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Company Affiliations: United Grain Growers (UGG)

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Summary: Retired manager of terminal elevators for United Grain Growers Eric Titheridge discusses his career in the Canadian grain industry both in the Prairies and in port cities. He first recalls his experience in the Second World War, which led him to emigrate to Canada. He describes his first role in UGG as a country elevator manager and then country elevator superintendent in charge of a large district. He shares the importance of elevator managers integrating into the community, the relationship with local grain competition, the major agricultural issues of the time, and the modernization of equipment in the elevators. Titheridge then discusses his move to terminal elevator manager for both Thunder Bay and Vancouver, what elevators UGG had at the time, and the improvements made to increase efficiency. He recalls his relationship with the Canadian Grain Commission, the Canadian Wheat Board, and the railways, and major industry changes that have impacted those organizations. Other topics discussed include the increase in specialty crops, differences in shipping between Thunder Bay and Vancouver, labour relations with grain handlers, interactions with local engineers, terminals making money through cleaning and blending, and Canada's success as a grain trader.

Keywords: United Grain Growers (UGG); Country grain elevators; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Terminal grain elevators—British Columbia; Grain elevators—equipment and supplies; Grain elevator managers; Grain farmers/producers; Grain storage; Canadian Wheat Board (CWB); Grain buying; Grain transportation—rail; Grain transportation—ships; Dust control; Grain pests; Grain export destinations; Modernization; Computerization; Automation; Specialty crops; Non-board grains; Grain varieties; St. Lawrence Seaway; Canadian Grain Commission (CGC); Agricultural policy; Government policy; Labour relations; Labour strikes; Grain pellets; UGG Elevator A; UGG Elevator M; Thunder Bay Elevator; World War II; World War II veterans

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: Here we go. Okay. I think we're ready to go. I'm here this afternoon with Mr. Eric Titheridge, and maybe we could just start with some general questions about your life—when you were born, where you grew up?

ET: Well, that's not terribly interesting. I was born in southern England. Of course, the war was on when I left school, so I joined up as soon as I was 18 with the Royal Air Force. I was accepted as air crew, so I did my initial training and then was sent over to the United States to train as a pilot in Georgia and Alabama. But unfortunately, I didn't make the pilot, so I had to revert to Trenton in Canada, and then we were told that we would be budding navigators. So they said which manning depot did I want to go to? So I thought, "Well, I'd like to see as much of the world as I could." So I put down for Edmonton. Well, like everything else in the service, when they got to the Ts, all the favourite things were filled up, and I ended up in Brandon. That really wasn't too bad because it was because I was in Brandon and had a 48 hour leave at Clear Lake that I met my lovely wife.

So I went from Brandon into 5 AOS [Air Observer School] in Winnipeg, and then after I finished the course, I went back to England, did my operational training, and started flying over France. But then we were shipped out to North Africa. So once the North African campaign was over and captured Sicily, we were posted to Italy. I did most of my flying out of the east coast of Italy, where we were used to intercept oil from the Ploiesti oilfields in Romania that flowed up the Danube either by barge or by rail to Germany. So that was our primary role, but we did bomb marshalling yards and strategic targets of one sort or ananother. But essentially, that was my role in the war.

Then when I'd finished my tour, they shipped me back to Palestine as an instructor. So I spent a year in Palestine. That was before Israel was formed. Then from Palestine, I was sent back to the desert again because we were monitoring the return of troops from India through the Med, and we had aircraft equipped with lifeboats in case one of them had to ditch in the Med, and we were there to pick him up. Well, the Navy was there too with a little--. I don't know what they call it. P.T. boat of some sort. But that was the end of my role.

So then I got back. The war was over by then, so I got back to England, I think, it was in about July of 1946, and I'd already applied to emigrate to Canada and had been accepted as a student at the University of Manitoba. The only problem was getting here. Transport was very difficult, but I was lucky enough to find a position as cabin boy on an old tramp steamer, an old 10,000 tonne tramp steamer which left from the port near Edinburgh, Grangemouth, in Scotland. So I rushed up there and got on the boat. We didn't know whether we were going to land anywhere between Montreal and, well, the East Coast of the United States, but they did get orders 48 hours out, and they came into Montreal. So I got off the boat onto the train and got to Winnipeg, and Ruth was meeting me at the station, and we had our first kiss. That weekend we got engaged, and I started classes on the Monday. So that's a brief history of my life up to the point where I got through university and then started in the grain trade.

[0:05:49]

NP: How did you make the--? Were you taking agriculture related courses at the university?

ET: Oh, yes. I graduated in Agriculture. Yeah.

NP: Any specialty?

ET: No. I was--. Well, economics, but the general course with some economics. Then I was writing for the student newspaper, and the United Grain had a magazine called the *Country Guide*, so when I was about to graduate—I guess it was the year before—I had an invitation to meet with the editor of the *Country Guide*. I thought, "Well, maybe they wanted me to become some sort of a writer for the *Country Guide*." But when the final year was up, I applied for a job, and I wasn't posted to the *Country Guide* at all. I was sent out to a country elevator to learn how to buy grain. So I spent my early years learning the rudiments of the Prairie end of the grain trade, and then after a while, I was moved in to manage the terminals at Thunder Bay and Vancouver. So that's how I came to know a little bit about the Thunder Bay situation.

NP: What would--. Well, first of all, when did you begin your career with UGG?

ET: I started in 1949. I first went to Thunder Bay, I think, escorting some agents from all over the Prairies. We used to give them a sort of a free trip, a selected group. Twenty, twenty-five selected agents would get a ride to Thunder Bay and look all over the terminals and then come back again. I think I was detailed to shepherd these 25 rowdy agents. That was my first exposure to the terminal. But then they decided that I better begin on the lower end of the management side of the terminals, so I started that, I think, in 1960 or '61 or so.

It was about the time that the big collapse of the big annex at Elevator A in Thunder Bay. So after that happened, I was running to Thunder Bay, I think, twice a month for a long time because we made a film of the reconstruction of that annex, and it's still around, I imagine. But I wouldn't have a clue where it was.

NP: So when you started in the country elevators, where were you stationed?

ET: I was stationed in Swan Lake, Manitoba. Yeah. Just a small point. We were sort of living in a hotel and learning all about farmers, particularly Belgian farmers. Well, people who had emigrated from Belgium.

NP: They had established a--?

ET: Yeah, there was a big establishment of Belgian-descended farmers from there and Mariapolis**.** It was quite a concentration. They used to play Belgian bowls in the pub, or the hotel I should say, at Swan Lake.

[0:10:12]

NP: Did you know anything about the origin of that group? When they came over to--?

ET: No, I have no idea. I presume they came in the early 1900s. Some of them would, and then when one or two got here, they would write home, and they'd attract two or three more. Land was available. I think that's when we start to think about the terminals, it means nothing unless you think about the Prairies behind it because if the Prairies weren't here growing grain, we wouldn't have any need for terminals. So we were very closely interlinked with what happened on the Prairies.

NP: What would a--. Well, I guess a couple of questions I have about that time in your early career. As somebody from England ending up in a small Prairie community and getting your first taste of the ins and outs of the grain trade, anything strike you as notable or--?

ET: No, nothing at all. Everybody accepted me. I believe the fact that there were, of course, English speaking natives there, or Canadian speaking natives, whatever you like to say, as well as these Belgian people, and I presume there might have been an intermixture of another odd nationality, but I was thoroughly accepted. I had no problems at all socially or anything like that.

NP: What would a typical workday look like for you?

ET: Oh, I can't remember. I think we started at 8:00 in the morning, and we ended whenever work ended. Hours were not specially adhered to. If there was work to be done, you worked. Otherwise, I think we would probably finish up about 5:00. But I know that there were times if a quota was on, you'd work 8:00 or 9:00 or 10:00 at night, even later if necessary.

NP: What does it mean by a quota was on?

ET: Well, the Wheat Board determines how many bushels per acre a farmer could deliver because storage was always a problem. And of course, you had to deliver grain in order to get some money. So in order to get an income, the farmers wanted to get their grain in as fast as they could and would haul until the cows came home if we had space to take it. Of course, through the probably

late ‘60s early ‘70s, the construction of country storage was the main thing because the grain wasn’t being sold. The export trade wasn’t taking it all, and the big crops, and so the only money that elevator companies could make would be out of storage. So the construction of annexes to hold grain across the Prairies was rampant all through those early ‘70s and mid ‘70s.

But of course, now, it’s completely changed. We’ve just knocked everything all the way down from 1,500 or 16-1,700 or something elevators down to probably less than 400, I guess. Of course, they’re all bigger, and they can load 90 cars in 24 hours now. [Laughs] No elevator was capable of doing that in my day.

NP: When you were first there, which was fairly soon after the war, I guess-.

ET: Well, I was there, and I was sort of running around on the fringe of the trade from 1949 on, but to be active--. Well, of course, before I did, I spent about, oh, six or seven years as a country superintendent before I became involved with the terminal.

[0:15:16]

NP: What does a country superintendent do?

ET: Well, I had an area—what they called district—and my district happened to be southern Manitoba, and I went right across to the Alberta border south of the CPR [Canadian Pacific Railway].

NP: Wow.

ET: So I did a lot of travelling all over southern Manitoba and southern Saskatchewan in that job. We would have what we called a traveller. He was a travelling superintendent. I was a divisional superintendent, but I had three travellers. One worked out of southern Manitoba, one worked out of eastern Saskatchewan, and the other guy out of Swift Current. Well, not out of Swift Current, out of Assiniboia, which wasn’t far from Swift Current. So yeah, that was an interesting period in the country end of it.

NP: And what kind of things would you be called on to do as the--?

ET: Well, basically supervising. You had to make sure that your–. Well, first of all, the travelling superintendent was doing his job, and then you had a chance to sum up the capabilities and performance of every buyer that you had within that district. So that was essentially what we did. We’d travel around for a week at a time several times a year in each traveller’s district.

NP: Now, the buyers, were they different from the country elevator managers?

ET: No, the buyer was the manager. There was only a one-man show. Well, occasionally, they'd have a helper. If he was very busy, he would hire a local person to help him, but there were no managers in those days. The country buyer was the manager. Yeah.

NP: Did they actually go out to see the farmers to buy, or was it the farmers--?

ET: Oh, a little bit of both, but mostly they all knew each other. The agent normally was usually from that particular area, and a lot of the farmers he went to school with and all those sorts of things. Now, that wasn't universal. We did have to move strangers in, but it was his job then to make himself socially acceptable in the community and join whatever, whether it was the Masons or the Legion or Church or all those sorts of things. His wife would have to get a place for herself in the community, and the children—if there were any children—because these buyers all had their own--. The company had cottages. They had residences for the buyers. So they, at least 99 percent of the time, they had residences in each little town. Wherever there was an elevator, there was also an elevator cottage.

NP: Close by? Close by the elevators or walking distances, anyway?

ET: Always within walking distance, yeah. Always within walking distance. That enabled--. You didn't have to worry about whether there was a living accommodation for a new man. The company cottage was there. A lot of them were good, and a lot of them weren't so good. There were some happy housewives and some pretty unhappy housewives. The cottages were often a bone of contention all right. If there was a real serious problem, you'd be able to get the construction crew in to make a few changes to accommodate whatever was needed.

NP: Did UGG have its own construction firm?

ET: No, but it had a very close association with an outfit called Harper Construction, and the proprietor of that was a guy by the name of Lundman, a Swedish chap. He was sort of, you might say, although he was at arm's length, he virtually did all his work for United Grain.

[0:20:04]

NP: Did he build the elevators, then, as well?

ET: Oh, yes. Yeah, yeah. Whenever you needed new elevators, he was the guy who recruited the necessary labour and ordered the lumber and got it built.

NP: Where did he operate out of, Manitoba?

ET: In Winnipeg.

NP: Oh, okay.

ET: Yeah. He was a Winnipeg guy.

NP: Now, these little houses, this is the first time I've heard about them. So were they built at the same time as the elevators were built, or did they buy one available in the community?

ET: Oh, it varied. If it was a new elevator, there was probably a new cottage built at the same time, but often the house had been there longer than the elevator, or sometimes it was a new one at an older house. There was no uniform--. And they weren't the same design or anything. They varied from palaces to–. Well, not very many palaces, but some were good, and some were rather quite bad.

NP: Can you recall the ones that were the best, the ones that everybody wished they had?

ET: Well, I don't think there was much envy between--. The elevator agents were far enough apart that I don't think there was any envy between one station and another. But it was sweet little things like I remember one lady at Glenbain. She was a very short lady, and they decided to put all the kitchen cupboards up near the ceiling. Even with a step ladder, she could hardly reach them. I remember we had to do something about that. They were usually as good as the surrounding village houses were. They were all part and parcel of the same thing. The little town, the people living there, you wouldn't be able to recognize or isolate the grain buyer's cottage from half a dozen others in town.

NP: When you think back to those early days and delivery of grain to the elevators, you mentioned that there was a change in size or at least the storage capacity. Were they still delivering by horses back then or--?

ET: Yeah. Horse and wagon, but trucks were--. Horses and wagons were less, only about 10 or 15 percent, I guess. Most of the farmers had their own truck that would be able to haul at the most three tonnes. That was a big truck. A lot of them came in, of

course, in pickups. You had a variety of--. And it depended where you were. The horses and wagons were more common up in the Ukrainian district around, say, Dauphin and north of there, whereas I think farmers were generally a little more prosperous or up to date than they were in some of those northern areas. But no, the horses and wagons, I remember one came in, and they always had—well, not always, but occasionally, more often than not—illicit liquor, screech or hooch. They'd distill it themselves, and that was to keep the cold out while they were--. 10 miles or 12 miles or 15 miles with a horse and wagon in 20 or 30 below is quite a harrowing experience.

NP: So the screech, is that of a barley type?

ET: Oh, they would use just about anything that was available to them, I think, and everybody would have their own formula. I never tasted the stuff. I was scared.

NP: You were scared?

ET: Yeah. Well, I never was much of a spirits man, so no, I didn't taste it myself, but I heard all of these stories about it coming in.

[0:25:01]

NP: When you became one of the supervisors, what kind of issues were you dealing with?

ET: In the country?

NP: Uh-huh.

ET: Oh, just about anything that came up. It seemed to me one of the things we contended with was the LIFT program [Lower Inventories for Tomorrow] that Otto Lang introduced.

NP: When would that have been?

ET: Gosh, I don't know. I should think in the '70s.

NP: Yes, I think--.

RT: No, before that, Dusty.

ET: Was it before that?

RT: I'm sure.

ET: In the late '60s maybe? But there was a case where Otto decided that--. We looked that up the other day. LIFT was for Land Inventory for Tomorrow.

RT: Lower Inventory. Lower.

ET: Lower Inventory? Well, something like that. The idea was, anyway, to take land out of production and pay the farmer for the number of acres he idled instead of growing grain on it, but all they did of course was idle the worst land they had and grew more than ever on the best land! [Laughs] So it was an utter failure. That was one of the things I remember we were contending. And then, of course, we had--. I remember one year—I don't know when—there was an awful lot of very low-grade wheat. No. 5 I think it was. We had real trouble handling that. You could sell [No.] 1 Northern or [No.] 2 Northern, but [No.] 5 wheat was simply cattle feed, and it took a long time to get rid of the stocks of [No.] 5 wheat that came out in that one year. I don't remember what year that was.

But other problems? Well, sort of perennial problems like grain storage problems, heated grain. If you're not careful, grain will heat and deteriorate until it's worthless. Or it will become infested with insects like rusty grain beetles, and that will give you a real problem. Of course, then it all got in--. We had to introduce means of fumigating grain to rid ourselves of those damned insects. I think I was one of the first ones sent out to treat a country elevator with carbon tetrachloride, and they decked me out in a fancy gasmask. I didn't know it was as poisonous as it was, but I had got all these--. And it was in cans. You had to climb all over the pile of grain in an elevator in every bin and plop these cans and open them up. And the carbon tetrachloride, the gas, is heavier than air, so theoretically it's supposed to sink down through the grain, which I doubt it ever did. Of course, that all went out when the phosgene types of gas were introduced in the form of pellets. You'd mix the pellets into the grain when it was going into the bin, and then it fumigated itself after that.

NP: And did the pellets just eventually disappear, like--?

ET: Oh, it just became gas. The pellets became--. They just transformed themselves into phosgene gas.

NP: Who did the research on the fumigation?

ET: Oh, a variety of people. Lots of it was done in the United States. I think a little bit was done here by Canada Grain Commission [CGC], but mostly from the United States. We copied a lot of the things that we did in Canada from--. They'd had more experience down there than we had in all these things, so that's why we belonged to an organization like it was called the Grain Elevator and Processing Society [GEAPS], which held annual meetings every year and that had a big trade area that various people could display what inventions they have. So we were very keen to go to those meetings every year. I eventually became president of the thing, so. That was in '74, I guess. Yeah. We had the convention here in Winnipeg. Yeah. So we had all these people from Arizona coming up to 20 below or something or other. What was it, February or March, hon?

[0:31:06]

RT: It was March, but it was late March, and we still had an awful lot of snow because I remember the ladies. I think Cargill took a bunch of them out to St. Charles Country Club for a luncheon, and they just couldn't believe all the beautiful white snow.

ET: But that one woman, you had to loan her your fur coat, did you?

RT: Yeah. Oh, actually, several. We dug up a bunch of warm coats amongst the Winnipeg ladies because they just--. It was just a very--.

NP: They didn't know what to expect. [Laughing]

RT: It was a very cold--.

ET: No. Americans--.

NP: That was very thoughtful of you to have them meeting in March in Winnipeg. [Laughs]

RT: We thought it would be better.

ET: Their knowledge of geography, though, is appalling. I think they expected it to be the same temperature as Arizona, but they were sadly misinformed.

NP: Going back to--. We'll eventually move onto the terminals because I have a special interest in that myself, but in the communities, what was the relationship like between or among the various other grain buyers? So my understanding is there would be at least one other elevator.

ET: Well, there were various. There were single points where only one company was represented. There were double points where two companies were represented. There were quite a number of three companies at one point, and I think at one stage there might have been four or five different companies all competing for the same. Gull Lake, Saskatchewan, had seven or eight elevators. We had two. I think there was at least four companies there. So it varied. A single company, of course, you didn't have to worry about it except the opposition that might be 10 miles down the road. When two companies were competing with each other, well, there was a rivalry, and you had to exploit all the advantages you could find.

NP: So what would be some examples of advantages?

ET: Well, I think if it was, say, a strong Masonic town, and you were an ardent Mason, you probably had a lot of the farmers in your pocket right off the bat. Or you might belong to the church and sort of have a following from that source.

NP: Were there any economic advantages that one company would have over another?

ET: No, because we'd all use the same price. The pricing, in those days, it was very sort of odd. When the Grain Exchange closed, then--. This is--. We better just get clear between board grains and non-board grains. Wheat there was, of course, the Wheat Board told you what the price was. Everybody had the same price. In non-board grains, that depended on what the market close was in Winnipeg, and then that price was relayed by Morse code to the station agent. We didn't have--. Communications were kind of primitive in those early days. I think there was a telephone all right every once in a while, but you couldn't phone everybody. They broadcast the price to the various railroads because the CP and the CN [Canadian National Railway] all had their whatever you called those machines.

[0:35:22]

NP: Telegraph? Telegraph machines?

ET: Telegraph machines, yeah. You went to the station agent to get the price that you could pay for, let's say, flax or rye or--. Well, there was no rape in those days. Your price was--. Unless you got a phone call to say, "Look, bid a penny above the announced price." Well, that didn't last very long because the other guy would be going two pennies over. So it was sort of a mixed bag as to

how you acquired your business. Competition was keen and fierce. You found that one company was dominant in one market, one village, one town, and then the next town over, another company would be dominant.

NP: It seemed that personality played a large part in--.

ET: Oh, very much so. Very much so. The personality of your buyer was the end thing, yes, and to some extent, the equipment that you had. If your elevator was kept up to snuff with the best scales you could get or the best motors. A lot of the elevators were run, of course, by one-lungers. I don't know whether you're--. Well, it was an old Rustin Hornsby ten horsepower engine, and a big, long belt went from where the engine was to the base of the elevator, and that was the sole means of elevating the grain from the big pit that it was dumped in up to the distributor at the roof, and then from there into the various bins. You're familiar with what an elevator looks like inside? Yeah. So that was one thing.

And then electricity came in all across the Prairies, so then you converted from the old diesel-run machines to electricity. That was a big boost because these old engines and the cooling tanks--. [Laughs] Well, the cooling tanks were a problem because they would rust, and then they would leak. I remember going to Waskada, and the poor old buyer there had, I should think, 1,000 toothpicks with chewing gum holding this water in the tank. [Laughing] Yeah. But of course, they all got converted in the end to electricity. But that and the scales. Generally, the easier you made it for the farmer to come in, dump his load, get his ticket and cheque, and get out, that's what attracted business. So there was always a constant competition to keep your system up to date.

I remember we introduced a new system of cash tickets. A cash ticket was really a cheque. But we decided—or our general manager decided—that we would produce them in a machine instead of them being in books. We had a fancy machine that had carbon copies and one thing or another. I think it was when Trudeau must have introduced bilingualism because when we started, the agent would put down, let's say, "500 bushels of barley, BLY." The French-speaking people got it all mixed up with "BLE" which is wheat. So the bilingual effort I remember on our part just only lasted about, oh, one year, I think. Or not even one year.

[0:40:19]

NP: Well, when we talk about bilingualism, it makes me think about metric. What--?

ET: Well, the metric was a complete disaster. It required so much change, although, by that time I believe we were getting into electronic scales rather than the mechanical scales that we were up to at that. When did the metric business start? I can't remember. It was Trudeau that brought it in, wasn't it? Yeah. Yeah, Trudeau was the bilingual guy.

NP: ‘70s was it?

RT: Yeah.

ET: I think it must have been around in the ‘70s somewhere, but we were forced—compelled—to switch to metric anyway. It was the law of the land, so everybody had--. It’s the same as when dust control came in. For years and years and years, elevators were the dustiest places, and of course, there were some horrible explosions. When dust control was mandatory, then everybody converted, and that was it. You spent the money and complied with the law. But the farmers never got really used to--. I’d doubt if they’re used to it now. They still measure themselves in bushels, and the more modern ones, I guess, can think in tonnes, but then most of them still think in bushels. But anyway, the metric business went through.

RT: 1971.

ET: 1971. Yeah.

NP: So hard to talk about any elevators either terminal or the primary elevators without talking about the interrelationship with railways. What thoughts do you have about that, your experiences?

ET: Well, it was always a battle. The best stations were the ones that were served by both railways. You would have no problems at all. But whether it was CN or CP, then it was just a fight all the way through.

NP: What kinds of things created difficulty or the need to--?

ET: I’m sorry?

NP: What kinds of things created the difficulty? What did you have to fight about?

ET: Well, the failure to supply the cars that you needed, or when you wanted them. I suppose there again, you would have some districts that had the required quality of grain that was needed, and somewhere else, they would not have the quality. So you’d relieve one area, but farmers still wanted to get some money in Timbuktu, wherever they were. The pressure was on to distribute income, and that was a constant threat to make space, allow farmers to deliver their grain, and get some money into their hands so they could operate. A lot of the farmers out in, say, the middle of Saskatchewan are totally grain farmers. They’re not mixed farms. They don’t have cattle as a sidebar to their operation. It was solely--. A lot of them would farm for five or six months in the

summertime and be down in Alabama or somewhere in the winter. But they still needed to get their grain into an elevator whenever they needed money.

NP: Was it the mid ‘80s that there was an attempt to try to—or was it earlier—when they had the big fleet of grain cars sponsored by the various governments? Did that help things at all?

[0:45:04]

ET: Well, I think that was earlier than the ‘80s. I think that must have started--. Well, the Wheat Board bought the first ones, I think, and then the Alberta Government bought a whole bunch. That was when, really, the railways were trying to get rid of the old boxcars and get everybody converted to hopper cars. The Wheat Board, I think--. In fact, I believe it’s still a contentious issue as to who owns those cars, whether it’s a bunch of farmers or a nebulous thing like the Wheat Board. Well, what would the Wheat Board do with them? But yeah, as far as I know, those cars are still being maintained and are still in use. But the gradual conversion from boxcars to hoppers was a gradual process, I would say, over 10-15 years altogether.

NP: You were talking a little earlier about the dust issue. Were there ever any problems in the primary elevators at all? Did you lose any elevators as a result of--?

ET: No, I don’t remember any elevators actually exploding, but it was a horrible environment for the manager to have to work in. I’m sure that it contributed to a lot of lung disease and one thing or another. It was the order of the day. It was like coal mines, I suppose. I think nowadays whenever an elevator is built, these new concrete ones, they’re all dust controlled anyway. It was Thunder Bay where we had the explosion problem. Pool 4 was the big one, but they’d had one down there before that.

NP: The Pool 4 one, was that the 1952?

ET: That was about 1952, yeah.

NP: And there was an earlier one in 1945 right at the end of the war.

ET: Yeah. I think Pool 4 was ’52, I think. It was a bad one. Yeah.

NP: Who owned that elevator at the time?

ET: Sask Pool. Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. But there were explosions all over the United States. It was high time, I guess, the dust control business was introduced. But it was a big capital expense to equip those elevators to the state of the art that was required. But it got done, so that's the main thing.

NP: So let's move on to when you changed jobs, and you switched to the western terminal management position, have I got that right?

ET: No, I was just manager of our terminal elevators, east and west.

NP: What did those include, do you recall?

ET: Well, we had Elevator A was the big one, and then we acquired the old Thunder Bay Elevator, and then the McCabe Elevator, which was called Elevator M.

NP: The one right next door to the Thunder Bay Elevator?

ET: No--.

NP: Where--. Maybe--. They changed names so often that it's hard for me to--. So do you recall where on the waterfront Elevator A was?

ET: Elevator A was the furthest one in Port Arthur.

NP: To the north?

ET: To the north.

NP: Right.

ET: And who was next to us? It was somebody else. Several in between. It seemed to me we were the other side of Pool 4. That was Elevator M, the McCabe Elevator. But our elevators were all in Port Arthur. None in Fort William.

NP: So where was the Thunder Bay Elevator?

ET: Well, it was an old, old elevator, and of course, we got it knocked down in about, oh, the middle '70s. That was an admirable destruction because they dug a trench and then put charges in the--. It was a steam operated thing. It had a big chimney to burn coal, but that chimney, I should think, would be at least 75 feet high. They dug a trench that long, popped these charges in, and put the thing. All you had to do was just bulldoze a few yards of earth over the top of it.

[0:50:55]

NP: So could the Thunder Bay--. Like we had looked at an elevator for a project that we're working on, and there was something that people referred to as the old Thunder Bay Elevator, and it was in between McCabe's and Sask Wheat Pool. And I think a lot of them had a big chimney, but that definitely did have.

ET: Well, we took it out of operation. Oh, I can't remember the year. [Telephone rings] **[Audio pauses]** If I had a map. There would be maps available.

NP: Yes.

ET: To chart those things. Because there was Manitoba Pool and Saskatchewan Pool 4 before we got to Thunder Bay, I think. Then we got to Elevator M.

NP: Yes. Actually, there was a Manitoba Pool 5, perhaps, Canada Malting.

ET: Canada Malt wasn't--.

NP: And then the Saskatchewan Pool 7A and B, and then there was--. What's left now are just the silos from the old Thunder Bay Elevator, and then McCabe right next door.

ET: Yeah. Well, that could be. That's probably right. Pool 7, of course, was the biggest one of the whole bunch. I suppose it's still going too. I don't know. But the Thunder Bay movement has fallen onto hard times compared to what it used to be. Well, that was my recollection of Elevator A and Thunder Bay and then the Elevator M, the McCabe Elevator. But then running around the harbour, you had Richardson's, and National Grain had one. Well, I suppose that's Cargill now. Sask Pool had, I think, six or seven altogether.

One of which was acquired by Gene Mailhot, and he introduced—pretty well singlehanded—the idea of making grain screenings pellets. He converted that elevator with a bunch of hammer mills and got the market going. I think he was tied in with Ken Powell to market the stuff. Then we all got pelleting equipment in, and we had a real business going and converted all the old dust and screenings into viable cattle feed until the gnomes of Brussels changed the entry qualifications into the European market and cut us out.

NP: How did that work?

ET: Pen and ink. They just changed the rules and regulations, and we couldn't comply with them.

NP: Do you recall why you were unable to comply?

ET: Because they deliberately made sure that we couldn't convert our product into something which they would accept.

NP: A quality thing, sort of an unnecessary quality control?

ET: Well, the cattle feeders in Europe had been accepting the Canadian pellets, but I think they must have preferred the tapioca ones from Thailand or something because they deliberately wrote us so that we couldn't comply. I don't know what's happened to the business down there now because I'm talking 30 years ago. So whether they still pellet their screenings or not, I don't know. Do you?

[0:55:41]

NP: I believe they do, and I know that Mr. Mailhot is still operating. It's Western Grain Products, so I think he does some specialty things as well besides.

ET: Well, that would be Gene's son, not Gene. Gene operated that elevator with his wife and himself. She did all the sweeping and everything else, and they were using boxcars for screenings then. Screenings were considered an inferior product. Well, they would be a nuisance in a hopper car anyway. He used to get them unloaded by a bunch of Natives who would line up at 8:00 in the morning, and they would unload these screenings until noon, and then he'd pay them, and they'd be off to the pub. A new bunch would be ready to line up for 1:00, and it would start all over again. That went on day after day after day.

NP: When you think back to--. I think you said you visited the terminal elevator in Thunder Bay before taking the job as the manager in charge.

ET: Yeah.

NP: Do you recall what your first impression was of the harbourfront, of the elevators?

ET: Oh, I think I was very impressed with the magnitude. I had never seen anything as big as it was. No, it was a real eye opener, especially from England. [Laughs] I'd never been to the United States to see an elevator, so yeah, it was quite an experience. But there, after you visited and talked to the guys for a little while, it became second nature. So I don't think I was impressed when I left as I was when I went in. Although, again, the changes that have taken place in terminals since I went there. We talked about the hopper cars and the conversion from boxcars to hoppers. Well, I introduced bobcats for, oh, I should think we must have had them for seven or eight years to unload rather than use shovels that the original equipment was. I got bobcats into our elevators.

NP: I'm familiar with what an elevator looks like, so how would that actually work?

ET: What, the--?

NP: So when the trains come in, how would the bobcats operate?

ET: Well, once you knocked the doors down, you could get the bobcats in with their hoppers, and then run them over and dump it into the pit.

NP: So the cars wouldn't come right into the elevator, then? They would just stop short of the shed and then go--?

ET: No, they were in the track shed.

NP: Okay.

ET: They were in the track shed. The platform was just level with the boxcar floor. So just with a platform across and unloaded it that way. At least it was faster, and although a little more capital intensive, it was saving labour. So we had those bobcats go on for quite a while. I believe some of the other companies used them too. But then, of course, when hoppers came in, all you needed was a big hole underneath and away you went.

[1:00:02]

We talked about scales in the country. Well, of course, the scales in the terminal elevators were converted from manual to electronic scales. What else did we use in the terminals? Well, drying, for example. When grain is damp or tough--. You've heard the expression "tough"?

NP: Mmhmm.

ET: Often, unless you've got a huge quantity of dry grain to blend it with, you had to put the dryers on. So most of the terminal elevators had a big dryer going too, for which an extra charge could be made. What else can I think of changes that were in my job? I had a few things down here I noted. Oh, computerized controls, of course, all over the place, and communication systems were vastly improved. So was the cleaning equipment to clean grain. The grain cleaning underwent an enormous change from the old-fashioned screening machine to indented cylinders, and then you got fancy de-stoners and gravity tables. And then from when rapeseed came in, somebody invented a rotary machine, and I think that's universally used now.

NP: Were any of these Canadian inventions or most from--?

ET: No. If anything was Canadian, I think it would be the Kelly de-stoner, but I believe it was cribbed from the United States to begin with, although it was all manufactured here. Then, of course, we got new products coming in. Rapeseed was brand new, never been handled before until--. The chap who got rapeseed going was a member of my class at university, Dr. Baldur Stefansson. He and a fellow breeder is Saskatoon produced the canola, which is now universally used. But rapeseed was a brand-new crop after the war, although, I think there was some talk about rapeseed being used during the war for some sort of lubricating oil. But I don't think it amounted to very much. I think it was very much a post-war phenomenon, moreso when wheat was in disfavour. You couldn't find a market for wheat, but you could find markets for rapeseed, and the fact that it was a non-board grain, it just took off like wildfire across the Prairies. I think now, I'm not sure whether wheat is still the predominant crop, but rapeseed probably runs at a good second. I don't know. Do you know?

NP: Not too certain.

ET: No. I'm pretty certain it certainly outdoes barley or flax or rye or any of those. Then of course, you've got other things even in spite of rapeseed—lentils and peas and--. What did we try? Oh, mustard and safflower and sunflowers are in. So there have been a number of different grain crops now introduced, whereas it used to be just wheat, oats, and barley. Oats. Well, oats, there's still a

use for oats. A lot of it went out when horses went out. The oats now are basically for racehorses or porridge or granola bars or something. So the new crop--.

[1:05:18]

Of course, that had an effect at the Lakehead too because–. Well, peas I remember we started to handle peas. We had peas all over the elevator from top to bottom. There was pea soup being brewed up in every floor and office that you could find a hotplate to cook pea soup. [Laughs] Of course, you had to get special freight arrangements made to handle peas. I think it eventually ended up that one particular elevator—and maybe Mailhot's elevator—that handles the--. What do we call them? Non-board special crops. Special crops they call them, because they could isolate a bin for one particular customer. Although, maybe—what do you call them?—containers are being used for some of that stuff now. I wouldn't be surprised, although I don't know. But I'm sure we're running containers of different things.

NP: When you think of--. You mentioned that your responsibilities also included Vancouver.

ET: Yeah.

NP: So when you think of the two outlets—the port of Thunder Bay and the port of Vancouver—what are the similarities and differences that you found in--?

ET: Well, of course, Vancouver was sort of a secondary port, and 90 percent of Canadian exports went through Thunder Bay. Then over time, after the Russians decided to bow out of the big shipments out of Thunder Bay and China came in and other countries from the West Coast, it's been a complete reversal. I haven't seen any figures lately because I haven't been interested, but I'm pretty certain there's probably a lot more going through the West Coast now than through Thunder Bay. Of course, after Thunder Bay, you have to either get on a laker or a small ocean boat, whereas in Vancouver, you can load 80,000-tonners. I think that's probably the--.

The Seaway was a blessing, and I'm not so sure if it's a blessing now or a curse because it needs a lot of repair work, I think. And of course, it is expensive to get ships from Thunder Bay to the deep water in the St. Lawrence. So I think there's a combination of both—the contraction of the European markets and the expansion of the Asiatic markets. And of course, a lot of new building has been done on the West Coast, whereas I don't think there's been a new elevator in Thunder Bay since 1927 or something. Are you familiar with the last date? I think Elevator A was the last one to be built in--.

NP: There have been upgrades and changes, but--.

ET: Upgrades, yeah. We put a new annex on Elevator A and a lot of upgrading, but in terms of a new elevator, I don't think there's been one.

NP: Who was managing the elevators in Thunder Bay at the time, do you remember the ones who reported to you?

ET: Yeah. Our manager was a man by the name of Carl Flemming. Oh, I used to know all of them. Richardson's. I could dig up my old book in the--. What was the Richardson's guy? National Grain I knew very well. Sask Pool, of course, I knew very well. I think Ron--. Ron, Ron, Ron. When you get to 86--.

[1:10:20]

NP: Yeah. It doesn't matter because that kind of detail--.

ET: That's all in the books anyway.

NP: That's all in the books, exactly. We haven't talked anything about the relationship between the companies like UGG and the Canadian Grain Commission. What was your ongoing communication or working relationship with let's take the Canadian Grain Commission to start with?

ET: In Thunder Bay?

NP: Anywhere, really.

ET: Well, we had our differences from time to time, I suppose, but basically it was a very amicable relationship. You had grading. The Commission was basically two parts. Well, three, I suppose. The grading section, the weighing section, and the pots and pans section.

NP: I haven't heard of the pots and pans section. [Laughs] Which one is that?

ET: The research department, yeah.

NP: Okay.

ET: Well, I remember old Art Doherty. He was the chief inspector. He told Dr. Anderson, who was running the research department, to go mind his pots and pans. [Laughs] He would look after the grading, thank you very much. So we had a Commission of, what, one chief commissioner and two assistant commissioners. Or two commissioners, I should say, and then there were a whole bunch of assistant commissioners all over the Prairies. But the core of the thing was that chief commissioner and his two commissioners. They were public appointments from Ottawa. Some were good, some were bad.

NP: How would you describe a good one versus a bad one? What in your mind distinguished the two?

ET: Well, we had good ones. Well, we had one commissioner who was a disgrace to everybody. He went off to Europe with a--. I don't know who he went with. Another Grain Commission guy. And they disgraced themselves by, I suppose, on a glorious drunk the whole way. But by and large, the chief commissioner was a political appointment, and if it was a Liberal Government, it would be a Liberal commissioner. But they had a very good administrative section beneath the--. They were the guys that knew the Canada Grain Act from back to front. A guy by the name of Earl Baxter was the whatever they call them, executive secretary or something.

NP: Chief executive officer? Or--.

ET: Well, he wasn't a chief executive officer. That would be the chief commissioner.

NP: Ah. Secretary to the Commission.

ET: He was a secretary to the Commission and a very able man, and he had a staff that were loyal to him. It was sort of like the Vicar of Bray. "No matter what king may reign, I'll be the Vicar of Bray, sir." So the commissioners would come and go, but if they wanted to know anything, they got Old Earl Baxter to brief them first, and then they would come to a meeting and tell you what you could do. But by and large, I have no complaints with the Grain Commission. They maintained the Canada Grain Act, I thought, remarkably well. They made some rotten changes since. The recent Commission, I think, is a disgrace compared with what it used to be.

[1:15:05]

NP: Why would you say that? What kinds of changes?

ET: They've converted it into a sort of--. Well, I'm not sure what you'd call it. I shouldn't open my mouth too wide because I don't know exactly how it works, but I just hear comments from various people in the trade the odd time how we're changing or not adhering to the Canada Grain Act, and it's a loose arrangement. They've done all sorts of things to the grading system that I really don't appreciate. So I think it's changing quite a lot. But in my day, it was a first-class organization.

NP: Sort of the last big player in the system as I've come to know it, the Canadian Wheat Board. What was your connections in your work with them?

ET: Well, you had to work with the Wheat Board. That was always a problem.

NP: In what way?

ET: Well, the Wheat Board controlled everything. Ostensibly, they would tell you one thing, but practically, there could be quite a different result.

NP: Can you give me an example?

ET: Well, yeah. They would have penalties if you--. Say you shipped one more car that you ought to have shipped from a particular station. Well, they would penalize you for ten cars out of the next allocation or something like that. They could be very brutally punitive. I'm sure the Wheat Board itself, when you talk about the Board, wouldn't know what was going on, but it's the guys down below who ran the order system that they could be very vindictive, or they could also be bribed. Yeah. So there were all these undercurrents of things.

NP: Not getting any names, unless you want to restrict your comment. [Laughs] How would you find out that somebody could be bribed? Like--.

ET: Well, you found out the hard way, and you knew that so-and-so had a much greater influence on a certain individual than somebody else did. When you get down to those sorts of things, rationing, it was essentially rationing cars. Yeah, there are some better examples there, but by and large, I think you'd have to say no private company liked the Wheat Board. I think the Sask Pool did and maybe the Manitoba Pool did. Of course, they were the most powerful companies in the business when I was there. But you'd never get Cargill or Richardson or Paterson willing to say that they applauded the Wheat Board.

NP: What about the farmers, your customers? Did they applaud the Wheat Board?

ET: Well, I think most farmers tolerated it. Some farmers hated it. It depended if you were close to the border or if you were up in Timbuktu, Saskatchewan. But I think you'll find that some of these, it was going across the line for lunch. You could find out how much they were getting paid in North Dakota or Montana, and then come back and weep after lunch. No, I think there's probably the--. The more progressive farmers who were smart enough to do their own marketing rather than rely on Big Brother to do it for them, naturally, their instincts were, "Let me manage my own show." A number of them went off and said, "Well, look. How is it that a farmer in Ontario can market his grain wherever he wants to, but somebody on the Prairies, there's only one place to go and that's the Wheat Board?"

[1:20:27]

So I think that's a perennial argument, and whether that will ever be resolved, I don't know. Although, I do think the popularity of the Wheat Board is much lower than it was. It may still have a majority. I don't know whether it does or not. But I doubt if it will last if the Conservatives can get a hold of it. It'll be gone. [Laughs] Yeah, yeah.

NP: I think you've answered most of my questions, but I've got a couple of general questions about--. Canada, although it's geographically big, it's by population pretty small, and it has become a pretty major player in the international grain trade. Is that fair enough to say that?

ET: Oh, I think so.

NP: What pieces contributed to that success?

ET: Well, the fact that we've got all these wonderful acres on the Prairies here to grow. It's ideally suited for, well, primarily the production of wheat, of course, but they've now adapted to all these other crops. It's a wonderful farming country. I suppose we got some of the most fertile soils in the world. We used to have anyway. [Laughs] We may be eroding them a bit by now. You know, we're equal to the Ukraine for ideal conditions for growing cereal grains. As long as the world needs cereal grains, I would assume that we can maintain our position.

NP: Are there infrastructure pieces that make it possible for us to compete, or nothing different from what other countries are doing?

ET: Well, as far as farming goes, we could compete. It's the matter of by how much other governments are willing to subsidize their farmers. That was the big battle all through the time I was in business was the United States would just subsidize the farmers. They could get $4 or $5 a bushel where our guys were getting $1. Well, there have been a few obvious errors. I'm sure when I first came here, the first thing I got into was at university, I guess, the British Wheat Agreement. Old Jimmy Gardner sold I've forgotten how many million bushels of grain a year for four or five years to Britain at $1 a bushel, and the United States was getting $4. That was carried by farmers. It wasn't carried by the people of Canada. It was all on the backs of farmers. So some of our government policies haven't been the best. **[Audio pauses]** I think is probably a fair thing to do.

NP: Okay. Just a sec here, and I'll just put it on. Off tape we were just—it's on now—we were just talking about the impact of the labour situation. So you have some thoughts on that?

ET: Yes, because the grain workers' union was a very powerful influence. It was, of course, always striving for more pay.

NP: Now when you talk about the grain workers' union, there's more than one or--?

ET: I thought there was only one.

NP: Okay.

ET: It was universal.

NP: Grain handlers?

[1:24:57]

ET: Grain handlers, yeah. It was run by a guy, all the time I was there, by a chap called Frank Mazur. A real piece of work. [Laughs] But there's no doubt about it that he was all for his clients or whatever you call them, members. But we had at least two rotten strikes while I was there that he led. Whether or not anybody ever wins a strike is, I suppose, a debatable point, but the fact was that the seniority was the dominant thing. It didn't matter if the guy couldn't write his name, but if he'd been working for you for 30 years, and he wanted a higher job, he could get it. Whereas a young guy who was a little better educated or had more native ability was curtailed in promotions. You had to make do with substandard people rather than employing your best.

NP: When you say rotten strikes, were there any--?

ET: Well, economically adverse. It imposed all kinds of contractual arrangements that might have been made with various people overseas, or you'd book freight, and the freight couldn't get to you because you wouldn't have the stuff in time ready for it. So a very debilitating exercise a strike, I suppose, in any big organization. All the guys were--. All they were doing was--. [Laughs] Well, they might have lost a couple of weeks' wages—or sometimes I think it went as long as a month—but it created economic havoc in the balance sheets of the companies. So labour was a problem.

And then the longshoremen. I think, by and large, you didn't get the longshoremen striking at a different time to the grain workers' union. I don't remember the longshoremen going on strike, but they would always get whatever economic advantages that had been gained by the grain workers, would be automatically absorbed by the longshoremen too. I think they had a wonderful arrangement whereby they were all shareholders in the divvying up of the proceeds of the season so that, I believe, they had a much different arrangement than the grain workers, but I'm not too privy to how it worked.

NP: So those were major challenges of your job as a--.

ET: Well, yeah. Labour was always a problem. You would attempt to employ capital sometimes to get rid of the cost of labour. In that sense, the grain workers were hurting themselves. They got more money, but there were fewer of them because we squeezed them out. Or they were squeezed. We didn't squeeze them out, but they were squeezed out by the fact that the more efficient machinery or equipment or something was introduced. So it meant that either you had fewer people employed, or you were not employing as many as you otherwise might have. So all in all, I think it could have been labour costs. And that, of course, too, just think of the suppliers that were there. I can think of people like, oh, Fred--.

[1:30:23]

RT: Northland?

ET: Well, Northland was a big one, but the guy on our street. His brother. George--.

RT: George.

ET: George--.

NP: Hill?

ET: Hill! Yeah. Have you heard of George?

NP: Yes, I have heard of him, and he's on our list, but we haven't interviewed him yet.

RT: His brother lives down the street from us.

ET: George Hill had a big supply business going and rented all sorts of big equipment too. I believe he had one or two of his sons employed in the business too. I imagine George is maybe--. He'd be long retired by now. But then, oh, who was the guy that had that place? Remember I'd go stock your paper, what was that? Oh. Stationary supplies, and that's gone.

RT: We still have stationary supplies here. [Laughs]

ET: Yeah. We've still got little squares of his paper. But all kinds of people. And engineers. Just think of the engineering business. C. D. Howe and--.

NP: Syd Halter?

ET: Well, Syd Halter.

NP: Don Smith.

ET: Is Syd still around? Yeah.

RT: Don Smith.

ET: And there was little Don Smith, and the Indian guy, and--.

NP: Pritam? Pritam Lamba.

ET: Yeah!

NP: How would you interact with the engineers? They've been a special part of our project, so.

ET: Well, everybody had to have some engineering done from time to time. You would call one of the lot up. Or if you were installing a new piece of equipment--. Well, there were 101 reasons you needed an engineer. And then Thunder Bay Harbour Improvement was a big outfit because they had underwater people who could inspect your--.

NP: Piles?

ET: Docks and so on. Yeah. I'm sure that those sorts of trades were doing brisk business in the, let's say, the '70s. Whereas I don't suppose they'd be able to exist now. I really don't know.

NP: Amalgamations. Don and Pritam are still active.

ET: Oh? Who were the two brothers that we used to use?

NP: W. H. Cook or W. Cook?

ET: Yeah, Cooks. Yeah, the Cook Brothers. Cook, they had a sort of a body that was a harbour--. Well, not exactly a harbour control. Cook was a member of that.

NP: The Harbour Commission?

ET: Harbour Commission, yeah. And then there was that little Don Smith. But C. D. Howe and Cooks were the two biggest ones at the time. Pritam, I think, had just arrived. I believe he was working for C. D. Howe before he set his own company up. Very smart man, that. Always neat as a pin. Did he come from India or from Pakistan? I wouldn't know which one.

NP: Not certain.

ET: He's one of them.

NP: Mmhmm. So if you were telling someone--. Well, let's say you were talking to someone about your career. Let's deal with the terminal elevator part. What do you think they might find most surprising about the work you did?

[1:35:04]

ET: Hm. I don't know if there's an element of surprise. I suppose the magnitude, the size of the elevators are very impressive even to anybody who walked along the thing. The fact that they could receive grain and discharge it at pretty good rates of speed. That must be impressive. Loading a 20,00-tonner laker was impressive, but not quite as impressive as loading a 90,000-tonner at the coast. Still impressive.

The change from the old canallers. When I first went down there, Ken Powell still had two of those old canallers that could negotiate the narrow Welland Canal. And then of course, when the Seaway came in, then we got the big ones being built. And half of those companies must be gone now. Misener, I think, has disappeared completely. Upper Lakes, I guess, still may have one or two. I think they have an elevator now too.

NP: And they've taken over the Thunder Bay shipyards.

ET: Oh, have they? Yeah. Well, I knew that because one of the leading lights is a senior officer of Upper Lakes down there. I can't remember who told me it was. Do you know who is the boss of Upper Lakes down in Thunder Bay?

NP: Sorry, no.

ET: I can't think of who it was, but I think I know him. I didn't know him as going to Upper Lakes. Canada Steamships, of course, would still be going. But how many boats are in the trans-lake business compared to what it used to be when they would go all the way from Thunder Bay to Montreal or even Seven Islands or Baie-Comeau and then come back with a hold load of iron ore to Chicago? That was steady traffic all the way. I imagine some of that business must be long gone.

NP: Big changes, market changes, all of the things that you mentioned, you know, continue to have--.

RT: Changes in the methods of getting the grain into the elevator was something Dusty was telling me about. He probably told you.

ET: Well, we've gone all through that from shovels to hoppers, yeah.

NP: So if you had to pick what you're most proud of in your career, could you do that?

ET: Proud of?

NP: Mmhmm.

ET: Well, I guess I think we ran them profitably. [Laughs] In fact, quite profitably. We were considered to be the cash register of the company. In fact, I guess all of the terminal elevators were for every company. It was the cash register because you could do so much there. You know, you could get tough grain in, which had been bought at a tough discount, and blend it with a dry grain and out it went as top grade. Or you could get low grade wheat and dribble it into the top grade and get it out as top grade. Mixing grain was an art. Well, a bit of a science too, I suppose, but that's where the money was made, was when you got such a volume to deal with. You couldn't do it in a country elevator, but when you had millions of bushels to deal with, then a whole host of things was possible. So making sure you exercised all those advantages were part and parcel of the management business.

[1:40:16]

NP: So would you identify one of your elevator managers—Thunder Bay or Vancouver—who was the best artist at doing the mixing so that it still met regulations, and the best scientist and artist that you had?

ET: Well, of course, they changed. But we were always fortunate to seem to have one in reserve. I don't think we missed a beat in any transfer that occurred. Oh, some of those guys were just marvels. Tell the guy to pull this trigger or that trigger out of this bin or that bin and another bin, and away you went. Now, I suppose, they don't have to worry about that. They can do it all automatically from the control.

NP: Still have to know what to pull or what to push! [Laughing]

ET: Yeah. But no, that was a real work of art.

NP: Are there any questions you think I should have asked you that I haven't?

ET: Oh. No, I don't think so.

NP: You want to check your notes and see if you've had a chance to--?

RT: The last one?

NP: No, I'm going to show some restraint.

ET: I think I went over the fact that impacted on Thunder Bay, of course, was, well, the railways' conversion from steam to diesel. I suppose we didn't touch on that.

NP: Now, how did that impact occur? Like to me, you know, if you had a train, you had a train. But no so? [Laughing]

ET: Yes, but when you had steam, you had all kinds of problems that were eliminated when diesels came in.

NP: So what would be some of those problems?

ET: Well, looking after a locomotive with a firebox and coal or whatever. Yeah, coal, they used mostly. Obviously, it was a big conversion for--. You had to have these water towers all over the Prairies to put water into the locomotive. I think the conversion from--. Well, then again too, you used to have a fireman to stoke the fire besides the engineer, and that was a big problem for a while because the union insisted even if there was nothing for the fireman to do, he had to ride the diesel. But anyway, that's the--. And the Seaway, the world markets when--. Well, Frank would have told you all about going to Russia and Algeria and those sorts of places.

The British market, you see, the whole baking industry changed because the need for high-protein wheat seemed to be contracted. They were able to make good bread out of lower quality flour. Even today, we've been out to France a couple of times. You can get better bread in France than you can in England or even here, and it's supposed to be inferior wheat, but those Frenchmen make darn good bread.

Then we have the electronic things like computers, fax, telex. The time that it took to get your documents from the time the boat was loaded until your bill of lading got to Winnipeg was two days, and now, of course, it's two minutes. So those sorts of things have had a big impact on Thunder Bay.

NP: In what way? Like making it more efficient or--?

ET: Yeah. Well, much more efficient. Yeah. Because you know your dad was an inspector, well, the grade certificate and the weight certificate and the bill of lading all had to be sent to Winnipeg and then fired off to Timbuktu, wherever the unload was arranged. Of course, the whole country-elevator system being wiped out in favour of these new concrete elevators. We talked about the contraction from, what, 1,500 or 1,700 or something down to less than 400, I think. So, yeah. I think we've covered the waterfront fairly well.

[1:45:47]

NP: That's a good use of terms.

ET: I beg your pardon?

NP: I said that's a good use of terms. We've covered the waterfront.

ET: Yeah, I think so. I can't think of anything else. The burst of business from the West Coast primarily to China, but Japan too. But I think, really, Japan started it. We got more post-war business into Japan long before China started it, but then, of course, the huge population of China quickly outweighed that. China is a very important thing now. Places like Thailand where our wheat goes into fish farms, you know, for shrimps. So the change in--. New introductions has--.

NP: Change in markets.

ET: Yeah, changed the market. Yeah. I don't know how much grain now goes into fish farms, but I think quite a lot. I don't know where--. The barley goes to Iraq or Iran and Iraq. I think that probably comes out of Thunder Bay still, but I'm not sure how thriving that business is with the war on there and the political relationship between us and Iran.

NP: I guess that really has played a part. I hadn't thought of it before, but Canada's reputation in the world, whether you are friend or enemy, has a bearing.

ET: Yes. Well, of course it does. Yeah. World trade is a pretty fluid business to be in, I think. But I don't know where we're going from here. I suppose it all remains to be seen. But we haven't got too much time to worry about it anyway. [Laughs]

NP: Some days, I think that's a good thing. Just a couple of last questions, and one is I had mentioned to you that perhaps sometime in the future, we would like to have some kind of a museum, historical piece to commemorate the grain industry's contribution--. Actually, international grain trade is what we're talking about because it's the getting the farmer's product to an international market. So when you think about your time with the terminal elevators—and I guess with UGG—what kind of things do you think would be important to preserve if you wanted to showcase the history to people that come after us?

ET: Oh. Well, I should think you should try to lasso an old boxcar from somewhere and have some means of explaining how car doors were installed, and even worse than that, the paper lining you used to have to put in if you were shipping flax in an old boxcar because it would run out of anything. I don't know where you'd find anything like that now or those hammer things we used to have to tack the stuff up with. Down at the terminal, I don't suppose you'd want a bobcat with a--. A dumper. You know, we haven't mentioned dumping a boxcar, but those were huge. Picked up the thing from end to end and shot a lathe in to divert the grain from one side to the other. You could dump a car in, what, two or three minutes? Well, that was a huge improvement over the hand shovels with wooden shovels on cables. So the dumper was a huge thing. Somebody ought to preserve a dumper.

[1:50:54]

I suppose some of those old scales. I don't know how you would put a scale, a terminal elevator scale into a museum, but there might be a way of doing it. I've forgotten. What was the name of those? The mechanical scale was--. There was a special name, but what that was, I've completely lost it.

NP: Were you there when they shifted from the mechanical scales to the electronic ones?

ET: Oh, yes.

NP: And where did the old ones go?

ET: I think the scrapyard.

NP: Ah.

ET: Yeah. Must be in the scrapyard.

NP: So it might be even difficult to find one now.

ET: I'd imagine you'd have a real problem finding one. And of course, you had to have one to have a capacity to load 60-70,000 pounds–40-50 tonne cars they were in those days. Now they're up to 90. But that and the old punching thing that the tickets came out that the weighmen used. I suppose some of the old grading equipment that inspectors used. I used to have an old scale here and sieves and one thing and another. I don't know just where they are now.

RT: That probe thing you had for--. Big metal probe to get samples out of the grain.

ET: Oh, yeah. Well, that wouldn't be in the--. I guess they did use them in terminal elevators too, but huge great steel posts, and that had pockets in it. You twisted it, and you could bring back the sample. Have we still got that?

RT: We may even have that still. We'll know where to send it!

NP: Yes! [Laughing]

RT: Or your moisture metres.

ET: But that was when cars received an initial inspection in Winnipeg by these hand probes and then a final inspection in Thunder Bay.

NP: What were they expecting to happen in the meantime?

ET: Well, they hoped it would stay the same, but more often than not, it changed.

NP: What would cause that?

ET: Well, a guy crawling in on the top of a boxcar when it was only about a few inches from the roof and trying to wield a--. It took a lot of physical effort to get it two or three feet in. Whether you could get it five or six feet in was another--. Some people were pretty astute and put a little rotten grain at the bottom of the car. [Laughs] So I think that was the main reason for change. You think you've got a [No.] 1 Northern on the top and sample wheat in the bottom, but you found that out in Thunder Bay. So that's a change. You know, the stuff down there was so massive, it's pretty hard to think--. I think you'd pretty well have to get it down by a series of drawings or slideshow if you could find some.

NP: And miniatures, perhaps.

ET: And maybe miniatures, but getting a miniature manufacturer, I think, is very expensive and almost impossible to do. I think you might stand a better chance of getting a computerized slideshow going as to what things were like in the good old days. There are probably some good black and white photographs of individual--. We've got shots around here of a dumper working. And various annual reports of companies would have if not pictures, certainly good verbal descriptions of some of the things that were

going on. I imagine there's a whale of reference material within the walls of the Canada Grain Commission somewhere relating to Thunder Bay as well as to the Prairies generally.

[1:55:50]

NP: And that's one of the things that we're hoping to do. We're sort of picking projects that we can do that would help support an activity centre and would be worthwhile even if that activity centre doesn't occur, and one is to do an inventory of where all these records are because UGG would have had their archives.

ET: Oh, yeah. Our library was a marvellous thing, and you go back to those Royal Commissions that were into the grain trade when, oh, Pitblado, Isaac Pitblado and that guy who introduced the co-ops to western Canada from California. I can't remember his name now. But oh, there's some classic material there. I remember reading one of those, and Old Pitblado accused this chap from San Francisco—or somewhere on the West Coast anyway from California—accused him of being Jewish, and the guy retorted, "Yes, Isaac." [Laughing] Oh, well. Isaac Pitblado was a wonderful man, and some of those Royal Commissions were real gems. I hope they've been preserved somewhere, but I know we had copies of all of them in our library in UGG. What happened to that library, goodness only knows. We had pictures for the annual reports commissioned by people like Phillips, the artist who--.

NP: At Assiniboine Park? Oh, wow.

ET: Well, you know, there were thousands, and they just disappeared into the woodwork. I asked them the other day what happened to some of those, and oh, they just mysteriously disappeared.

NP: Now, they are somewhere, and this is sort of what we're learning as we do the project is everybody seems to have a little something in the corner somewhere holding on until--. Or for who knows what.

ET: And the old--. What did they used to call the hotel in Port Arthur?

NP: The Prince Arthur?

ET: Prince Arthur. There used to be pictures from old Senator Norm Paterson hanging there. I can still see one now. It must have been about, oh, six feet by six feet. A huge thing, and it was on display there year after year after year. He had acquired quite an art collection. What happened to it? I don't know. But it was down at that Prince Arthur Hotel.

NP: And what was it a picture of, do you recall?

ET: It was a cow. It seemed to me that predominantly it was a cow.

RT: Oh, I thought it was boats.

ET: Well, it might have been a boat in the background somewhere. But he had acquired quite an art collection, and I don't know whether Andrew, the present owner, would know much about it or not because Don Paterson's brother John was headquartered in Thunder Bay. He used to fly a Spitfire around. Yeah.

NP: Around Thunder Bay?

ET: Yeah. They were both in the Air Force during the war, but Don did a tour on bombers, and John was on Spits. When the old Senator was still around, he was a senator for years and years and years.

[2:00:08]

NP: Well, we've reached, I think, even beyond our two-hour period, but the time has gone so quickly. I didn't have a chance to talk to you at all about personalities, and just maybe we could set something up another time to do that, but I'm just going to say an official thank you for the recorder's benefit, and I'll shut it off, and then we can chat a bit more.

ET: All right.

End of interview.