You betcha!

NP: And what--.

DH: I knew Frank well.

NP: He's not around to--.

DH: I enjoyed dealing with Frank. I took a few goes. He took some at me, too. He was always fair. I said they should put a monument for all you got for the terminals—to kid him—put a monument for you down there in Thunder Bay. Of course he come back, “Yeah, so the birds can shit on me,” he said. [Laughs] He was good for the employees, and he was fair. I always had the attitude when I was dealing with negotiations: If I agree with it, then I’m going to go by it, and if I don’t, then I’ll let them know. If I feel bad enough, then maybe I’d have to strike over it. But I won’t BS it. If I don’t agree with it, I don’t want to go with it, and if I do, then we better all live up to it. Because down there sometimes you’d agree to something and some companies wouldn’t live up to the agreement, and that wasn’t fair, taking away the negotiations. I always try to separate that. That’s a necessity. They ask for too much, and we ask for too little. I see hockey getting that way. Pretty soon it’s going to all come together. Sometimes it’s going to take a few months.

But Frank was always fair. He had gone through the system. Frank expected out of his employees. There was cases that they should’ve got there and then, Frank, he would back us up. If you documented properly and--. We had a guy caught smoking there one time and we were going to suspend him, and I’ll never forget the guy, he went to our union guy in the terminal. He wanted agreements. They said, “You better go see Frank on the smoking.” Well, Frank told him, “You better get back there because if you’re caught smoking in there--. No wonder they didn’t fire you right there. Smoking in the terminal, it’s going to hurt all of the employees, not just you.” He used common sense. A lot of it was common sense.

And then we broke the rules once and a while—shifts and overtime sometime and you’re supposed to phone everybody for the seniority. A couple times we didn’t have time. Well, we abused it, and we got raked over the coals. But he was fair.

I had a problem one time when they were on strike we had to do some cement work. If we didn’t get the cement work done for freeze-up, then we weren’t going to be able to use that terminal all winter and then we wouldn’t be able to bring a ship back. I went to Frank. He gave me a stern lecture first, and then he talked to the protective committee and let me cross the picket line. So I thought that was fair, you know? Certain things. If you have common sense, you would do it. Some guys tried to go a little extra when they were on strike, and he could also rip you pretty hard, too.

NP: What does that mean?

DH: We had one guy cleaning the grain. Management went in to clean the grain one time, and it was always [inaudible] so he got in. And of course, Frank phoned the terminal. A guy answered the phone and all he told him was, “Can you swim? Because you got in there to clean terminal, you ain’t getting out unless you quit cleaning grain.” The guy wasn’t long shutting that cleaner off. This little thing, you push it a little bit. But he was good. I enjoyed Frank, and Herbie just carried on the same thing. I think Herbie maybe had a harder time than Frank. It was never easy, these layoffs.

When we started down there, I think there was 1,800 employees in Thunder Bay in grain and then down to 300 or 400, maybe not that many, when I left. That's hard. Whether it's May and you know the 25-year guys getting laid off and never coming back. That wasn't easy for anybody. I felt bad about it, but I remember Herbie, how do you justify all this? We did at the end. We got rid of all our senior management so we could keep some more on at the lower end. It helped a bit, but still, that's a lot of employees to go through. I guess when I started, we had 450, and when I left, we had 50. I can't remember what. Like we had some, but whether they were working or not. There wasn't much left.

NP: Just for people that are listening, I don't think we ever mentioned Herb's last name.

DH: Daniher. Herb, if he ever hears this--. When I left there's one thing I still have, and it's a nice letter from Herbie, and I still got the hat he sent me. The Union hat. I still have it and never wore it. It still sits in my drawer. He sent me a nice letter when I finished. I always appreciated that. I always thought he had a tough job. Our employees, we treated them pretty good cash-wise, too, sometimes. As Herbie said at one time, you're fighting all negotiations one time, fighting over one percent. And then I guess it was around Christmas time we give every employee in Thunder Bay a new leather jacket and \$1,000. Then I turn around and I'm fighting over them for one percent. Like, every employee in our whole company got a \$1,000, whether he was the president or the mail room because they did a good job one year. I guess when I keep whining, "We got no money," and then this come up. So I guess Herbie was a little frustrated at times with me. Those were the good times, yes, yes.

NP: We are bouncing around here, but your stories are great. A lot of people talk very much about what they did. The richness about this project comes from their interaction with people. I really appreciate you obviously are a people person.

DH: I'm proud of that. I had lots of good employees—lots of them. And I was always proud of Thunder Bay. One of the places I've always used to say, "I could easily live in that place." And my wife enjoyed it, too, just by the people. Up to about three or four years ago, I still used to go down every year, and a bunch of us we used to go fishing—always liked it. The Mallons I used to golf with them all the time. Not just our company, I used to know all the Bobby McKinnons and all the Billy from Grain Growers.

NP: Green?

DH: Billy Green and Larry Carroll's gone now but he was there. Prystay and, oh, there's a pile of them we used to have a lot of fun there. What's his name from Cargill? I guess he's retired now.

NP: Franklin?

DH: Yeah, Gerry. Used to always make sure we got together once a year at the GEAPS convention anyway. There's a lot of good people. A lot of help, too, from people in Thunder Bay. Pritam Lamba done a lot for us, too, as an engineer. We had a lot of people who made money off our operation. One friend of mine, too, I haven't seen for a long time is--. He paints the terminal elevators. He's a big painter down there, does all the painting of the terminals.

NP: I didn't realise there was a person that specialised in that.

DH: It'll come to me. He did all the painting and that. He was the one who would take us fishing all the time.

NP: I should interview him.

DH: My understanding is he's got Alzheimer's. He's quite a bit younger than me, too. He'd done grouting in all the terminals. He took two or three of us from every company, and we used to go fishing every spring.

NP: You were the regional manager and then--?

DH: Then from there I went to terminals.

NP: And that was when approximately? Do you remember?

DH: '85.

NP: '85. What appealed to you about terminals?

DH: It was something. I guess it was big, fast. I guess fortunately my life I'd never spent more than five years whether buying grain, regional manager, district manager. It was nice to be able to do something different. I looked forward to the challenges in Thunder Bay. Of course, when they interviewed, they used to ask you what you're going to do. One of my things was trying to make it go faster. Make it do better. So that was one of my things looking over the terminals is what we could do. Also, another thing I was always proud of--. We had a real good maintenance and tin smithing outfit down there and give him the big tin smithing shed and equipment, so we didn't have to outsource. They could make their own spouts and they could do all kinds of stuff down there, but they didn't have the equipment. So we invested a fair amount of money on equipment and that, and we didn't have to outsource a lot of our stuff, eh? Which meant we could keep the employees working.

NP: Where was this setup?

DH: It was at Pool 3. It may still be sitting there. I don't know if it is or not.

NP: You talk about Pool 3. I have to tell you a story. When I first started this project, I spent a lot of time skulking around the various elevators, and at Pool 3 there was the old Manitoba Pool sign, a fibreglass sign, like a huge, huge one. It was down on the ground, and I thought this is so sad. I can't bear to see this sign there, but I didn't feel I could just take it either. I went to talk to the people who owned the property at the time and overtime the sign just disappeared. I don't know whether somebody just threw it out or--. I said there's a piece of history, the Manitoba Pool sign.

DH: That's right. I got the last Pool Elevator sign, and it's only this big.

NP: Yeah.

DH: At our last annual meeting in Winnipeg—I was retired but I got invited in as a guest because I was still responsible for that year—and Billy Mallon, no Brian, when he was in, he come in for that, and we were walking out together because we were the last ones leaving. We looked up at where the speaker and the podium was there—this is sitting—and he says, “Nobody wanted to take that. Do you want it, Denny?” And he just wacked it off, and I still got ‘er. So I gave it to my daughter to put away. I said, “Someday, that's a piece of history there.”

NP: Yeah.

DH: Billy signed it. Brian signed it. We put the date on it and everything.

NP: Well maybe I'll put a note in the newspaper and say, “Did someone take it? Are they taking care of it?” Because I just thought--

DH: All that history. It's sad because I mean--. I guess nobody was there. Every time I'd go down there and looking at Pool 3, it just makes me sick! I mean put a fence up at least. Of course, they stripped it and took all the equipment out and everything.

NP: It think maybe we're going to have to have a reunion of all you guys.

DH: Oh yeah. It's too bad they don't down there or something because I mean there's--. Oh, I used to get along with all the managers down there. Every Christmas the managers had a Christmas party in those few years—like their own, eh—out at Uncle Frank's there. I'd get invited to it. I always felt pretty good. I used to go down there, and they'd have their excuse for meeting first, and it was just an excuse for a party, but anyways. They used to entertain us over at Uncle Frank's—pretty good times.

NP: Now with the managing terminals, did Manitoba Pool have interest in terminals other than in Thunder Bay?

DH: Yeah.

NP: So what were the other--.

DH: I'm not sure now. I can't remember. It's either five percent or ten percent of Prince Rupert, and we had a share in Pacific Terminals at Vancouver. I think we had 20 percent share in Pacific.

NP: What was it like to operate jointly with another group?

DH: I never had to do that. Greg Arason, CEO, looked after that. Our CEO's all looked after there. I don't think it was a problem because you stayed out of the operating department. You would get a budget, but it wasn't like I owned that 20 percent. I couldn't tell them what to do. I think they had to stay at arm's length. They'd have a board of directors and maybe the manager would come there and that's the way it is. But individually, you couldn't do it. You have to do it as a group. I never heard much in-fighting in that.

NP: It would be like hired managers to manage the cooperative's groups.

DH: That's right. Yup. Like Prince Rupert, that guy was hired to run it, and we own and a share. Whatever money that made, we got five percent or ten percent of it. And Pacific, the only thing we had, if we had to ship canola and stuff out that way, that would be our own. It would go there, but we would have a place to ship it. If we had to ship out of the West Coast, we didn't have any terminals, so at least we had a place to put the grain.

NP: Any connection with Churchill then?

DH: Nope. No.

NP: Which is interesting because Manitoba Pool Elevator--.

DH: But actually, it's mostly Saskatchewan grain goes there. Swan River Valley, that will go there. But most of the grain comes from Saskatchewan. Then the problem I had with—and it used to really be bad—was the farmers getting so mad in that area because they would hold the grain to go to Churchill. They couldn't ship any grain. They wouldn't ship grain until Churchill opened. All the rest of the guys would have maybe a five-bushel quota. They would haul a lot of grain, and they would still be holding their grain because they're holding it for Churchill. Sometimes it was a detriment to the farmers because once they opened Churchill, then it would start moving it, but that might be six months after everybody else got it.

NP: The bane of your existence—the rail car allocation—when you moved into terminal, operations did you have connections with the rail companies?

DH: Oh yeah. We dealt with there, which was Tony Kaplanis and Dino Burella, and that's where you get your allocation. If I had a fight with, if I wasn't getting my share, or I got a problem, then it'd be with those two. They had a department there, and that's what they run. If I wasn't getting my cars. If I wasn't there with Gerry, himself—he wasn't scared of anybody—he'd be down there pounding on their desks.

NP: Is this Mr. Speer?

DH: [Laughs] Oh yeah. Great guy but I mean he [inaudible] everybody knew that he'd be on the phone, eh? Herbie used to know when Gerry would phone him, he'd have to phone way out here. Herbie used to tell me that. Sometimes Herbie was wrong, too.

NP: Holding the phone away from his ear.

DH: Oh yeah, yeah. If you ever talk to Herbie, ask him about Gerry. I was the same. If he got mad at me and he was out there, until he cooled down a bit.

NP: So was he a native Thunder Bayer, Mr. Speer?

DH: Oh yeah. Everybody likes Gerry—heart of gold. He asked me for money because some guy is sick. Can we get him enough money to fly him to someplace? Don't tell anyone I told you that. [Laughs] He never liked to be a softie. They used to always make fun of him. Nice guy, Gerry.



NP: So other than, sort of the usual fighting for your share of cars, there was no--? [Laughs]

DH: Or the vessels, too.

NP: What about the vessels and what did your job--?

DH: Same thing. You had a fight with a Lake Shippers to get your share of vessels. All of a sudden, your percentage--. Say it would run out at the end of the year, and you'd always have to straighten up. Who's going to get that last vessel in there? One time we were supposed to get it, and then it broke down out at the harbour. We never got it to spring. So that counted against our shipping next year. There was always some problems. Danny O'Connor ran that—all fair guys, nothing wrong with that, especially if its the last one coming in or the first one in the spring, and you knew it was yours. You'd be down there pounding on his desk.

NP: You may not want to answer this question, but if you recall early on in your career, you were talking about grain-car allocation. If you annoyed the engineer or the conductor, they were getting a good supply of liquor, too.

DH: That was the old days, though. You wouldn't get away with that today.

NP: Thunder Bay, was it honest?

DH: Oh yeah. There was no--. I mean everybody took somebody out for lunch, but you knew your percentage, and if you weren't getting your percentage and they had to justify why you didn't get it. None one of those guys would--. They were all fair, honest guys. There was no--. No, I never could say anything against any of those guys. [...*audio skips*] What happened?

I get it was the biggest improvement Thunder Bay ever had with that car allocation. When they started on a pooling system, which means Manitoba Pool cars going to Thunder Bay to go to anybody. It wasn't as if they had to go to Pool, as long as they were wheat cars or whatever it was. The railway didn't have to spend all day changing cars around. And that was the biggest improvement in Thunder Bay.

One time we had more grain than we could look after, so I sold my share to Sask Wheat Pool, so much a tonne for the grain I couldn't handle. Only trouble they didn't like was I wouldn't give it to them until it was Saturday. Then they had to pay time-and-a-half to get it off. I don't care. I'll work Friday until I can't get, so you'll get it Saturday. But I had to do that until I got equipped so that I could handle it all.

NP: Now, the Ports Clearance Association—I've just interviewed Mr. O'Connor—I was quite surprised about the complexity of their operation.

DH: Oh yeah.

NP: Was that news to you when you first started?

DH: No. In Winnipeg there's Lake Shippers, there's the GTA in Winnipeg, Clearance Association there. I was a member of that. There was certain things here. You pretty well knew here. When I took the job, they asked me, one of the questions was, "Where should it be? Thunder Bay or here?" Where I should be. Well, to me, I would've been happy to go to Thunder Bay—get out of the head office with the board of directors and all these guys. It's a lot nicer down there, peace and quiet, except I likely had to fly back for the board meetings, but anyway.

You had the Grain Commission here, the Wheat Board, you have the GTA. You had them all here anyway. You had all the managers here, too. All the guys, they were in Winnipeg. It made more sense to have it here. I used to go down there two or three times a month. At that time, plane service was pretty good. You'd go down in the morning and come back at night. But it was similar to what I worked with in the country. There, the car allocations going out, and then the grain shipping going to Thunder Bay. It was kind of the same idea but much larger scale in Thunder Bay.

NP: We've talked about the connections during your job with the farmers, the carriers, the handlers. What about Canadian Grain Commission? What was your interaction with them?

DH: Basically, the grading in Thunder Bay, it was the same in the country. If a farmer hauled me in some grain, and he didn't like the grade I'm giving him, say it was a 3 and he thought it was a 2, well, then we just package it up and send it to the Grain Commission, and he took the grade back. Then there's rules. When you're in the elevator, you can't do certain things, and they used to have a guy come around checking at times. One of the things in the old days and your scales weren't big enough to handle some of these trucks. But if you put a couple of nuts on the end of your scale and made the truck weigh lighter all the way down, you could weigh large amounts. It didn't look right, but you could still get the same amount of grain.

NP: You could make the adjustments.

DH: Adjustments with that. If he caught you doing that, you'd be in jail. Stuff like that. So they'd come around. When you have an audit, the farmer better not be getting taken. So he'd check you out, all your grains, and if you have a problem you come and have a visit with you.

NP: Can you think of any times where things didn't quite go right with an audit?

DH: Some guys would have maybe some overages or something else. There was usually a reason. It wasn't because--. Like farmers in our area with wild oats, if they come in, wild oats, they just clean it out of wheat, and then they'd put it in the barley. Well, that'd make you some money where it wouldn't show right on the books. But you weren't doing anything illegal. Thunder Bay, they do it all the time. When they clean grain, anything allowed you add back into the grain.

Nobody was used to the country doing that because nobody ever cared about blending grains making that kind of money. So it used to be little oddities. I never had one that they fined or suspended the guy. Some were a little close, closer than others. But the Grain Commission keep a pretty good eye on it. They also cut tolerances down. If you're allowed a certain tolerance going in a grade to make some money cleaning grain and added tolerance. I forget one year they cut the tolerances down. Well, they cut our money down, then we can't buy equipment.

NP: The timing here. So the Canadian Grain Commission, little bit of give and take. Overall, what are your thoughts of the Grain Commission?

DH: They were good. I just think that in some cases I think they were duplicating our job. When we take a car into Thunder Bay, the grain is split and goes to our graders and goes to their graders. Our graders are just as good as their graders and vice versa. I think we're duplicating it all the time. But what they were doing, if we were adding grains to it, they'd make sure they were checking you all the time. But on the other hand, if that grain didn't make the grade, the Pool was going to take the loss on it, so they had to look after themselves. They still had to be careful. It's going to cost money. Seemed a lot of it was duplicated. I know they were going to change some of that, but I think that was in the works a long time ago.

NP: Now it's changed. The legislation is going in shortly now.

DH: Yeah, that's what I thought, too. But some people are saying they're doing away with jobs, but that was in the works a long time ago. Some of this duplicating jobs, you got a fair amount of government staff there. And the same as loading the vessels, trimmers, and stuff like this. Necessary evil in some of this stuff.

NP: Did you interact with the trimmers or was that somebody else did that?

DH: No, I never knew any of the trimmers.

NP: Who?

DH: I'm not sure who does with the trimmers. It would have to be Danny O'Connor I would imagine because he's the one that ships the vessels there.

NP: Or did. They're gone, too.

DH: Yeah, that's right. It's quite a change down there.

NP: Your life would've been easier without them but--.

DH: Yeah but--.

NP: Would the system would have been as good without them?

DH: I don't think so. I'm always pretty proud of our grain-handling system. Our standards are pretty high. I would defend them at a lot of meetings on grain because we got a top-quality wheat, and we got a top dollar for our grain. That's one of the things now, if they don't have control of that grain, I don't know what the future is. I think that we're a lot better off with them. I just don't know how far it would get out of wack without them. You give an inch. They'll take a mile. These guys here, there's a tolerance and that's all you're allowed. If you start going outside that tolerance--. I'm not sure how they do it in the United States. I was on a major one one time and when you move grain over there, they know exactly what they're getting. They know they're not getting the top of the line, but they know what is there. If it isn't there, I don't know how the customers will be.

NP: Which brings us to the Canadian Wheat Board, another big player until recently, and certainly during your career it was a big player. What was your interaction with them and pros and cons as you saw it?

DH: Basically, most of it was through the shipping of grains in Thunder Bay or outgoing. The country is where I had the most, when I was allocating cars. In the shipping, they were the ones that sold the grain and where we'd would ship it out of. I think they're going to be missed. I was very disappointed to see them go. I figured there was going to be a two-deal system, but never,

ever. I have farmer people out there say they want about 16. I said, "I know from past experience, if they'll give you four systems, you'll take it all. But don't ever think that you can have both, because there will never be a Wheat Board when you let it go." Very unfortunate. My daughter worked for the Wheat Board, and she just became unemployed a week ago. Anyways, that's beyond that.

NP: What does she do for the Wheat Board?

DH: She was in the producer cars. She worked there for quite a long time. Well, she started Pool Elevators and of course it amalgamated with Alberta Pool. Of course, she went to Alberta and then she come back here and then she worked for United Grain Growers. Well, it amalgamated again, and then she went to the Wheat Board. She's had enough of the grain business. [Laughs]

NP: So you left in '98? Had there been an amalgamation with Alberta Wheat Pool?

DH: Yeah.

NP: In what year?

DH: I left '98. The annual meeting in '98 I think is when I officially retired. I said I would stay until the amalgamation was together, and then I would go.

NP: Did that have any impact on terminal operations?

DH: Oh yeah. It did, I should say, down the road. I would say with Alberta it helped Alberta because they didn't have terminal presence in Thunder Bay, and we didn't have it there. But the trouble is with the amalgamation is it didn't last very long. Then of course Grain Growers took it over the last two years.

NP: That was the Agricore.

DH: The Agricore, yeah.

NP: And you weren't there then.

DH: No. As I said, I was going to put it together. I don't know if you know Ron Gorst or not, Thunder Bay--.

NP: Yes.

DH: But he was the Sask Wheat Pool. I had already made plans when I was going to take early retirement. I thought, I've had enough. [Laughs]

NP: Ron Gorst is out in Alberta. I haven't done the Alberta/Saskatchewan run. I would like to at some point.

DH: I don't know who Ron's working for now. He got terminated here when they joined the venture here. He didn't last very long and lost his job.

NP: You were out of the mix when everything imploded. Do you have any thoughts about that?

DH: I'm very, very upset the way it went, that's for sure. I had a pretty good feeling when I left here that the person taking over wasn't going to last very long. It's common knowledge that I told the people making the decision, they wanted to interview me because I was leaving. I told them they're making a major decision. It happened and the guy left.

NP: Who was running the operation at that time?

DH: I don't know, what the hell's his name is now?

NP: It's a mental block, is it?

DH: Yeah, well it is. Cummings. I forget his first name. He was one that come to the fish factory to run Alberta Pool for a couple of years. He put this together, and then you could see that it was way, way, way out of wack.

NP: Had an interview with, I guess it was Billy Mallon, and of course he was caught in that. You'd probably find it interesting to listen to both John and Billy's interviews and as highly as you speak of them, he speaks highly of the head office people.

DH: The two of those, those two guys, they made my job easy. One running one terminal, one running the other like it wasn't hard to operate. And then when we went to the one terminal, Billy run that, and then Brian took over from Gerry, took over Gerry Speer's job.

NP: What was the relationship between Speer and Mallon?

DH: Gerry was the manager of the terminal operations in Thunder Bay, and when he retired, Brian took over from him. But at that time, they got rid of that one terminal, and Billy was operating the Pool 1. So that's where they ended up. The one thing about there is the staff was--. It made my job easy with that staff down there. I always said it kind of looked good, but it's a lot of work for most guys down there. When I used to go to the annual meeting, present the statement, "It wasn't from me," I said. "It's from the guys in Thunder Bay." I said, "I can't take that credit."

NP: One of the comments I remember, I think in both probably John Mallon said it and his son—we didn't interview Brian yet—John's advice was, "You take care of your people and they'll take care of you."

DH: I remember John when he came down here. What I did there, not long after he took it over, I got it all sorted out and did it all in one day. I went down there, and I made all the changes in one day. So all hit the waterfront next time must have changed management guys all over the place. I'd call them in the Airline Hotel and tell them, "You're going to be the manager of this terminal and don't tell anybody until tomorrow." It was quite a day. I should've got out of there in the morning.

NP: [Laughs]

DH: Some were happy, some were going to hate me, but anyway.

NP: So did that result in people quitting?

DH: No, no. It's just the way they had their management structure down there. It just didn't make sense. We had guys that should've been managers that are assistant superintendents. So Brian Mallon, one day he's a grader, the next day he's assistant manager of the terminal. These guys were jumping right out of union right up to the top jobs, and they didn't have an idea about it, and two of them are Johnny's sons. They were both deserving, too, because I would get all this from all the--. I made sure I knew what I was doing, because if I'm going to run this place, I want to make it easy for me. [Laughs] They run them just the way I did all the time I was there, so I never had a headache.

NP: That occurred early on in your tenure.

DH: Oh, early on. That was one of the first things I did going down there. I think the first year, I made all my changes.

NP: In your time, what would you say were the major changes in the industry?

DH: Well, in the grain industry, in this end, it's amalgamating all the system like getting the elevators large enough to load 50, 60 cars in a spot. That was a major thing, where the train could instead of stopping at 30 little elevators where they have to make one major stop. And then the cars are coming. You know they're coming. It's not like cars are supposed to be here this week. They don't show up for two weeks. You know they're coming and the system in Thunder Bay, when you get down to that system.

The biggest changes I see down in Thunder Bay is handling grain faster and automation basically from the downsizing. But Thunder Bay, the biggest change down there is mainly automation and the speeding up of equipment. And the country had to make the biggest changes, trying to move grain efficiently to get it down there. We used to have three, four car spots well now there's no such thing. You'd take ten elevators you'd get 40 cars. Well now one elevator will take 50 or 100. And they can load them within a quick period of time. So it moved the system a lot faster.

NP: So when you took over the terminal operations that was '85?

DH: '85.

NP: '85. What elevators were operating then? What Manitoba Pool elevator, or just the two?

DH: Just the two. We used to have Pool 9 and Pool 4, but we didn't have them when I took over.

NP: Okay.

DH: I don't know--.

NP: And at some point, I think you leased or whatever Pool 2?

DH: I guess so, yeah. That's right. Did I say 4? 2. Two and 9 I think is what we had. That's right. Maybe I said 4. It's Pool 2 and 9, yeah. Nine, we used to handle mostly flax there. But they were long gone to work when I took over.

NP: Between your time and when you left—your start and when you left—any major changes in safety?

DH: Safety? Oh yeah. They had the—I forget what the name is—they had a joint with the union and the terminals because it was--. I don't know what the safety was like before that. It was always supposed to be good, but here they had a joint with the terminal



inside and the union, and they met regularly. I guess I always think safety is priority because I mean people hurt cost you a lot of money and it is. But I can always remember attending the first meeting down there with the union. One employee waited three weeks until the meeting to tell me there was a broken ladder. You know let's fix it before the meeting. The joint thing isn't to find--. You got to work together for safety, not find stuff that's going to kill somebody and bring it up at a meeting six weeks later.

I said, "No, no, no. Make sure this is joint, so nobody gets hurt." I was always safety conscious, even in the country. I always thought safety was very important. Downtime hurts, and you know what happens, you get good staff off. We had one, Jimmy Fitzgerald, and he was a safety-conscious guy, and I'll never forget. Once he didn't wear his safety glasses, and he had a chip in his eye. I think his eye still bothered him when I left, and that was many years later. Just one--. And he was a safety conscious guy!

NP: Did any major accidents happen when your watch?

DH: Nope. Not that I can remember, no.

NP: One of the things that comes up at all the interviews in Thunder Bay was the--. Actually, quite a change in drinking on the job.

DH: Oh. It had gone when I was--. To be honest I don't think I ever, ever--. I had to send some guys home the odd time, before they got into the terminal. But that was at Christmastime one time. I shouldn't even mention that. But no, I never had one drinking on the job. I had one—and I don't know whether he got caught—maybe I had one, one person. I forget the guy's name. But anyways it doesn't matter. He was drinking, and yes it was—I think it was his third time— when Frank Mazur was there. And the last time he ended up in jail. That was his third warning. So I took the manager, the nurse, and Frank Mazur went down and visited him, and that was his last chance.

Actually, it was an extra one. But they went down and told him, "No more." I don't suppose he had a drink to this day. That was the end of the line. I'll never forget that. It worked out good because the guy was a good employee but it was getting to be a danger to some other people. So I only had the one, and the nurse and Frank and Ron Trewin went down there and laid it on the line. He went back to work, and I don't think he ever had a drink, that I know of, ever since. It's the only one I know of. Smoking once, I had that. As Frank Mazur said, "You got 16 hours a day to smoke. If you can't leave it alone the other eight, then you got a problem."

NP: Change in the products dealt with. Did that stay pretty steady or was canola--?

DH: No, canola was there. We didn't have many. They seemed the same commodities. No there was never--. Odd time we'd get, it wasn't very nice, but once and a while we'd have to handle sunflower seeds. Nobody really liked doing that. That was a hit and miss, once and while.

NP: What's it about sunflower seeds that people don't like?

DH: The trouble is that it gets in your other grains and it's hard to get it out. It's a commodity and it's a degrading factor if it gets stuck in your other grains.

NP: What about it makes it--?

DH: Well, if you receive sunflowers, just throw it in a bin of wheat and it'll stick out like a sore thumb. You can't get it out of there. So when you send it overseas, and they see these black things sticking there. It's just more of an eyesore and everything else. I know when we used to handle it, we had to get good money to handle it. We only had to do that the odd time, though. But other than that, no, we had almost every commodity you'd want.

NP: Okay.

DH: Okay.

NP: Well, I'm not quite finished. I have a couple more questions, but we just have--. That's right and we're running out of tape anyway. Let's stick with your terminal position for this one. If you meet somebody for the first time and they're not in the grain industry, what might surprise people most about the work you did?

DH: The work I do--.

NP: It's almost like what are the misconceptions of--?

DH: I guess the people ask me where I live because they don't know. I think it's just the large, expanded volume of a country elevator. It's humongous when you start talking about volumes of grain you move and how fast you can do it, how fast you can clean grain—especially farmers. When you say you can clean grain as fast as you can dump it down a pit. Yeah, I can clean it as fast. I think it's just a magnitude of what you're doing.

I was on a course in the Banff one time—a management course there—and I was explaining how we sell grain like clean it down to zero dockage and have all the grains back and we'd have such a superior commodity to any country in the world. And I'm proud of that. That's why I think the Grain Commission-- We do have a commodity that will always sell. I think a lot of people don't understand you take the grain in, and you can't just ship it out. You have to clean it to nil dockage and then take the commodities that are allowed back and then control back into the grain. You have to control the thing. Farmers used to say, "Well that's all nice grain. By the time you guys get it, it doesn't look at that good" because we blend some stuff in it, and blend it in there. But that's what the grade allows. There's quite an experience there.

NP: And as a result, the farmer ends up getting a better return.

DH: Sure. That's right.

NP: And that must have been one of the nice things about Manitoba Wheat Pool is that you were doing it that--.

DH: That's right. It will all come back to them. That's what I said. See, they would ship it from the country where the elevator managers didn't do that. It was all done at the terminal. Come the annual meeting, the country elevators and they may make \$500,000 dollars. The terminals make 10. Yeah, but they're still [inaudible]. That was the way they say, well we send them the grain and they make money off us.

NP: So you would've had to sort of educate both sides.

DH: [Inaudible] But you know, with Thunder Bay. One of the hard parts too was when Cargill, Elm Creek, used to clean their grain here, and put all the terminal specs back in again, and ship it to Thunder Bay, and we'd got that thing, we couldn't make five cents off of it because they'd done it all out here. Nobody wanted Cargill's grain because you'd make no money off of it. Even Cargill didn't want their own grain.

NP: And that's something that's happening now. There's far more cleaning being done on the Prairies, so what kind of impact is that going to have on terminal elevators?

DH: It's going to impact them, especially in the terminals, because now it's going there at export standards. It's already met there, so they can't add anything. So it takes it out of their pocket. It's okay if Cargill is going to Cargill, but if Cargill is shipping to me, I don't like that because I can't make any money out of their grain. And if I'm shipping dirty grain from here to Cargill, they're still making money out of me.

NP: Due to the terminal elevators, they'll just be storage?

DH: Just pretty well. Just be storage and their grain screening pellets, which is a big money maker down there. I don't know what it's worth today with all the scruffage we used to pelletize and make pellets and sell the scruffage for money.

NP: Can you think of any way where terminal elevators wouldn't be needed? Is that a possibility?

DH: Like I know the terminals, even our company one time did it—just loaded straight from cars at Thunder Bay terminals, that place out there. Remember they used to just ship cars [inaudible] right onto the boats. I guess if you can get enough cars lined up, they could do it, but it would take too long. They couldn't have the storage ahead of time. You'd always have to be perfectly coordinated with the vessel coming in. So it would be hard. You're always going to need the terminals.

NP: What are you most proud of when you think back on your long career, what are you most proud of?

DH: Terminals. I think of all the people and all the places I worked, I don't think I've ever seen a better work ethic in Thunder Bay than anyplace else.

NP: And I just want the people listening to this to know that I'm not paying you to say that. [Laughs]

DH: No, I think down there, it's a well-run organization. I know all the other guys, too. I'd like to say Gerry is the best, but he's just one of the best down there, because they were all--. And another thing, down there what I always liked, even though they're opposition, they worked well together for Thunder Bay. If there's a problem down there, they always got somebody else to help them out.

NP: I think you'd be surprised now if you went back.

DH: Yeah, maybe I would be. Maybe it's changed.

NP: Things have really changed.

DH: Well, I don't know some of the guys that are there today. It was a well-run organization.

NP: More circumstances, I think, than people.

DH: Everybody dollar eat dollar, and there's only so many left. But it's too bad because working together [inaudible] but the amount of grain and they put through at that time.

NP: Now looking at an even bigger picture, Canada's place in the world as a grain exporter, the work you did, how do you think it contributed to Canada's international reputation?

DH: I think it made their reputation. Part of my running the terminals and we did little private project on shipping specialized grain on this little place called Bolton outside of Manchester, England, a specialized grain. We were able to do that. We had the farmers grow it, and we paid them a premium to grow it, and we shipped it to Thunder Bay and segregated it, and shipped it over there. I made a trip over there because it's quality where this guy could make grain out of this wheat and uniform. And this guy could charge half again the price of loaf of grain.

NP: Oh, he'd make flour?

DH: Yeah, flour, and then he'd make this Warburton's bread over there. I don't know if you ever heard about it. If you can afford their bread, you're somebody. But it was uniform. It would last longer and everything else. But it had to be specialized, and Canada could do that.

NP: Interesting that you say that because I was interviewing Dennis Portman--.

DH: Oh yeah, Denny took my job. When I came in here to allocate cars--. He worked for Manitoba Pool, Denny eh? Then when I went out as a district manager, he took my job.

NP: Because he mentioned the same British company as being pretty specific about what they wanted.

DH: Oh yeah, that was just one thing that we can do that and segregated all there. Nobody else could do that.

NP: Now, one final thing, and this is sort of a promotion on our part, the group that I'm with is Friends of Grain Elevators—I mentioned earlier—and we came about because we want to have a terminal grain elevator designated as a national historic site.

DH: Oh, okay.

NP: And we would actually like to persuade the federal government to establish a national interpretation centre that celebrates the grain industry in particular, the export grain industry, and the whole terminal and transportation aspects of it. So we dream in technicolour, but why not.

DH: That's why I was interested to tell my wife about it. I said, "I don't know, but if it's something to do with Thunder Bay, I owe them." So that's why I thought I'd come.

NP: Well, great. If we do that, what do you think, what are the stories do you think we should tell at that centre?

DH: Are you going to start just from Thunder Bay forward or just from the grain to Thunder Bay?

NP: Well, what we wanted to do, we didn't want to steal the thunder from the producers. I mean that's the western Canada story, but we want to do the handling, and the transport out, and external markets.

DH: You want to tell them how you developed all this?

NP: If you think that would be the kind of thing that would be interesting.

DH: I don't know but if you ever talk to Dino Burella, I'm along his line. When like, let's face it, Thunder Bay can handle one hell of a pile of grain, if this system had have stayed there. And the system was put in place and from the car allocation how they put it—never mind Manitoba Pool going to Manitoba Pool—it's on a pooling system and how they operated that. And all the things to get that grain. And then the terminals, I would get the managers on how they got efficiently, this one-pass cleaning, that we cleaned grain as fast as we could do it.

NP: Was Mr. Igneczi part of that? I can't recall whether he worked for Manitoba Pool or Saskatchewan Wheat Pool.

DH: No.

NP: But he also had something to do with improving the cleaning system.

DH: No.

NP: But he was a Thunder Bay guy.

DH: But I mean, all of us guys interacted, the Dino Burellas—the Grain Transportation Authority—and Danny O'Connor—and a good friend of mine. And I always feel bad about what happened—Jack at the Grain Commission— because we interacted with them quite a bit. We had problems, and if we needed some help from them, I'd bring the farmers down there, and we'd get the Grain Commission, stuff like that. Any help we needed down there was good. But I would take it right from there and how they expanded it. And the people of Thunder Bay are the ones that done it. They had the GTA.

But it wasn't easy, let's face it. When they make changes, it wasn't easy for the guys running it. We all wanted our share. See, the percentage of grain changes every year. Like out here Manitoba Pool has a good year, and we're shipping our [inaudible] goes up pretty high, but it can also go down pretty fast. One time they got to be ready for all this. We're all friends down there. We always had our difference of opinion, too.

NP: Good. I'm going to sign off, unless there is anything I should have asked you or some things you wanted to say that you haven't had a chance to say?

DH: No, I'm good. I didn't know what to expect. Actually, I'm interested—like I said—I'd sure like to see whenever it's done. It would be nice.

NP: Well, let's go offline and just spend a couple of minutes talking about what the future might hold.

**End of interview.**