

Narrator: Alec Kubicek (AK)

Company Affiliations: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC), Canadian Wheat Board (CWB)

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Summary: Grain market analyst for the Canadian Wheat Board Alec Kubicek begins his interview by describing his long journey to Canada. He includes stories throughout his interview about his escape from Czechoslovakia, his work and studies in Paris, his move to Australia, and finally his journey to Vancouver where he first joined the Canadian grain industry through the Canadian Grain Commission as an assistant statistician. He details his work in this department, his fascination with the Grain Research Laboratory, and his eventual move to the Canadian Wheat Board to start the Technical Services and Market Research branch. He discusses his main duties in the department, a lot of which involved travelling to foreign countries in Africa, Latin America, and Eastern Europe to see their grain handling, milling, and baking infrastructure. Other topics discussed include his inclusion on long-term export deal negotiating committees, his work in London as chairman of the Grain Exporting Countries Monitoring Committee, and stories of assignments in Brazil, Cuba, and East Germany.

Keywords: Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Canadian Grain Commission – Statistics branch; Grain statistics; Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); CWB -- Technical Services and Market Research branch; Grain marketing; Market analysis; Market research; Foreign markets; Canadian grain exports; Flour milling operations; Western Canada; Australia; Eastern Europe; Czechoslovakia; Germany; East Germany; West Africa; North Africa; Soviet Union; Cuba; Brazil; France; London, England; Political refugees; Immigrants to Canada

Audio Part One

Time, Speaker, Narrative
NP: It is November 23, 2011, and it's Nancy Perozzo interviewing a person with a great deal of experience in the Canadian grain trade, at his home at 19 Wedgewood in Fort Garry a subdivision of Winnipeg. So we'll start the interview by asking my narrator to introduce himself and just a comment about your career in the grain industry, which we'll go into in more detail.

AK: So, should I start? Yes. Okay. My name is Alec Kubicek. As it happened, it is the same name as the former president of my beloved country Brazil, but he spelled it differently. While the Kubicek is spelt with a simple accent over C, you see the Czech alphabet has quite a few, about 15, extra letters. So instead of Cz, Czechoslovakia, that's just C with an accent, converted accent circumflex. So as an explanation.

NP: So both of you were exports out of Czecho--.

AK: Without any doubt. Not just exports, he's--. I don't know. I wish I had a biography or--. In fact, I intended to start to write some because Kubiceks not only come from Czechoslovakia—former Czechoslovakia—but most of them from one region, and many of them from the same village where I was born. So that name for some reason or other is very popular in that region.

NP: Good. So we know then that you were born in Czechoslovakia, and yet we're interviewing you for your time in the Canadian grain trade. So we have a standard set of questions, which I think we'll try to follow along, but I hope you don't mind if I ask you some supplementary ones.

AK: Go right ahead.

NP: Your involvement in the Canadian grain trade involved two major organizations. Who were the two that you worked for?

AK: Actually, the start of my career in the Canadian grain trade began in Vancouver when we landed, my wife and I and our son—two years old—when we landed in Vancouver on a British ship *Orcades*, which was really a liner from Melbourne, Sydney, Oakland, New Zealand, Fiji, Hawaii, Vancouver. And this is where-- Really, I was heading for the United States with some waiting in Canada, but on the ship before it landed in Vancouver, there was already immigration officers so that on the ship you could just go on without any stopping at all. So should we register as landed immigrants in Canada? I think, "By all means!" because before that, I already saw what I was coming for—beautiful! Even the smell of the forests, Burrard Inlet. I think I told you that. It was quite emotional, you know. So I said, "By all means."

So how did it start in Vancouver? I got off the ship with absolutely nothing fixed, and what did I do? You're probably familiar with the public service hiring. At the main post office, there are racks and racks of little announcements of every new opening in public service so that anybody can apply. Anybody who feels that he's qualified can apply. So I went through this again and again and again, and most of them have been labelled "Only the Canadian citizens need apply." There is one saying, "Assistant to the Chief Statistician in the Board of Grain Commissioners," which is now Canadian Grain Commission [CGC]. And of course, I thought I

was just fitting just perfectly into the requirement qualifications, and at the bottom, “Canadian citizens as well as Commonwealth citizens can apply.” Bingo! I applied.

[0:05:35]

In a month, I got a letter from the Public Service Centre in Vancouver, “Would you present yourself such-and-such date in our office for the examination committee?” So, one, two, three, four, four men—two from Ottawa, one from Winnipeg, and one from Vancouver Civil Service Centre—quite an interview—two and a half hours. And when it was all over, I thought I didn’t do so well. Maybe I did. God knows. Hard to say.

End of audio one.

Audio Part Two

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: And that you thought you weren’t going to get the job.

AK: I wasn’t sure. I was hopeful, of course. And I don’t know what happened, what did it. I think Bill McLeod, who was from the Board of Grain Commissioners—wonderful guy—probably was the one who did the job. In about a month, I got a letter, “You have been selected from about 250 applicants as the winner of this competition.” That didn’t guarantee that I was getting the job in Winnipeg, so I had to wait for the letter directly from the Board of Grain Commissioners, which came. “Would you present yourself in Chief Statistician’s office of the Board of Grain Commissioners on such-and-such date.” As it happened, right after Labour Day. So, boy oh boy, that was--. You have no idea what that meant to me. So we packed our little bags and moved to Winnipeg, and I was in Board of Grain Commissioners Statistician office after Labour Day. That’s how it started.

NP: Now, for those people who are listening very closely to the interview, they might be a little puzzled by your saying that you were able to apply because you were a Commonwealth citizen, and yet, last I heard, Czechoslovakia was not part of the Commonwealth. So I think we’ve got a little piece in there to--. [Laughing]

AK: Oh, no. No, of course. There’s a lot of personal history behind it. First of all, I escaped from the totalitarian paradise in Czechoslovakia in March in 1949. I escaped and moved very quickly to Paris in France where I sort of settled down somehow as a political refugee with no support other than here and there dining room for the refugees, stuff like that. And quite a few Frenchmen

looking after refugee students, especially from Czechoslovakia. So that was my start in Paris. And I managed also to study post-graduate because I already had a degree from University of Prague, Charles University, and I was a Bachelor of Commerce, which was later recognized as equivalent to the Australian Bachelor of Commerce and in Manitoba, Canadian.

So originally, I had a Bachelor of Commerce degree from University of Prague, and lots and lots of post-graduate studies. I couldn't even enumerate, including the University of Manitoba. About four different courses, credit courses, of course, you know? But to me, post-graduate it didn't matter, but I had papers as credits for these courses. One of them very good one, business mathematics and models, and the doctor major. That was a marvellous course, which I could actually use on the job in the analytical work of the analysis and market research.

NP: So, you were in Paris and then you moved on. Tell us a little bit about that story.

AK: Well, you see, in Paris, there was no hope to get any reasonably steady job at all. You know, they took you with open arms as refugee, but very, very strict to let you get to anything decent. But I got casual jobs. One was very good one with the group of students, Czech students, in Radiodiffusion en française. Something similar to Radio Free Europe in Munich. There was the similar thing on Champs-Elysees in Paris. And I've done quite a few programs for them, including two seasons of Roland Garros Tennis Championships, so that I met quite a few tennis stars, including two Czech stars. So that was a lot of fun in Paris, but no progress for someone of a reasonable future. So I decided to take immigration to Australia, you see?

[0:05:32]

NP: And why did you choose Australia?

AK: Because it was easy, free trip, free passage under one condition, two years' guarantee on any job that we'll delegate you to. Sign on the dotted line. And here I was on the way to Bremerhaven, which was the gathering point for the refugees going to Australia. And in about four, five days, we were boarding the ship called Skowberin [sp?]. Maiden voyage of a beautiful, smaller ship, of Norwegian origin. Sort of S line. Skowberin [sp?].

NP: And you didn't know what your job was at that point?

AK: Not a single idea.

[... audio pauses]

NP: On the tape here is you saying, “I didn’t know what my job was going to be.” So.

AK: Meanwhile, I should mention that on the ship I met a wonderful girl who eventually became my wife, Martha. We met on the ship, got closely acquainted, and married in 1951 shortly after we landed in Australia. We married in Melbourne, and our son was born in 1955. And in 1957, we moved to Canada when we decided there is no way for us that we stay in Australia, mainly on account of the climate. I had a very good job there. By the time we left, I had a wonderful job in [Standard Vacuum Refinery], a huge refinery under construction. By then, I already bought a nice house, modern furniture, close to the site of refinery. So I had a very good job, and the climate, the whole Australian surroundings, the attitude to immigrants and all that, did not appeal to us at all. So we decided for Canada.

NP: When you say the attitude towards immigrants, what was it like?

AK: Even rude. You see, one of my wife’s jobs was sort of a supervisor waitress on a train buffet from Melbourne to some kind of a tourist area. So she was there, and of course, the Australian’s famous building is, you know--. Slush time was from 5:00 to 7:00 when they closed the bars and then they reopened again later today. In between that 5:00 to 7:00 time, half of the pub was dead drunk, you know? And unfortunately, that was the case in some cases on the buffet train as well, and some of the guys were absolutely rude to the girls working there, you know? So things like that.

Other than that, the first job was assistant cook in one of the big, large hostels for the English immigrants. There was, I don’t know, four very large cafeterias and kitchens, and I worked in one of them so that I got a lot of experience in baking, cooking, what have you, which I had a little bit before. Baking, not bread. Bread was bought from bakeries, but all kinds of other pastry cooking, this and that.

[0:10:27]

NP: Skipping forward then to when you came to Canada and you were on your way to the States, but you decided to stay in Canada for reasons that you mentioned, and then you had your interview. Did you ever ask why they selected you? I mean 250 people applying, and from what you said, there hadn’t been a whole lot of grain industry experience in your background. Why did they select you?

AK: There was quite a bit, quite a bit. During the war, I was fortunate to escape the forced labour. You see, Nazis simply decided you go there and there and there, and you would work there including the coal mines. I escaped that because I landed a job in food

industry, which was agriculture cooperatives. Grain, cattle, pigs, what have you, all that was marketed in that district town where was the central office of the agriculture cooperatives all over the district town. Many, many members. Thousands of members. So I got a very good job there, and that saved me from being pushed into anywhere in Germany or even in Poland or Yugoslavia, so anything that was occupied by the Nazis.

So that was--. And during this time, because I guess I was good at my work, I was selected as one of the 35 attendants, [inaudible] in the Institute of Agriculture Cooperative Enterprise, one year—very good, very good cause. And then after that, I was back in this centre office cooperative. So that's why I escaped the hardships of war. In fact, I had a very good time during the war. But then of course, the Communists came, and it became a very, very dangerous time for me. So it was time to get out. And of course, much later when I wrote about my escape, four-part series published in all of the Czech newspapers, then reprinted in another newspaper in Czech Republic. And I was asked here by John Morriss who published the narrative I gave him to translate it, but I just don't have time to do it, you know?

NP: Can you give us the short version of how you escaped?

AK: Oh, sure. Short version was very interesting. First of all, I knew that I've got to get out. I was warned. "They are after you. Watch out." I had committed myself in politics, Social Democratic Party, which I considered as a *social* democratic, not socialist democratic. And very quickly after the Communists take over, it was converted to more-or-less socialist and split between social and communist within the Social Democratic Party. And because I was on this social democratic side, in very vocal manner—and few articles in the newspaper—I was warned, "Kubicek, you better get out and do it fast." "Thank you very much for all your help. How do I get out?" "That's up to you. You have to find out yourself."

[0:14:57]

In the district town where I was, where I worked in the agriculture cooperative, there was a very good ping-pong team, ping-pong competition—table tennis, I should say—and I was with a table tennis. And in one of the tournaments, a guy whom I knew only vaguely—not really a friend—who was just out of the military academy, the only one or the most famous one in Czechoslovakia, new cadet graduating from military republic comes to me and says, "Alec, I hear that you might be in some kind of trouble." "What do you mean?" "They are after you. Be quiet, let me tell you that." "How do you know that?" "Don't ask me how I know. I know. Would you consider to get out of here?" "Would I consider? I've been thinking this for quite some time." "I have ways and means to get you in." I thought, "By God, there's a guy from military republic, fresh cadet, he must be very into this for the army. Newly regimented by the Communist Party." Which I said, "Well, I don't know. I don't know." "Well, I don't have much time to let you

think it over, but you have to give me an answer now. Yes or no.” I thought it for about an hour, and I come back to him while we were still playing in the tournament. “Yes. I’m coming with you.” “Ok.”

“In about a month or so,” and that was before Christmas, “you’ll get a Christmas card telling you that you should come to a party in a little town nearby to the village where I was born, and you’ll have a little party in the house of my parents on such-and-such date.” Sure enough—and it was already winter, nice, white in this case—I go to this little town in the house, and there was he, another guy, and myself. “This is what is going to happen. In about a month or two, you will get a card telling you that we shall meet at the main railway station in Prague, and we’ll go for a little excursion to Western Bohemia. Just bring the necessary baggage in a suitcase.” Oh, and during the meeting in the little town, he said, “When you get that, you get a small suitcase, but in the suitcase, you put the knapsack with the most necessary things that you can think of.” That’s what I did. And so it went. Main station, three of us met, into the train, changing at the main Pilsen—Pilsen the beer—changing to a small train to the little town where the meeting place of the actual instruction how it will be done would be done in few days. Address certain house. We got in and waited, waited. The guy—wonderful guy—came in and he was the main organizer, and he said, “Tomorrow, the forest ranger will come in, and he’ll explain to you how it going to be done.”

Next night, we get together with the forest ranger, and he says, “In about three days, you get the signal, and it will be around 9:00 in complete darkness already.” It was beginning of March, white winter. “There will be a taxi. Leave the suitcase here, just get the knapsack. And we go into the taxi. We drive in the taxi to a little wooded area, and we get into the woods and wait and wait. Another guy will come and take you over and lead you through another stop.” And so it went until we were already in forest region of that particular region. It’s called, well, Sumava Forest on the Bavarian border. Same on German side as on Czech.

[0:20:59]

And that was quite a guy, quite a guy. We sat down, he had a drink. “Let’s have a drink. So, see that valley and that brook, and the long building with lots of lights? That’s the border guard station, and that’s where we’ll be heading for. Make no mistake. We’ll be escaping right behind that building.” And he knew exactly when most of the guards will be in the terrain. It was all organized, you know? Including some of the ins of the border guard. And we crawl into the valley behind the building, radios blasting in the building, and slowly behind the building to the brook, through the brook, on the ice. Unfortunately, I dropped in one foot in the ice, so it was all wet. And we went below a steep hill leading to the border with border stones in the area, you see. He said, “Here we are,” about 500 metres from the border. “You have to run up the hill, and when you see the stones, cross quickly, and you are in Germany.” So we did. We ran. Meanwhile, it started—machine guns, dogs barking—not too close, but close enough for us to really, really run. Border stone marked with a line in the stone, black line. “Czechoslovakia – Germany.” So we crossed, and bingo! There were very high snowdrifts, so we got right into behind the snowdrift and wait until the shooting stopped, and then progress.

Oh, there was an instruction already from the last guy. “When you cross, there’s a little a farmhouse, and they’ll be waiting for you.” It was organized right through, and sure enough we get from out the snowdrift, there’s a farmhouse, lights on. That’s where we go. And the farmer is waiting for us. “Have a rest, boys.” Fortunately, I was fluent in German, eh? The other two guys knew nothing about German. “So, have a rest, have coffee, and have a little sleep if you can. And tomorrow, you progress.” Well, to make it very short, in the morning, we progressed to the town through the German border officers that picked up the little cash we had, we had to leave it there. What else? Oh, one of the guys—actually the graduate of military academy—had a gun. I was instructed that we have to have at least one of us have a revolver. That he had to leave there, all that.

[0:25:02]

And in the next town, there was an American centre for refugees, and from there, we have been boarded on the train to Munich, where we were placed into refugee camp in former military barracks. Former military, big, huge complex. That’s where we spent—I spent—about two weeks. Not for Kubicek. He packed it in with another guy and headed for the border on Rhine River in West Germany, border between West Germany and France. We stayed there, checked it over. “How do we cross?” Big bridge with this nice construction underneath where we could climb. We climbed under the bridge. I was scared stiff, but the guy with me was a scout, experienced scout, and he could climb you wouldn’t believe it. He was telling me, “Alec, careful. Just behind me. Catch here, catch there. Hang onto that.” So I was following him step by step. Down we go. We are in France. And then—it’s a long story, I’m sure—I have to stop right here because we ended up on a farm in France for a little job to see us through, and then with the little money we got from the farm, we made it to Paris.

NP: Which is where we pick up the other part of your story.

AK: That’s right.

NP: With, I’m sure, a lot of story in between there. How old were you at the time. What year was it that you made your escape?

AK: ’49.

NP: And you were born in--?

AK: ’22.

NP: '22. Okay. Good.

AK: So I was about 27.

NP: Yeah. Now--.

AK: Twenty-seven with a university degree in the pocket, and a very nice diploma from this agriculture cooperative institute. All this helped later, tremendously.

NP: And what university did you go to in Paris? Like you picked up your studies?

AK: Sorbonne. Sorbonne. Branch was called Institute du Science Politique. Political science. So it was political science and economics. Very good economic teacher, a Swiss doctor, Professor Roethke. Quite a few books he wrote. So, you know, and that was a certain type of, well, institute. Political institute type. Mostly debate rather than just lecturing, you know?

NP: Where did you pick up your English skills?

AK: That was--. [Laughs] That was quite a--. I studied English at the Faculty of Commerce only for four years, so that was my last acquired—not last, Spanish was last already, yeah—but four years. I had good English. I could read it very nicely, translate it even back and forth, but no fluency of speaking at all. So where I picked it up, only in Australia, you know? Because in Australia, of course, they asked first of all, “How’s your English?” “Practically non-existent.” That’s why I was delegated even with my university degrees to the hostel as an assistant cook, you see.

NP: Yeah. Language skills are very important, aren’t they, in career advancement. Well, we’ve done this circle of very interesting information, and now we’re back at your move to Winnipeg with the Board of Grain Commissioners at that time. What was that job like? Who were the people you worked with? What did you do?

AK: Absolutely marvellous. I’ve done all the things that were under the direct supervision of the chief statistician, which included the whole movement, crunching the figures of the whole movement from the country elevators to the Lakehead terminals, from the Lakehead terminals to the transfer elevators. The whole picture in my hands, week after week, month after month, year after year, so that there was a weekly publication with graphs that I had to--. At that time, it was all hand job—a little starting with computer, punch cards only, you know? Otherwise, it was all manual. That was a wonderful job, and very, very good relationship with the chief.

[0:30:58]

NP: Who was the chief at that time?

AK: Harold Baxter. He died three years ago or so. What a guy. What a guy. So actually, he was the one that picked up my application amongst many others across Canada. You know this examining committee goes right across from whatever, Montreal to Vancouver. And he picked it up.

NP: And what was Mr. Baxter like to work for?

AK: Very good professional. Oh, I should mention that the statistics branch was originally at Fort William, and it was later moved to Winnipeg. So the statistics started in the Lakehead. Yeah.

NP: When did it move?

AK: I'm not quite sure, but I would think somewhere around '56/'57.

NP: And you started what year with the Commission?

AK: '57.

NP: '57. So it just moved over.

AK: After Labour Day. Meanwhile, I was very interested in the Grain Research Laboratory next door. I shouldn't say next door. One floor below and one floor up. I got friendly with quite a few guys, and in my free time occasionally, I went to watch what all they were doing because I knew they were quite well-known all over the world. That Grain Research Laboratory is really something ever since they started. And I guess for some reason or other, these guys were watching me. For instance, when I did the export summaries by countries, by areas of the world, by continents, I just was thinking, "What a job." There was regularly 80 or 90 countries that have been buying Canadian wheat, Red Spring wheat and durum and barley and little bit of rye. And all that was tabulated in this statistics branch, and of course, reported to statistics in Ottawa.

NP: Just to step back a little bit, you came from a relative—at least area-wise to Czechoslovakia—a very big country. What surprised you, interested you about the Canadian grain industry?

AK: When I saw the numbers, everything. Everything at all, so that I tried even to visit some farm here and there when I was still in the statistics. Later on, I visited farms left, right, and centre in all three Prairie provinces. Not by myself. With foreign delegations, foreign clients because before the Grain Institute started their programs, we have done it all in the CWB [Canadian Wheat Board]. Invited foreign delegations. So that was one part of the job. Anyhow, how did I get in CWB?

NP: Mmhmm.

[0:34:56]

AK: One of these bright guys, the legendary C. W. McNamara—or W. C. I think—McNamara, calls me in. Right out the way he calls me, “Alec, could you come for a visit? I would like to have a little talk with you.” And the interesting part was that he was in fact was calling me for an offer of the job without even asking for any resume or what have you because he had it all anyhow from the Canadian Grain Commission. So he was a man of few words, very direct. And you know, he makes you a little shy, in fact, because he was very direct. “We are creating a new branch which is under the direction of Dr. Irvin, who is the assistant director of the Grain Research Laboratory.

NP: Doctor--?

AK: Irvin. Norm Irvin.

NP: How is that spelled?

AK: I-R-V-I-N.

NP: Ok.

AK: Norm Irvin. The director was Dr. Anderson, an Englishman, and his right-hand, Tim Aiken, who actually was in charge of my training—another Englishman. So anyhow, in McNamara’s office. “We are creating this new branch which will be called Technical Services and Market Research, and the idea is that we will try to get more internationally known than we are.” because of course, the multinationals—the private grain companies—have been all over the place with branch offices here and there and everywhere, you see? At that time, CWB already had a branch office in London, England. And of course, we’re talking about ’57, when the whole Prairies were—well, not that time, but later on—the whole Prairies were just plugged, nothing moved. Even the winter storage at the Lakehead

was sitting there not touched at all. So it was a very, very tough time. So he said, “This is the aim, and there will probably be a little bit of travelling involved.” I said, “How much travelling?” “Hard to say, a little bit anyhow.” I said, “You know, Mr. McNamara, I’ve done already enough travelling and I have a wonderful job in the Grain Commission. I love it, and I have a very good relationship with the chief. No, thank you. I think I have to decline. That’s your job.” And of course, there was a salary which was about \$2,000 higher than I was getting.

NP: What were jobs like yours paying in those days? Like was \$2,000 a big increase or--?

AK: Substantial. I was getting \$4,500 a year as an assistant to the chief in Statistics.

NP: In 19--?

AK: '57.

NP: '57.

AK: Well, later on it was more. It was my starting salary, eh? So there was \$2,000 more. New job. “Well, think it over anyhow. Meanwhile, I have your answer, which is no, but that’s fine.” And the next time he calls me again, “Could we have another talk?” “Yes, Mr. McNamara.” “We thought it over, and we’ll make it a little better.” \$1,500 more than they offered originally. I thought of my family, thought of my two-and-plus-year-old boy, and at this stage I could not refuse. I said, “Yes. I take it.” “There will be a few months’ training period. Oh, and I hear that you’re fluent in French.” That was another strong point, of course, in Baxter picking the application, you see. Completely fluent in French, Sorbonne post-graduate studies. Boy oh boy, that was a strong point. Plus, the agriculture cooperative.

[0:40:16]

Well, anyhow, my application was obviously very good, perhaps over-educated but fitting into that job very nicely. And little could I expect how I fitted in that job almost immediately. To me it was a piece of cake really because what I was doing in Australia for Standard Vacuum was quantitative accounting, first of all, in the so-called fixed-assets branch. Every nut and bolt accounted for, plus the big items of refinery building—catalytic tower and catalytic cracking towers. The tanks and all, everything carefully recorded and accounted for depreciation or tax purposes. And later on, this whole fixed-assets section was converted into statistics branch so that when I left, I was in fact working for Standard Vacuum refinery already constructed, already running as a statistician. They were sorry. They were sorry, as was Baxter, Baxter was just about crying when I told him that I’m leaving, you know? He didn’t want me

to go at all, neither did the refinery in Australia. But I said, "I'm sorry, we are just not--." And of course, that was American-run, and I had the application for American immigration. So it was all--. They gave me good recommendation, but no job at all in the States and no fixed visa for the States as yet.

So as it happened, this ship *Orcades* was ready to go, and I took it even without the visa for the States. I thought, "I have the Australian passport. I am the Commonwealth citizen. I can get to Canada just on my passport." Just a minute. In Sydney when the *Orcades* ship was getting ready to be cruise through, as I told you already, they look at the passport and what other papers, some fill-up papers. You read your name, "No immigration to Canada." I said, "No. Commonwealth citizenship is enough." "No, no. You have to have even visitors stamp in your passport, otherwise you cannot go into the ship." I said, "What do you mean? I already paid my passage." "Sorry."

I had two days left. I took the train to Canberra. I found the first. "Could you please help me? I have the ticket to go to Vancouver and later on maybe to United States, and I need the stamp in my passport." "Come on over." And it was the weekend. "Come on over. Come to my house, address in Canberra." He was a--. God bless him. He was a very nice first secretary. Not the ambassador. First secretary. "Come on in. Sit down, have a coffee. So you want to go to United States? That's okay, but we'll give you the visitors stamp in new passport." And that's what happened on the ship. They told me, "Do you want to be landed immigrant?" And as I told you afterward, I saw coming into Canada, I said, "Thank you very much. Yes, today I wanted to be landed immigrant in Canada or the day before. Boat landed immigrant."

NP: Things are quite different now.

AK: Mmhmm.

NP: So if we go back to your shift over to the analysis and marketing group, have I got that right?

[0:45:11]

AK: No, the--.

NP: With the Wheat Board?

AK: The first name was Technical Services, I think, of the Grain Research Laboratory direction. Technical Services and Market Research and the training was mainly the laboratory. I went through the whole gamut of the Grain Research Laboratory so that at the end of six months, I was already a doctor of cereal chemistry!

NP: What were they working on at that time, do you recall?

AK: Protein, gluten, milling, baking on the laboratory scale. That was about the main lines—barley, malting barley. There was even some kind of a beer production on it.

NP: So did you get to taste the beer?

AK: Oh, of course. I got a taste of beer just about every lunch with the laboratory guys, and already the Wheat Board guys. Some Wheat Board guys gathered in a little pub not-- Well, across the street from the Grain Exchange. So sandwich, hamburger, and a glass of beer was our lunch more often than not, not every day now.

NP: So with your job, then your change of jobs and moving to the Wheat Board, first of all, I just wanted—because his name comes up so often—I just wanted to ask you a little more about Mr. McNamara. What are some of your remembrances about him other than he was direct?

AK: I travelled with him a lot.

NP: Ah!

AK: And of course, it was the reason why I was on one-to-one, which wasn't exactly liked by the surrounding of my colleagues, you know? Incidentally, Chancy Alcock was the administrator of this new branch, Technical Services and Market Research. Chancy Alcock was chief chemist of Maple Leaf Mills in Toronto already 17 years or so, and he was the administrator of this new branch. So two of us started this branch, meanwhile I was permanently in the Grain Research Laboratory on and off after I was a month or two in the flour mill, Maple Leaf Flour Mill on Archibald, which is now closed I think. Ogilvie flour mill, small mill, Soo Line. Saul Caney and his brother, Ed Caney, and of course the bakers. I was, for instance, in the Gold Bakery on Henderson Highway. I was there at 4:00 in the morning mixing dough, which was a piece of cake to me from experience in Australia.

NP: And why would you go out to watch them mixing dough in a--?

AK: I had to do everything according to the directors of my supervisor in the Grain Research Laboratory. “Do everything, Alec, as you were employed by the bakery, including starting 4:00 in the morning.” So for about a week, I went through the whole thing—mixing the dough, preparing the loaves, proofing, raising, travelling on, out of the oven in 25 minutes, whatever. dipping it out and putting it into the cutting section, wrapping section, and out it goes. So that’s what I did in my training in the mill—up and down, up and down. The milling, the actual milling, the breaks—four usually five breaks. The first break just breaks it open and a little bit of flour, and so it goes. It’s a gradual process of reducing to the very fine flour.

[0:50:12]

And of course, already in modern milling, gradually took out most of the good stuff out of the wheat, you see? Except they stopped—in every mill—they stopped at one stage and took out what was called “semolina,” what is called “cream of wheat” at supermarkets, see? Otherwise, it was gradual process, chemical treating, and very, very fine, white flour coming at the very end of the first break. Well, I’m giving you a quick course in milling, and maybe we shouldn’t do that.

NP: What was your title in that position, can you recall?

AK: What was the title? Canadian Wheat Board Representative in Technical Services and Market Research.

NP: So they were having you do this, I would take it, so you really got to understand your customers?

AK: Exactly. So that I could talk reasonably intelligently to what was coming to me. Incidentally, McNamara knowing already my four languages fluency, nonchalantly asked me, “How about the Spanish?” “Mr. McNamara, Spanish, no.” But I had a solid six years of Latin in my senior high school. Oh, yes. So I think Spanish will be coming to me very easily. “Would you take a private course?” “Absolutely.” Paid already for by the Wheat Board. And the nice Spanish lady got me in a private course for about six months. No, more than that. One year and six months. Yeah. So, I was quite good in Spanish. Fluency only comes when you have a chance to speak it with the locals, you know?

NP: Yeah. So Mr. McNamara said there’d be some travel with this job, and you had mentioned earlier about the delegations that came over from customer countries. So I’d like to add a bit to those pieces.

AK: Yes. This branch—eventually called Market Analysis and Research—which was renamed quite a bit later, when I after having travelled left, right, and centre anywhere in the world because this Technical Services and Market Research eventually consisted of us and Chancy Alcock. We went through I don’t know how many applications just he and I before three guys had been in, you see?

NP: So who did you hire into the--?

AK: Another man from Maple leaf Mills in Toronto, chemist originally from Indonesia.

NP: What was his name?

AK: Herman Diepenbrock.

NP: Ok.

AK: And a German who went through the whole war including Leningrad defeat. Quite a guy. A Berliner, unfortunately.

NP: And his name?

AK: Al Pressburger. In fact, I made sort of a decision before the interview, the only name or two I'll mention would be McNamara and Baxter. Otherwise, I would rather stay away from the names altogether because, you know, it may become--. I'll leave it to Larry Kristjanson if he wants to talk about people that he worked with.

NP: Mmhmm.

[0:55:00]

AK: And I'm sure that some of those that you interviewed cut into things talking about others.

NP: So these men then, quite a good, let's say, ethnic mix in that you're looking at marketing the product around the world, worked together as a group to improve the situation you were talking about earlier of great stores of grain that weren't moving out of the country.

AK: Nancy, in three years, I had some wide graphs. You would be amazed. When I joined, the exports were just about here, and it started to climb a little bit. And suddenly, it was right up there at 8.5 million. And ever since, during what I call "golden era of the CWB," right from '61 when I joined until I retired in, well close to 30 years between the Board of Grain Commissioners and the Wheat Board. I had about 30 years when I officially retired, but the official retirement, in fact, I was retiring officially every year

there was a retirement party for all retiring. Frank Rowan was retiring with me in the same time. At the time it was about 15 of us retiring, a little presentation, little speeches, what have you. So this is when I officially retired. The very next week, I was back in the office having been offered consulting job full time! I said, “Full time, it’s getting a little hard for me. How about if you make it four days every week?” “Yes.” “How about if you make it from 9:00 to 4:00?” “Fine.” And a very good, very good salary here, you know?

NP: So what were your jobs then throughout those--?

AK: And I was already on pension, you see?

NP: Right. Yeah. So what were your jobs then in the 25 years or so—or even more, I guess—with the Wheat Board? Did you stay in the same position and the position just grew, or did you--?

AK: Like I said, this new branch got all kinds of assignments aside from analyzing and travelling, what have you. The technical side when the Institute was created was taken more away from this side, so it became Market Analysis and Research under Brian Oleson, Dr. Oleson, an economist. And under my suggestion and more or less direction, I suggested that we cannot—three of us—cannot travel all over the place. We have to divide it by areas. And that’s why Market Analysis and Research was divided into area desks, and each desk looked after strictly one area. So I wasn’t really in any particular area. I was sort of directing the whole thing. How was it done? Still travelling all over. Because a lot in America I got only when I got back from London.

NP: Well, let’s take a little break here because we’ve been at this for an hour, and just get a little bit of a stretch. And we’ll resume with those three areas.

[... *audio pauses*]

We took a little bit of a break, and just resuming now, you had started to talk about the different areas that the marketing group was split up into in order to make travelling a little bit more sane for people.

AK: We hired about 12 people, and I was the main interviewer of these people. So we hired about 12 so that there were one or two in each area. And when it was all set, I took the whole group to Ottawa because the liaison between the government and the CWB was the so-called Grain Division in Ottawa. So I took the whole group, first of all, to tell the Grain Division what we are all about as area desks. And in reverse, “You tell us what exactly you do.” [Laughs] They had a bit of a hard time, but they made a nice presentation.

[1:00:52]

NP: Well, you know, that puzzled me too. So maybe you can clear this up. What was the connection between the Grains group in Ottawa and the Canadian Grain Commission and the Wheat Board? How did they liaise? What were the differences in responsibilities?

AK: Well, first of all there was an administrative branch of CWB, which was switching from Minister of Justice at one time, Minister of Commerce at one time, another minister of something else at one time. In other words, the Wheat Board—the crown corporation, not the civil service outfit—was travelling from one ministry to another so that at different times a different minister was in charge of the Wheat Board, knowing very little or nothing about it. Therefore, he knew he needed a liaison which was following almost day-to-day business of the Canadian Wheat Board—constant phoning, reporting for that.

NP: And that was the Grains group? And they would be doing the same thing with the Grain Commission? Sort of trying to, the Grain Commission, trying to pull it all together and feed up to the minister?

AK: That's right.

NP: So that group followed the minister around, whoever he might have been?

AK: Yeah. Mitchell Sharp of course, was one time very influential and very much interested. He was the one minister who knew quite a bit about the Wheat Board and was interested in and visited very often, you know? I've got a few photographs with him in the boardroom with the board. Few others.

NP: So what would a typical day on the job been like for you? Is that easy to say?

AK: Because there was so many different tasks of this division, there was really no typical day at all. A typical day, say, when the project came to invite a foreign delegation, foreign clients—say from Switzerland—I was assigned to design the whole trip across Canada. Get the tickets, get the communication with---. Usually, it was the invitation was sent to some kind of a government office, which was in charge of food supply, what have you.

NP: And when you travelled—you may have mentioned this off-tape—but you had said that as well as being the coordinator for the various desks by region, you also were responsible for Africa. So tell us a little bit about your experiences in working with Africa.

AK: In Africa I--. You see, I made, what, I don't know how many business visits in 89 countries over and over again. On one trip to Africa, I covered five or six countries, starting in the west—Senegal, Ivory Coast and then later Nigeria. And that was about it. Then on another trip, North Africa—Libya, Tunisia, Morocco—this kind of thing, so that one business trip usually covered four, five or more countries.

[1:05:24]

NP: And what was the goal of the business--?

AK: I have them tabulated here.

NP: Oh, good. I'm pleased to hear that.

AK: But it's only my handwriting. [Laughs]

NP: Oh, that's fine.

AK: I had it tabulated. I'll keep it for myself.

NP: Yeah. If you don't mind, if we could make a copy and get you the original?

AK: No, I would rather--.

NP: Ok. Not a problem. What would a business trip entail? Besides the countries you visited, what did you do?

AK: It started with the Telex to various embassies. "Would you please arrange for whatever arrangement you could make with whatever government entity is there in charge of milling and baking, or general food supply?" Usually there is a ministry of some kind of food supply with a branch for milling and baking. "So would you please arrange that?" So when I got to a country, say Ivory Coast, there was already arrangement with visits to four or five bakeries, visits to, at that time, two flour mills. Was there two already? No there was only one under French management. Mr. Moreau was owner and manager—very nice mill. And that was it. Mills, bakeries, government offices. Agents, multinationals, if they had an office there, always contact with them because they in fact were agents of the Wheat Board by contact. All multinationals.

NP: So how would you make the deal?

AK: On these trips there was no deal made. It was a breaking the ground for a possible deal. In fact, I was almost forbidden to try to even start talking some deals, which I couldn't help not to do. I went into it without hesitation because to me, this is why I was there. And the deal in Africa was relatively small except Ghana, where we made some headway, where the head miller of one mill was a Czech, so I made a very good contact with them. On the first trip to Africa, two of us went, Herman and I. So in Ghana, there was a good chance to start something. They, in fact, came as visiting clients on a cross-Canada tour. I conducted them. In Libya, I think we made something in durum, pastas. Italy, you know? In Tunisia, something in the Red Spring wheat possibly. In Morocco, I can't remember, but it wasn't terribly big anyhow.

NP: Who was supplying them at the time? Who was supplying their grains at the time? Was it grown in their countries or was it being--.

AK: No, none. None at all. That was the simple part. You didn't have to study how much they produced themselves. All they needed and all the consumption of bread based on some kind of wheat was, you know, imported. So for instance, in Ivory Coast, France was the main supplier, if not the only supplier. Other countries, United States, France, Italy sometimes. Who else? That was about it.

[1:10:03]

NP: What—and I don't know if you can answer this—but what was the reaction of those people that already had the business there to the Canadians coming over and trying to get a part of the market? Did you ever know?

AK: Initially, quite friendly. There was the Great Plains Association, which was some kind of a competitor to the Wheat Board. I should mention that at times, there was quite a strong club, eh, in Washington to create something like the Canadian Wheat Board in the United States. No kidding! It was on and on was going for, I think, couple years before it died down, you know? But they were thinking of it. They were definitely thinking of it.

NP: I'm going to, a little later on, ask you about what were you most proud of in the work you did, but since we're talking now about the marketing of a product, what were your greatest successes or disappointments or both in that regard?

AK: Well eventually, I was on just about every long-term agreement or contract, service contract negotiations as a member on the team. All over the place even if I was already in a certain area. And of course, when I was assigned to Latin America, that big

business in Latin America started very fast, namely with Brazil. But in Colombia as well a little bit, in Venezuela a little bit. What else in Latin America? I can't remember.

NP: Anything in Chile?

AK: Peru, Ecuador, Chile. Yes, Chile. Yes. Bits and pieces.

NP: So this was all market that was not there before? So even though it might be fairly small sales, they were sales that weren't there before.

AK: These markets had been there before, but smaller and not really knowing what the Wheat Board was about, you know? So my function was just travelling, besides being member of negotiating teams. The--.

NP: So when you send--. Sorry.

AK: Yeah. That was before I was on the negotiating teams because after that, the area I worked—the analysis—I was glad to be back at the desk doing the mathematical things and analyzing and what have you. But you have to remember that every country I visited, usually four or five on a business trip, there was a hefty report. First of all, a business report, then the technical part. Listing all the details which I picked up in the bakery. “How did they make? How much consumption? How was it channeled into the markets?” That was in the bakeries. In the mills, from top to the bottom. “How was it done? What was the machinery?” And that's why I was very popular with Meachin [sp?] in Germany, Buhler in Switzerland, manufacturers of milling machinery, you know? They thought, “Oh, that guy Kubicek travels a lot. He might be useful in recommending this.” And Roncaglia of Italy. Milling equipment.

NP: You've mentioned a negotiating team. What were they negotiating?

[1:14:53]

AK: First of all, there was a knowledge or maybe a tender even of the intention as to what they would be thinking of. For instance, long term agreement, yes, three years. “How much within three years?” “Three million, four million tonnes.” “Ok, we'll think of it.” And then the debate was, “Can you ship it reasonably?” “Yes.” You see, the Wheat Board at that time was selling on the FOB business, Free On Board. That's where the Wheat Board function stopped. Cost insurance, freight, was done by the multinationals. So even if they were not able to sell for export, they did eventually enter into the business doing the freight insurance and cost of, you know, trimming the ship and this kind of cost before the ship could leave the harbour, because the CWB function finished when

the spout was spouting it into the hold of the ship. That's where we ended up. Eventually—and of course, I stopped following it—but I think now the Wheat Board would sell on CIF basis as well.

NP: On which basis?

AK: CIF, that is called Cost Insurance Freight. FOB, Free On Board. CIF, Cost Insurance Freight.

NP: Who made up the negotiating team?

AK: Usually the chief commissioner or assistant chief, sometimes the sales manager, sometimes the treasurer or somebody from the accounting side, and that was it. That was all.

NP: Now you mentioned that you spent some time in London, how did that come about?

AK: It was offered to me.

NP: And what was the job?

AK: Just two of us, manager and myself as an assistant manager at the time. Before that, the office was larger, about four, but then it was reduced to two. And I spent three years plus, three years plus, in the London branch office.

NP: And why did they have a London branch office in particular?

AK: Big business—the whole flour milling in London, in England, and the malt whiskey in Scotland was Canadian grain, you know? Most of the milling, high quality Red Spring wheat was required by England. They would hardly touch anything else, I guess, as a matter of some kind of Commonwealth duty. They did import some Australian wheat, and of course, they did import some American wheat as well so that there was the Grain Exporting Countries Monitoring Committee formed from all these exporting countries exporting to England. Monitoring Committee with the representative of Australian Wheat Board, Argentinian Wheat Board, International Wheat Council, Canadian Wheat Board, and US. No Wheat Board in US— usually trade commissioner of the American embassy. And we met every week, going from embassy to embassy. American, Australian, and so on and so forth. I was nominated probably because I was the oldest and because the Wheat Board as a board—as it was called—board-marketing system was the largest in the world. I was the chairman on this monitoring committee. What we did? Exchanging prices, which were posted. Talking

about prospects of crop—they send that—closely guarding the secret business in the making, of course, because that would have been dynamite.

[1:20:32]

NP: That's quite a balancing act, I would think.

AK: Yes, but it was very friendly and very useful because all this was immediate [details?], almost the very same day. The meeting was 10:00 in the morning or 9:30 to lunchtime, lunch together. Even in the Playboy Club because the American Trade Commissioner at that time was a member of the Playboy Club, so he had to have the luncheon for the Monitoring Committee in Playboy Club. Fine with us! That was when I got in the soup.

NP: In the soup!

AK: One day I was alone in the office. The manager was travelling somewhere. The telephone, "Hello?" "Hello, this is Larry speaking." I said, "Larry who?" Because Larry Hall was the member of the American side in our Monitoring Committee. So I thought it was Larry hall phoning. So I said, "Larry who?" A little pause. "Larry. Larry Kristjanson." And I could feel that he was-- Well, he was a touchy guy, you see? He was offended a bit, I think. But anyhow, we had a nice meeting. The manager came back, and Larry and I met close to the airport in restaurant, had dinner, and then Larry next day flew back to Canada. I travelled with Larry quite a bit, at least twice or three times to Brazil. Larry was the chief negotiator.

NP: So was he upset about the Playboy Club connection?

AK: No, Larry was upset that I didn't recognize when he said, "This is Larry speaking." Who else would it be than Larry from the Canadian Wheat Board, who was then, was he already assistant chief? Or just commissioner? I forgot.

NP: He was there for some time, I understand

AK: But anyhow, he was travelling from Moscow. We didn't even know he was there, and he completed some hefty, hefty deal. Not completely, I don't think, prepared.

NP: That must have been quite the deal.

AK: Not the largest one by any means, but quite a deal. The very large one that I was present at with the service again was concluded in London.

NP: When would that have been?

AK: That was when I was still in London, '71/'72.

NP: Hm!

AK: Yeah.

NP: What—just getting back again to the general questions here—what would you like people to know most about the work you did? I mean, we have this recording to pass on to history. What would you like them to know most about what you did in the grain industry?

AK: That I was most grateful for this unique opportunity, which was not given to many, let's face it. That was a splendid opportunity, which very, very few get in their lifetime. Why I got it? I have no explanation. But what I would like people to know that I put my best into it. Thinking most of the every step in every country of the monopoly I represented. It was not the CW which was the monopoly, it was—at the time—close to 200,000 orders or at least 150 plus orders of the permanent book, which was the number of the farmers in western Canada. Nancy, I was shocked when just the other day, when the debate goes on about the plebiscite what have you. When on the news in a truly democratic way of doing things, 75,000 of the farmers in western Canada should be allowed to vote. I couldn't believe that was the first time I learned that from that part, from that number to that number, so many left. So many left. I couldn't believe it. Oh, we don't really need that. Couldn't believe it.

[1:26:41]

So, you know, the monopoly really starts with some of the multinationals. Without mentioning many names, they now have the land, they have the country elevators, they even have the land in foreign countries. That's where the monopoly will be. That should not be recorded, you know.

NP: It's um--.

AK: That debate should not be recorded.

NP: Yeah. We really didn't get into the debate and we won't get into the debate because it's a very sensitive issue and not part of what we're looking at here. Although, I think in ten years' time, there will be an opportunity to follow up with some people who predict one thing versus the other, and what actually has transpired. But let's--. You just answered the questions "What would you like people to know about the work that you did. What do you think might surprise people about the work that you did?" So when you say for example, "Well, I was in marketing and analysis," that's a pretty broad term. So what do you think might surprise people who knew very little about that branch?

AK: Oh, you mean the actual branch of the market analysis?

NP: Well, just what you did? Like, you know, they might say, "Oh, gee. Marketing analysis, that's pretty dull."

AK: Oh, eventually, I should say, I did get Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, which was my last area I looked after and travelled to with McNamara several times. So the actual analytical work was in case of Soviet Union especially. A very complex analyzing. What I did, I dissected it into all the individual republics, and there was ways and means to follow the weather, knowing the acreage in each republic, and putting it together into a sort of a total number. And knowing roughly what was coming into the domestic channels in way of their own production. Always big, big deficit. Why? Many reasons, especially the agriculture infrastructure down to the [inaudible] all the time. A good example: Travelling from Moscow airport to the centre of the city, you travel along the cemetery of tractors. Hundreds of them unattended to, obviously waiting to be repaired. Never touched obviously. That kind of thing. Poor production figure obvious. Obvious.

[1:30:17]

It was, in fact, much better than the final delivery—forced delivery—showed because a co-op farm of acreage maybe not much larger than a very large grain farm in western Canada had about 1,500, 2,000 people. These people have to live. These people have to eat, these people have to grab what they could off what the fields produced. In other words, you could call it black market. It was not the black market. They took what they could over and above what they had to deliver to the government channels. And, of course, what they had to deliver was never met.

Another thing was good old Nikita Khrushchev. Guess what happened? He is invited to United States in, I think, 1955. And of course, they can do it just as good as we did in the Wheat Board, showing clients what have you, prospective clients. And they showed him grain growing areas and unfortunately to Ukraine especially—main wheat growing area—corn growing and the livestock production. And Nikita thinks of chronic shortage of meat in the Soviet Union. "Corn is the answer." He comes back,

“Let’s start completely new planning of our agriculture, granary culture. A lot of wheat has to go, and we start planting corn.” In two years or so, the wheat production was going down and down in the Soviet Union, plus some misfortunates of weather as well, of course. Let’s be fair. But that was one of the main reasons why suddenly Soviet Union was the main client.

And by God, you asked me what did the competition think of the CWB? When McNamara concluded the first huge deal in Ottawa with an export representative, there was criticism you wouldn’t believe from south of the border. Only that quite a few years after, Continental Grain was concluded the first very large deal with the Soviet Union as well. In between, it was just the Canadian Wheat Board doing business. Same with Cuba. Cuba was my, not first--. My first business trip was to Brazil. [inaudible]Two exhibition, baker exhibition. Big, big exhibition hall. Bakeries from all European countries. And Canada had a stand which was not necessarily the Wheat Board, but that was the government exhibition centre. What do you call? There’s a special centre still today, I’m sure—just international exhibitions. So they had the stand. A nice train, model train running, running through the mountains, elevators, terminals, ports, what have you. And in front, there was a picture with a field and the combine and the big spout, and in the back, there was a big bucket of wheat. And the conveyor, little conveyor was pushing it into the spout so that in the window, the grain was coming for everybody to see, coming into the train track or whatever. So I was assigned there. Why not have it as a Wheat Board stand as well? And that was my first assignment. Not bad. Not bad. The second real business trip was Cuba, and that was useful.

[1:35:48]

NP: Describe Cuba and working there.

AK: That’s where the Spanish came in. Again, legendary McNamara calls me in. “How’s your Spanish, Alec?” “Well, I’m trying hard. Not too bad.” “You think you could communicate?” “Well, sure.” “The fluency in language, in Spanish, is not very fluent, but I know the language by now quite well.” “Do you think you would go to Cuba?” “Of course, I would go to Cuba!” But how about the-. It was still, there was the end of revolution. Fidel already is fully established. Some government offices are already established, and he has still some friends from the States who actually participated with him marching to Havana and winning the revolution, including Errol Flynn was marching with Castro into the Havana victory, you know? This kind of thing. So I was already getting into that kind of thing when it was established.

But there was still a number of large crowds of girls with red—white shirts, red skirts, blue button braids—and militia machine guns, what have you. Dangerous place. But anyhow, that was--. Politics was none of my business, except I was in a ticklish situation. I had not the Canadian passport. I still had only Australian passport. I was of Czechoslovakian origin. Obviously for already secret police, a refugee. So it wasn’t that easy, but anyhow, the main objective was the flour mill. I got into the flour mill with two officers from the government who were sent by office. None of them speak, well, one of them spoke English, but when we got to the mill, already

it was fully in the hands of the Russians. The two officials, experienced milling experts, were Russians. Not a word of English. But my Russian was not fluent. There was one guy who had a bit of English he could translate. So how was the communication going? Slow but good. I had two Russians in front of me—friendly—showing me the mill. I had to turn around often not to look because it was in shambles. Bran at one floor was coming through the spout on the floor. The brake machines, some of them were not properly working. All kinds of things. “Could I see the flour sample?” “Yes.” A mess!

[1:39:59]

So back in the office after, close to what I was visiting—the machinery, what have you—“What do you think of it?” I thought, “My best way is to be quite frank. See the card? Technical Services and Market Research. Technical services. This actually could be an offer from CWB in Canada. That thing here needs technical help.” “You think so?” “Yes, I do gentlemen. Forgive me if I’m critical.” “Not at all. We agree with you 100 percent.” This and that further details, and of course, at that time, McNamara knew. That’s why he sent me there without even mentioning it. That the Iron Curtain fell between the States and Cuba. There was no more grain. Absolutely none lined up from the United States to Cuba. They knew it. They knew it, and they nonchalantly asked. That’s where I always thought my jurisdiction, my assignment altogether, you know? Well, not quite, because I knew that what McNamara had in mind was not just researching technical what have you.

What was appealing to them—and later on it was realized—that a chief chemist was sent from the institute to this mill to establish proper mill laboratory. But in any case, back to this initial discussion, “Do you think that we could probably get your good quality wheat?” They knew that much about Canadian wheat. “You think we could get it from Canada?” “Yes. I think the shipping would be a bit of a problem because of going through Gulf of Mexico would not be possible through the States, as would usually be the route. So, that would have to be solved.” “Don’t worry about that. We will solve that. We will solve that with our friends in the Soviet Union. But do you think that Canada could supply?” The same year, Cuba has become the largest client of CWB on per capita basis. Sold it later Czech Republic. That we’re coming to. That was funny too. What was--?

NP: So did you ever go back to Cuba after the things were--?

AK: Oh, yeah. That should be mentioned. I designed already when the institute was established--.

NP: The Canadian International Grains Institute [CIGI]?

AK: That’s right. There would be quite a bit of credit taking for these kind of programs. Anyhow, that’s ok. But there were many programs that I say we established with Cuba. Feed grains, milling, baking. I had 15 bakers for one country course in the Institute in

Winnipeg for three weeks or more. I had couple or three millers and all kinds of--. And of course, we had programs as required overseas in Havana. We had a general course about Canadian wheat. We had the feed symposium, feed grains course, and what else? Something else. Many programs so that I travelled to Havana quite often.

[1:45:16]

NP: And did things come up to good quality standards then by the time you'd stopped visiting there? Things were running well?

AK: Very well. Very well. The bakers were doing very good job. And of course, the flour was very different from what it used to be. And the supply of--. The main thing was the supply of daily bread.

NP: How long would you spend on one of these trips in each place?

AK: Three, four days. Up to a week.

NP: I'm going to move along because we have some other questions. With the exception of I really would like you to tell the story of when you went back to Czechoslovakia as a representative of the Wheat Board. Can you tell us a bit about that story?

AK: That story, again, has a sort of a preamble. When I was already going strong in the Wheat Board with the service department and always with the very top, that was my advantage and his advantage as well because of maybe the other departments what have you, sales department, they often felt that I was stepping on their territory. I wasn't. I was just trailblazer if you like. And of course, then, automatically becoming a member of the negotiating team. Organizing it from A to Z. "There you go, negotiating to such-and-such country. Alec, you organize it." Within an hour, I had it all lined up, and within the next week, I had the tickets. I had everything ready to go. And of course, negotiations, quite fun. Minute taking.

NP: Why would negotiations be such great fun?

AK: Because of the discussions back and forth. It was a chess game, you know? Opening, a middle game, and the ending. And the ending was usually—well, not usually--. Well, these are confidential things, but I tell you. After these preambles, which could take a few days, the ending was done certainly within less than a day. And the very ending was very fast.

NP: Were there--.

AK: In other words, pricing the--. We're talking here now, we're describing sales contract. Long-term agreement was easy. "Can you supply? Can you send the ships? At what time? How large the ships will be?" Incidentally there were so-called "salties" loading at the Lakehead as well, but those were only smaller overseas ships. But there was direct exports, as you know, from the Lakehead. Not too many, but there were some.

NP: This might be something too that you feel is confidential, but I'm not sure. Were there some countries that were more fun to negotiate with than others?

AK: Yes, yes. Well, actually, that's not more, but my last hurrah when I was in charge of Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was GDR [German Democratic Republic/East Germany]. And there, I think, I'm not bragging when I could say I could take a lot of credit for a huge business that developed in feed barley. There was never such large business in feed barley in history of CWB.

[1:50:18]

NP: And what do you think the secret to that success was?

AK: The secret was first, negotiation with [inaudible] was the government company of GDR looking after exports, imports. They have some exports, not of grain—other things as well. But they liked to do negotiating in either East Berlin, of course, or Leipzig. They had an office in Leipzig. You pronounce it Lip-zig. The site of International Fairs, spring and fall. And the secret was that at this first negotiation, there was the boss of [GDR export company] and his assistant. And they say, "You know, we have a space, nice space, in the Messehaus," which was one of the large buildings of the International Fair of all kinds in Leipzig for foodstuffs. "And we have a nice space on the third floor close to other organizations such as yours, and that would be very nice if the Wheat Board would establish a stand there." What was--?

Oh, yes. I think Jim Leibfried was the commissioner then, and he was the chief negotiator then. And he thought, "And how much would it take to establish it?" "Well, somebody would have to come and work at it." And that was close to the fall, you know spring and fall, for couple of weeks. Close to the fall. "Could it be done before the fall?" "Well, it all depends how soon somebody who would come and work on it, how soon he could put it together." "Alec, what do you think? Would you go there?" "I go there tomorrow." As a metaphor. "You mean it? How about going home a little while?" "No, I'll go to East Berlin tomorrow." "Ok." "And I go to Leipzig, of course. That's where it will be established." So, here I'm in East Berlin, Checkpoint Charlie, train to Leipzig, and here I am. Of course, they were expecting me, and I started on it. It was a nice space. Small. I would say not even half of the living room. A nice pantry and kitchenette and a hall, and a display window. Empty. "Kubicek, what are you going to do with it?" [GDR

export company], which was fully behind me and very happy that I was there to establish it, they gave me a guy who was very experienced in building this kind of thing.

[1:54:30]

“So, what would you like to do?” “Ok. I would like to have sort of a rustic corner for the dining room in one corner of that what could be living room. And in the other corner, we make sort of an office. Easy chairs, couch, coffee table, and of course the pantry.” Quite a space, shelf space, cupboards. Of course, we had to have liquor and little things to offer, what have you, because as it happened, visitors came quite a bit, you see? And of course, there was [inaudible], the Czechoslovakian import. There was [inaudible] on the floor above. There was Bulgarian import organization on the same floor. There was Italians across the corridor. So it was just an ideal, absolutely ideal place. And of course, the [GDR export company], big office on the floor upstairs ready for the long-term agreement. That was the big thing. And of course, the long-term agreement was not concluded at the same time, but a year, next year later at the spring fair–long-term agreement.

NP: Personal relationships seemed to have played a part in--.

AK: So, with the GDR team, that was a lot of fun. That was a lot of fun. When we concluded, and that was, you know, that was euphoria for us.

NP: What was the least fun? If not a specific negotiating teams, maybe the characteristics of those negotiating teams that made them less fun to deal with.

AK: That was hard to think. Hard to think. There was really never any controversy. By fun, I mean that we had quite a social--.

End of Interview.