

**Narrator:** William Turner (TT)

**Company Affiliations:** Canadian Grain Commission

**Interview Date:** 27 March 2013

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**Recorder:** Monika McNabb (MM)

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**Summary:** In his second interview, retired general manager of the Prairie government elevators for the Canadian Grain Commission, William Turner, continues to discuss his career in both Thunder Bay and Winnipeg. He begins by continuing his survey of the Thunder Bay terminals, covering the unique features and memorable stories of the Intercity and Current River elevators. He describes the difference in reputation for the government weigh staff and inspection staff, and he shares stories of elevator shenanigans that resulted in lost or deliberately stolen grain. Turner discusses his move to assistant general manager and then general manager of Canadian government elevators on the Prairies, with his key duty being to make the elevators more profitable. He describes the reason the government built its own terminals, his uneasy feelings about the CGC competing in the grain handling business against private companies, the private industry's pushback against the terminals' increasing handling share. Other topics discussed include his involvement in upgrading safety in Prairie terminals, Prince Rupert's record year of grain handling, his recommended changes to unit trains and country elevator consolidation coming true after his retirement, the private industry's inland terminals, the difference between a country elevator and a terminal, and a workplace accident at Prince Rupert.

**Keywords:** Canadian Grain Commission; Terminal grain elevators—Thunder Bay; Canadian government grain elevators; Country grain elevators; Terminal grain elevators—British Columbia; Terminal grain elevators—Prairies; Grain weighing; Grain inspection; Grain elevators—Equipment and supplies; Non-board grains; Grain varieties; Grain export destinations; Grain transportation—rail; Grain transportation—ships; Unit trains; Consolidation; Grain trade—laws and legislation; Workplace accidents; Workplace fatalities; Parrish & Heimbecker Elevator; MPE Pool 1; UGG Elevator M; Thunder Bay Elevator; SWP Pool 7A & 7B; Canada Malting Elevator; SWP Pool 6; MPE Pool 2; Richardson Main Elevator; SWP Pool 4A & 4B; AWP Pool 9; UGG Elevator A; UGG Elevator A collapse; Weyburn Terminal

Time, Speaker, Narrative

NP: Okay, we are resuming our interview with Bill Turner on Garden Avenue in Thunder Bay, and today's date is the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, 2013. Our last interview, we ended off a tour of the Fort William-side elevators from his perspective as heavily involved in the weighing functions. So we're going to start out with the Intercity stand, and I probably don't have to tell you the names of them, so if you would--.

WT: Parrish & Heimbeck [P&H] first.

NP: Yes, Parrish & Heimbecker.

WT: Yeah. Parrish & Heimbecker was a relatively slow elevator. I didn't work there very much. On our staff, it was considered a bit of an old man's home. There was no pressure there because it was not a high-capacity elevator. But it was a pleasant place to work. I have nothing that stands out in my memory about it.

NP: Did they specialize in any particular product that you recall?

WT: No, not that I know of. They may have. But I didn't work in it that much. I spent more time there as a supervisor than as a weighman because I would go and see how the staff was doing. That was my job.

NP: Had they built the extension on there by the time you started? It started off as a fairly small elevator. I mean, it ended up as a fairly small elevator, relatively speaking, too, but--.

WT: I'm not aware. This is a surprise to me that they put on an addition, but I'm not aware of it. I know nothing about it.

NP: Okay. Next-door to--.

WT: Pool 1. Manitoba Pool 1. When I first went over there, the superintendent was Bill Stewart, a real fine person, and it was a slow elevator. Small elevator. But during my time with the Grain Commission, they built a huge addition, and they just speeded it up, and it's one of the bigger, better elevators in Thunder Bay today. There's nothing outstanding in my memory about it, but it was a pleasant place to work.

NP: Was Stan McKay working with Manitoba Pool at that time?

WT: No. Stan McKay worked at United Grain Growers [UGG].

NP: Okay, right. So I know--. It would be Mallon, Johnny Mallon.

WT: Yes, Johnny Mallon, I believe, was there. Yes, I believe so.

NP: Yeah. And his two sons eventually, but I think they probably came on after you had moved onto Winnipeg.

WT: Yes, yeah.

NP: Next-door? An elevator that--.

WT: Next-door was McCabe's.

NP: Right.

WT: Yeah, that was the old Government Elevator. It was the Government Elevator before I got involved in the grain business, and it was disposed of before I started working over there. So I'm not aware of what it did while the government owned it. I'm not even sure how much work it did, but I know under McCabe's it worked.

NP: Tell us about McCabe's.

WT: They were one of the efficient people that put a lot of grain through.

NP: So it was the Kroft Family that eventually owned it?

WT: I don't remember that name.

NP: Can you remember who the managers were there? Any of the managers there?

WT: I should remember because I bought a used half-tonne truck from them. [Laughing] That would be about 1948. An old half-tonne truck. I can't remember the guy that I bought it from, but--.

NP: If you came up with that name, I'd be very surprised. I can hardly remember the car I bought.

WT: I don't remember that name at all.

NP: Well, they were the Winnipeg people.

WT: Oh. No, I would not have known them.

NP: Then we had sort of the star on the block, at least for the time being. Oh, no. We didn't. We have the little guy.

**[0:05:00]**

WT: No. Yes. There was Thunder Bay. Was it not called Thunder Bay?

NP: Thunder Bay.

WT: Thunder Bay Elevator, yes. I don't remember who operated it. I just have very little recollection of it. I did work in it. It's a rather older, slower elevator.

NP: Yeah, I'm trying to think because it gets a bit confusing. I'm not sure if it's the same people who ran the Empire Elevator or whether it was the same people who ran Consolidated.

WT: Yes, I think you're right. Who in the heck would that have been? I just--. Sorry, I'm not going to be much help to you.

NP: Well, it's very strange to me why they would have the different elevators under the same companies.

WT: Well, like a lot of the elevators, they had a tough go at times. The big competition was becoming the Pools and Grain Growers, and those smaller elevators were starting to hurt a little bit. It also depended a lot on their collection, organization on the Prairies. If they didn't have a large number of country elevators, they couldn't keep those terminals busy. That was a problem, but I really don't remember the--. I probably knew at the time, but I can't remember now.

NP: Just to tell you a little story about McCabe's Elevator because we interviewed the son of Kroft, who bought it from McCabe's, I think, who were an American firm. But Mr. Kroft got out of the business at the time that the Canadian Wheat Board was brought in because his feeling was that most of the fun had gone out of the business because there was less of the meeting with the

customers because the Wheat Board would be doing that, and wheeling and dealing on the Exchange because that was no longer happening once the Wheat Board took over. So that sort of just expands a little bit upon your point that the small elevators as the Pools but also the Wheat Board--.

WT: Yeah. I think that would have applied to Parrish & Heimbecker, but--. I knew Bill Parrish in Winnipeg, and it was his own drive and a wonderful personality that kept that little elevator going. And they didn't have many country elevators, but he was a fine person, and I think his own initiative kept it going.

NP: Mmhmm. Then we had--.

WT: After McCabe--. Oh, no. Then we had--. What did we call that elevator?

MM: Thunder Bay Elevator, the little one, you said.

WT: Thunder Bay, yeah. Gee. I can't remember who--. It had a wooden workhouse, if I remember rightly.

NP: And the big stack out front.

WT: Yeah. They had a steam-fired system there for a while. And who else had one of those? Old Fort William Elevator Company had the great, big stack. Yes. I remember that. You must remember, this was a long time ago.

NP: Yes. [Laughs]

WT: It's hard for me to remember. If you would have asked me 30 years ago, I would've been fresher. No, I don't have much to add about the Thunder Bay Elevator.

NP: And right across the slip from it, we had--.

WT: Pool 7. Pool 7. And remind me when we get back to this, I want to tell you about Pool 7 and their marine leg. Did you know they had a marine leg? A marine leg is used for unloading boats. I can digress and tell you about it now.

NP: Well, why not?

**[0:10:00]**

WT: All right. Well, first of all, I've got to say that the only time the marine leg was used was if they got the wrong grade of grain or if there was a problem with the grain on the boat. The inspection were serious about their job, and they had some pretty keen management at the top, the inspection division did. If there was a problem, they didn't hesitate enforcing the regulations. They had a good reputation, the inspection—I'm sure your dad would have told you that—which was, at that time, unlike the weighing division. The weighing division didn't have that kind of reputation, but a few people started to bring it around, and Ross Teeple was the main person that did.

But anyway, to get back to the marine leg, if they put the wrong grade of grain on a vessel, the inspector would say, "Take it off." Now, if it was just a little patch of grain, they could shovel it off and so on, but if it was a few thousand bushels, the steamship had to go all the way over to Port Arthur to the only marine leg that operated, unload it, and then come back and get the proper grain. I've actually seen that happen a number of times.

NP: So would you as a weigh person have to be there to weigh it coming off?

WT: Well, they had their own staff at the elevator, and, yes, they weighed it into the elevator. Yes. Yes, that's quite true.

NP: And then there'd be some kind of paperwork between one elevator and another?

WT: I wasn't familiar with that, but when they made the mistake by putting the wrong grain on, you could bet the phone lines between Thunder Bay and Winnipeg were just red-hot. The elevator company would try their damndest to please the customer or whoever's grain it was, but if they didn't succeed, unload it. The inspection, same thing. They were just as tough. So I never saw them--. I wasn't present when the marine leg was working, although, I did work at Pool 7, but it was used occasionally. I don't think more than two or three times a year, but it was used occasionally. We're at Pool 7 now.

NP: It was one of the newer ones on the waterfront, was it not?

WT: Pool 7?

NP: Mhmm.

WT: Yes, yes. One of the more efficient ones. Hugh, high-capacity legs, and huge belts. When they moved grain, they really moved it.

NP: And that was Saskatchewan?

WT: Saskatchewan Wheat Pool. I've got a story there if you want me to go into it now. I'll try to be quick. Okay. When I was first moved from the Fort William group to Port Arthur, Pool 7 was one of the first elevators I was sent to because it was busy, and I guess they were trying me out to see if I could keep up to it. The first day there, the receiving weighman for the company, the first car of the morning about half past 8:00, the cars were spotted, and we had the shunt. I knew what was coming up. I could hear the grain coming up the leg and so on. But at about 8:30, he come in the office, and he threw down the scale ticket with the weight of the car punched on it. And here I'm the government weighman. I was supposed to supervise the weighing of that car. I said, "Why didn't you let me know you were ready?" He says, "You were busy." I said, "I'm never too busy to do my job." I said, "Now, don't you ever do that again." I accepted the weight, although I didn't see it weighed, and he never, ever tried it again. That's my story at Pool 7.

**[0:15:27]**

NP: Do you think that was probably common practice before you got there?

WT: I think so. I think so. I think some government weighmen allowed it to go on. In fact, I've seen them do it, but it was never done when I was there, I can assure you.

NP: You mentioned this earlier when you said that the inspection department had built up a pretty good reputation.

WT: Yes.

NP: But that the weighmen's reputation was not at that level but then did grow. What was the reputation of the weighment then?

WT: Lackadaisical. Not serious. Not everybody, but a fair number of the weighing staff were like that. But I wouldn't likely mention this 20, 30 years ago because too many people were still alive, and it would just create a lot of bad feeling, but most of them are dead now so I don't mind telling you. Ross Teeple taught the weighing division how to do the job. It was important. I'm going to tell you a couple of other stories. I told you the one about that fellow.

But at the elevator next door, at Stewart's, I was sent there, and I think it was the very first day, and the receiving weighman—I had no trouble—but the receiving weighman would go out of the scale floor office, and I would hear garner being opened and grain flowing and so on. I thought, “I wonder what's going on here?” So he'd gone out, and I gave him a few minutes, and then I quietly walked out after him and just stood not far away. He didn't see me. He didn't know I was there. The car was coming up, and he had already opened-- No. Yeah. I think, yeah, we had weighed the first half of the car, and he had a bin, and he let it go to the bin. And I went back in the office to get caught up on my paperwork and so on, and then I heard all this activity out there. So I went back and watched, and as that first half of the car was running out of the scale, he grabbed the garner lever, did this, and then closed it.

Those garner had six or nine pockets, and they would, when you open the garner, just a cascade of grain coming down, and it would fill the scale in no time. So just a few seconds of opening the garner while the weighed grain was running out would be a few thousand pounds. He actually stole it. I said, “That's enough of that.” I reported it to my supervisor, but nothing ever came of it. That's why I'm not ashamed to say the weighing division needed a lot of supervision. And with Ross Teeple, it got it.

NP: So that type of behaviour, would that be picked up at the audit that we talked about last time?

WT: Not that amount. See, we're talking about a couple of thousand pounds that he took and sent it out to the storage with the grain that's already weighed. Well, it wasn't weighed, so they got that for nothing. I think that was a common practice, and that's why the Grain Commission was first formed. People don't remember this, but the producers were awfully upset at some of the shenanigans, and it wasn't just weight. It was grades and dockage. Dockage was-- They would insult the farmer. They would-- Your dad has probably shown you how they assessed a sample, and they calculate the dockage in it. The grain companies would say, “Well, there's seven percent dockage here,” and there might only be two percent. The farmer couldn't say a word about it. He can argue all he wants, but--

**[0:20:56]**

Later on, when the Commission took over—and this is 1912 or something—there was an appeal process so that if a farmer didn't get what he thought he was entitled to, he could appeal it to the Commission, and they would rule on it, which was a big improvement. But we talked the other day about the weighing division and the inspection division being phased out, and I don't know whether it's time. Maybe they're no longer needed. I don't know. But I can assure you, in my day and before, they were needed.

NP: Hm! With that, going back to the story you were just telling about the weighing incident, the grain car would come in with a certain stated weight, correct?



WT: There was a shipping weight. Now what did we call that? A bill of lading weight or there was something--. Yeah, the weight approximately. It wasn't an official weight. A country didn't have official weights. They had their own, but the reason the Commission was formed was because some of those weights were phony. It was all right when the country elevator got grain from a whole bunch of farmers and loaded one car from many farmers, and they had their own weight, and it was their own grain, but there were such things as producer cars. Farmers would load their own. They'd get an auger and bring their truck or horse and buggy up beside the car, and they'd auger it into the boxcar. They were allowed to do this, and the Grain Commission were responsible for getting them producer cars. Now, I don't know if you've been into it that deep, but that's the way it was.

NP: And they still have them.

WT: They still have them, do they?

NP: It's one of the arguments now with all the big--.

WT: Now, the other thing I have to say at this time is that when you've got grain elevators, and they're supervised by the Grain Commission, the people who run the elevators don't like the Grain Commission. Nobody likes the authority. You'll hear all kinds of stories, "The Commission did this, and the Commission--." You hear derogatory stories, but don't believe them all. There are truths, and I would be the first to agree that, for instance, the behaviour on the weighing staff wasn't always impeccable. It left something to be desired, but I know that when I left Thunder Bay to go to Winnipeg, people were doing a job—not 100 percent—but it was improving.

NP: Sorry to harp on this particular line--.

WT: Not at all.

NP: But thinking of that grain car, who lost out? Like the fact that that--. Who did that guy end up stealing from?

WT: When the fella--?

NP: Yeah.

WT: See, I would have to know who shipped the car, and I don't know that kind of detail.

NP: So it would be the shipper that would be at a loss?

**[0:25:03]**

WT: Yeah. Yeah. The terminal would have benefitted from it. I don't know who suffered. I just don't know.

NP: Well, if you said it was so many bushels of grain, and it turned out to be less than that, then I would assume the shipper would have been the one that would have taken the back--.

WT: Well, he stole grain. That's for sure. When he opened that garner, and the grain went down into that scale that was already running into the bin, he stole grain. There's no question.

NP: Now, who would benefit from that theft? Could that individual, or would it be the company?

WT: Well, the elevator. I don't know. I honestly don't know what they did with overages, but I'm sure they generated overages. I know when I managed elevators, we generated overages. There's no question. Not that we stole. You were allowed a handling allowance. There were ways you could--. Certain mixes you could mix and blend a grain back into another parcel of grain. You could generate an overage.

NP: Yeah. I was thinking about, that there was a story you told last time about working with an elevator in Quebec or Montreal. In Montreal

WT: Oh, yes. Yes.

NP: And saying that there was suspicion there that some bins were filled with--.

WT: That was on my part. I suspected.

NP: Yeah, just suspicion. And I can sort of see trucks coming in and taking off with it at night. I just was sort of wondering in Thunder Bay whether that stolen grain--. What would be the market for it?

WT: I don't know. I really don't know.

NP: Yeah. Interesting.

WT: I wish I did. But no, I can't answer your question.

NP: Now, Stewart and Bawlf Elevators were pretty much the same?

WT: Yes, yes.

NP: Was it Canada Malting by the time you--?

WT: No, no. Stewart's is separate. That's a different one. That's what's 4B now.

NP: 7--.

WT: Or 7, I mean. 7B, that's right next door. But Bawlf or Canada Malt is the next one across the slips from it.

NP: They were twins when built, though.

WT: They looked alike.

NP: Yeah.

WT: But Canada Malt was a little newer from my memory.

NP: They had a piece added on. They had the malting plant added on because when they were built, they were just mirror images of each other.

WT: Yeah. They had a workhouse much like the Searle alongside the dock, and I think there was two shippers and two receivers. Yeah, they were much the same. Yeah. You know more about it than I do!

NP: Well, I've done some research. [Laughs]

WT: Yes, you have.

NP: I have not been wasting my last ten years.

WT: It's fresher in your mind than mine.

NP: That's true.

WT: I've been out of it a long time.

NP: Then we move onto the one next door.

WT: That would be Pool 3, Manitoba Pool 3. Yes. I can see the people. I can see the superintendent, but I can't think of his name. They built those big storage tanks during my time, but I didn't have much to do with them.

NP: Now, do you know why they built them?

WT: Just not enough storage capacity. I guess Manitoba Pool had hundreds of country elevators, they were generating a lot of business, and they hated to pass it onto some other company, so they built it to store grain themselves. There were years when they would take in a lot of grain, and it didn't move that fast.

NP: They're coming down now, the whole elevator.

WT: I wish I could remember. My memory is bad. But I think I'm going to drive over there someday just to look at it.

NP: Well, I think the last bin is coming down.

WT: Is it?

NP: Yeah. And the rest is coming down as well.

WT: So they're knocking it down with a big front-end loader or something?

NP: Yeah. Just sort of clawing at it. Yeah.

**[0:30:00]**

WT: Clawing at it, yeah. Okay. I'd like to go and see how they do it.

NP: I don't know what they're doing with the concrete, but I suspect it will not be blown up or in. It will probably just be taken down.

WT: Yeah. They avoid dynamite nowadays. I don't know why because it's the quickest way to get them down.

NP: Well, right next door to Canada Malt, maybe they don't want to take it down too. [Laughs]

WT: Well, yes. Yeah. Well, okay. Across the next one is Pool 6. Right? Sask Pool 6?

NP: It was old.

WT: Yes, it was old. If there was a shortage on a boat, it was the weighing division that were asked to investigate it. We used to get a lot of shortages from Pool 6. I don't know the details of the complaints or anything, but many a time I would be told by our office that vessel loaded so-and-so and it's short a lot of grain. That's when we started inspecting the spouting, and the Pool 6 had spouts going to the shipping bins that went through house bins. Over the years, that spouting wore out, and nobody did anything about it. It leaked grain into the house bin.

Now, that doesn't sound much, a little hole, but that hole can become a big hole. I guess, eventually, they would plug them. An employee once told me that after they loaded a vessel, it was his job to go and shake out these house bins to see how much they had got back. Now, that's why the Grain Commission was formed in the first place. That's just one more incident.

NP: Now, is that unusual to have the spouts go through the bins?

WT: No. It happened at them all, but from then on, especially when us people came, we used to go to those bins and inspect them. I've been down many a bin to check the spouting.

NP: What's that experience like?

WT: Well, you shouldn't become accustomed to it. You go down the chair, and it's quite safe, but--.

NP: But they're dark. There's no lights in them.

WT: Oh, yeah, but we let down light. We let down extension cords. What some of the elevators did to stop this grain from leaking when they found out that we were onto it, they put a trough around the spout. Just imagine just a trough, a metal trough, and that trough would pretty soon fill up with grain that leaked. Once it filled up, it couldn't leak anymore, which was acceptable to us. We on the weighing staff, we thought that was quite acceptable.

NP: So would they fill those bins to the top or just to the bottom of the spout?

WT: Oh, no, no. No, it never got that bad. Oh, no, no. No, I don't know. Pool 6 is the only one where I've had the employee admit to me that his job is to shake out the bins. I don't know if--. If others had spouts that went through house bins, we soon found out. We had plans for the elevator, and we knew where the spouting went. We'd inspect it.

NP: Who would have those plans?

WT: I don't know, but we must have got the information somewhere because Ross Teeple has us draw—and I was involved in this—had us draw up a flowchart showing where the grain went from the time it left the scale. We're talking about shipping now. If the spout went through a house bin, which house bins it went through, and it became the staff's job at that elevator to regularly inspect those. We used to have an inspection form that we had to fill out. Oh, I'm sorry. The staff, our staff, would then inspect this spouting. It wasn't just spouting. It was inward cars the same way to make sure there was no loss of grain.

**[0:35:17]**

NP: This is all bringing to mind something I read early, early on when I started working on this project about some millwright who had been asked to build false bottoms in bins, but that was way back. [Laughs] I think it was probably pre--.

WT: Oh. Okay, so you have had an inkling then.

NP: There were some shenanigans that--.

WT: Yeah. Okay. I thought--. You sounded quite innocent. I didn't think you had heard--.

NP: [Laughs] It's a pure act on my part.

WT: Okay, well. I take it back.

NP: Yes. So Pool 6 then, at one point it had two workhouses. Did it have two workhouses on either side?

WT: Not when I was there.

NP: Just the one then?

WT: Just the one big one along--.

NP: I wonder what happened to the other one.

WT: It had two annexes or three? Gee.

NP: Yeah. Now, a house bin, it's in the workhouse then? Those are the bins that are in the workhouse?

WT: In the workhouse is a house bin, and annex bin--. House bins were originally meant to hold a car upon receipt, and then they could take it from there and put it over the cleaners and then put it out to storage. But they would take grain in so fast, they couldn't do that. So pretty soon, they would be storing it out in the annex, and then when it got time to clean it, they'd bring it back and clean it. Yeah.

NP: Mmhmm. Moving northward.

WT: Yeah. Okay. Pool 2. It's still standing. Yeah. Yeah. I don't remember working there, but I must have. It was slow.

NP: It would have been one of the first to be closed down, I would think.

WT: Yes, it was. It was. And the main reason was it had no water in front of it. The ships would come in there, and they would have to send an empty boat in and put the first few thousand bushels on from there, and then move it out because if they kept loading, it would be sitting on the bottom. Yeah. It was one of the slower ones. Manitoba Pool, I think, run it. Yeah.

NP: Among many others in the earlier years.

WT: Yeah.

NP: Then we move to--.

WT: Who's next? Oh, Richardson would be next. Yeah. Fast, efficient, busy. Who the hell was the superintendent there? Hm. I did know. But the weighman was a fellow who's still alive. He's into airplanes, so I've got to know him fairly well. What the heck's his name? His hobby is taking pictures of airplanes. He's got thousands of pictures of airplanes, but that's beside--. That's nothing to do with grain.

NP: So did he have a long career then at Richardson's? Did he have a long career at Richardson's, the weighman there?

WT: This chap that--?

NP: Mmhmm.

WT: Oh, yeah. He was there, oh, I don't know how long before I ever knew him, but he was still there when I went to Winnipeg.

NP: Well, if the name comes back to your mind, let us know.

WT: Yes. It should come back, but I wouldn't guarantee it.

NP: Yeah, let us know.

WT: So after Richardson's there would be Pool 9.

NP: Pool 4 beforehand, I would think. 4A and B? Or was it Pool 5 at the time you were there?



WT: No, no.

NP: The ones where there were the explosions, anyway.

**[0:40:00]**

WT: Yeah, okay. Yeah, yeah. See I didn't work in Port Arthur, so I'm not as familiar with those, but I did--. I guess they thought maybe I had a little potential or something. They made sure they sent me to all these elevators. I worked at them all, but not for long.

NP: Now, Pool 4 was where they had the explosion, and if I have my dates right, you were working for the '50--.

WT: Pool 4, that's when I was heading overseas again.

NP: That was the '45 explosion.

WT: Yeah. '45, yeah.

NP: And then there was one in '52. A lot less loss of life.

WT: Oh, yes. Yes. You're right, yes. I don't know much about it, but yes, you're right.

NP: It must--. Well, I wonder if there would have been weigh staff that would have been killed, I would think, or injured.

WT: I don't remember anybody in the weighing staff being killed, but there could have been. I think in the '45 explosion there was, but I really don't know. I probably heard it one time, but I've forgotten.

NP: When there's incidents like that—and maybe this comes from your experience with managing the government elevators out west—when there's an incident like a fire or an accident, who investigates?

WT: We never had one.

NP: Oh, well, good.

WT: And I'm going to tell you now that when I took them over, they had old, open electrical motors, highly dangerous, and one of the first projects I started was electrical rehabilitation at all the elevators. It cost millions of dollars, but the government went along for it. When I first went there, I said to the Commission, "This is a hell of reflection on you. If we have an explosion, and we kill a half a dozen people, and you're the licensing authority, you better do something about it now before it's too late."

So we did. We started with the Prince Rupert Elevator. We totally rehabilitated the electrical system, all what we call Class 2 Group G explosion-proof motors. I don't know if you've heard that expression, but it's a big deal around grain elevators. We did--. Well, I think we were still doing Edmonton or Calgary when I left, but yeah. We did it.

NP: So we slipped from Pool 4 to Pool 9, then.

WT: Yeah. Pool 9. I really don't know much about it. Was that Manitoba Pool?

NP: Alberta.

WT: Alberta Pool. Okay, yes. Yes. But didn't Manitoba operate it for them?

NP: I'm not sure. All I've seen are postcards, and I see, "Alberta Pool." It could have very well been managed by Manitoba Pool.

WT: I don't know much about it. I would suspect that in those early days, most of the grain was moving out the East Coast. The markets for grain was in Europe, and at that time, there wasn't much going out through the West Coast. So Alberta Pool, I can imagine, put that elevator up here for that purpose. But I don't really know. I'm guessing.

NP: Again, you may not remember because you didn't spend much time over on that side, but was Alberta Pool still operating when you left as far as you know? It hadn't come down yet?

WT: That's Pool 9 you're talking about?

NP: Yeah.

WT: Yes, but I don't remember it being called Alberta Pool. I know it was at one time, but I really thought Manitoba Pool was operating it. But I could be wrong.

NP: At one time it was called Union Terminal, or at least an elevator in that spot was called Union Terminal, but that's an old, old name.

WT: Yeah. I really can't help you.

**[0:45:01]**

NP: And then the final one.

WT: Oh, that would be United Grain Growers, is it? Yes. That's the one that slipped in the slip.

NP: That must have created a bit of work for the weighing staff.

WT: Yeah, that caused--. Well, it happened when there was no staff in the elevator. The watchman, I understand, had just walked out of the basement. He had to go in there to punch his clock. He just walked out of there when the elevator went *swoosh!* Apparently, it created quite a tidal wave. I remember looking out the window. I was working at the National at the time the next day. I thought, "I'd like to get over there and see that," but I never went.

NP: Now, the National was what became Cargill?

WT: Grand Trunk.

NP: Yes, yes. Okay.

WT: Oh, yeah. Yes, it became Cargill. Yeah.

NP: So with something like that, what would the weighing staff have to do when they lost a whole elevator full of grain into the--?

WT: Oh, nothing they could do. It was an insurance claim. Yeah.

NP: Okay. Just records that you may have had and that's it.

WT: Yeah. Well, that would take place in the Commission in the statistics division. They would cancel out. And the elevator would have to tell them what was in there. We didn't know.

NP: Good thing the workhouse didn't go, or all the records probably would have gone too.

WT: Yeah, yeah. Well, the--.

NP: Quite something.

WT: There wouldn't be many records in the workhouse. When grain was weighed, whether it be in or out, the records—our records, the weighing division—was sent down to the office down in the Chapple's Building and then in the post office building.

NP: Well, that's a great tour of the waterfront!

WT: Well, if--.

NP: From someone who's been in all of the elevators.

WT: I've got one more little story to tell you, and it's to do with inspection. As I said, they did their job properly. They acquired prestige. They were highly thought of. The elevators would hesitate putting anything over on them. But at Westland Elevator D one day, I was up there loading a boat, and there was--. It was a big boat, long. We were shipping in the scale—let's call it No. 1 scale up there—and we were shipping from the last scale here. These are all shipping scales. I think there was five of them or something, and wide apart and so on.

On the vessel, there was one sampler. The assistant inspector--. They very seldom sent a sampler, but they would send an assistant inspector or one of the junior inspectors, and they would sample. I guess you've seen the scoop that they cut through the flow of grain and so on. This sampler—I was upstairs, and I'm looking down—and he would sample at this spout, and then he would rush down to the other end of the boat, and he would sample at this spout. All of a sudden, they stopped the flow of grain in this spout. They didn't tell me, and they weren't even speaking to me, but you get to know what's going on. I knew what was going on in the elevator just like I knew what was going on on the back of my hand.

They were chatting, and the weighman said, "Don't drop it. Don't drop it." See, they had the draft in the scale. We watched the sampler go down the boat, and he's sampling at this spout here. He said, "Let it go!" And the weighman opened it up, and the spout

to the boat was open, and right onto the boat. And so, the sampler saw this happen, and he quickly grabbed his sample, and he started to come back, but they shut it off. Now, I can't prove anything, but I'm confident that they had a parcel of grain that wouldn't pass inspection, and they got rid of it while he was up at the other end of the boat.

**[0:50:12]**

But I have to tell you that story just because the inspection didn't let those things get away. They had control, but occasionally, the elevator got away with it. Now, I couldn't prove anything, so I couldn't report to anybody.

NP: But the sampler likely reported.

WT: He didn't know.

NP: Oh, he was facing the other direction.

WT: No, no. He was at the spout there, and they can drop wherever they want and put in any shipment they want. He had already been sampling there when they cut off the flow. See, somebody down in the basement was sampling for the elevator, and they realized, "This doesn't meet the grade." So they phoned the scale floor, "Don't let any more go to the boat." They shut it off. The weighman says, "Well--." I think. I suspect the weighman said, "Well, we'll clear it to the boat." Well, not while they're sampling. So when--. Was that mine?

Anyway, I have no doubt that something was wrong. There was dockage in the grain, or it didn't quite meet the grade, or something was wrong. They would have had to unload it. That's why I told you about the marine leg. They would have had to unload it if it didn't meet the grade, but by the time the sampler got back to the spout, they had good clean grain up there or whatever that met the grade, and they just--. And he caught samples. But he would not know what went in while he was up there at the other end of the boat. He's got no way.

NP: When you're just talking about that, what's going through my mind is I'm wondering now with the change in doing inward inspections—and I think even inspections on grain that is going to a transfer elevator—so if we take a--.

WT: A transfer elevator to me is one of those elevators down east on the Bay Port.

NP: Right.

WT: Okay.

NP: Yeah. So if that kind of thing happened with the wrong product going in and nobody noting it, then there's going to have to be--. I don't know what currently happens with--. If ships are inspected out of here that are going to transfer elevators, they wouldn't bother inspecting again when they offload into the transfer elevator?

WT: Not official. Oh, no. Just a minute. There were government inspectors. There were government grain inspectors in Montreal.

NP: But that may have been on shipping out.

**[Audio pauses]**

WT: No problem for me.

NP: Okay. Yeah. They would certainly be inspecting on the ocean-going vessels taking it out of the country, but there could be a real mess in the elevators if care isn't taken, but maybe care will be taken.

WT: Well, see, when the grain left here for storage in the transfer elevators, it met the grade, and as long as they binned it separately, there wouldn't be no problem in shipping, but there was undoubtedly some hanky-panky going on. I don't know. I'm just guessing.

NP: Are we back on? Good.

WT: It's human nature, some people, to try and put one over on the next guy.

NP: Yeah. Well, and that's the whole area you mentioned earlier on about blending. Blending, from a lot of people we talked to, is a real art.

WT: Oh, yes.

NP: And so, the elevator blender, whoever that might be, was prized because you had such a narrow margin before it became the wrong grade.

WT: Yes. And also, the reason is the inspection were pretty sharp. They'd catch--. If you were wrong, they'd catch you. They were pretty sharp those guys.

NP: Well. We better get to Winnipeg, or we'll never get finished!

WT: Okay. Government elevators.

**[Audio pauses]**

**[0:55:00]**

NP: Do you want to put it on, and I'll just introduce it by saying--.

WT: Okay.

MM: Okay.

NP: Well, we're moving out of Thunder Bay to a job in Winnipeg, and that would have been in 1967. First of all, why did you want to make a change?

WT: It was the biggest surprise of my life, and I never thought of wanting to do it. [Laughs] It was just presented to me. It was so far over my head. The only way I can describe it, it was a huge promotion. I don't know of anybody in the government ever jump from a supervising grain weighman to assistant general manager of six terminal elevators. Totally unheard of. But anyway--.

NP: So was it just the idea of a challenge that grabbed you?

WT: Well, I thought--. You know, I was young and bulletproof. I just thought I can do anything I make up my mind to do. It never occurred to me that I couldn't do it, but I really didn't know what the system was all about, what the government elevators were all about. The job had been offered to Ross Teeple. Ross had an excellent reputation, and it was offered to him, and I think I told you previously that the reason the job was offered to Ross first and then me was because the previous general manager had been, I hate to say, he was crooked, but he was taking money from various people. He was engaged in activity that he should never had done.

Just as an example, one of the things he used to do, the government elevators had their own repair crew. They would go down to the elevators and paint them, for instance. Big job. They would do some concrete work or anything that the maintenance staff at the elevator couldn't do. Then this mobile crew, they were based in Saskatoon, but they used to travel around to the other five elevators. You know, I've lost my train of thought.

NP: You were talking about one of the things the guy was doing related to having their own crew. So he was not on the up and up.

WT: Yeah. Well, you asked me about accepting the job and so on.

NP: And then they offered it to Teeple because this--.

WT: Yeah, they offered it to Ross Teeple.

NP: Because the other guy was not doing his job properly.

WT: And Ross Teeple—that's where I wanted to go—Ross Teeple had been in Winnipeg as a supervising weighman, and he knew the reputation the government elevators had, and he knew what it was like to work in head office and be under the thumb of everybody—not just the Commission, but the whole grain industry. That was the headquarters in Winnipeg. He just didn't look forward to it. So he turned it down.

NP: So did he start off in Thunder Bay and then go to Winnipeg and then come back to Thunder Bay?

WT: Oh, yes. See, he was a grain weighman here, and the supervising weighman for Winnipeg. There is one there, and they were replacing him. The occupant had retired or something, so Ross applied for it and got the job. They moved him to Winnipeg, and he was there for a number of years. I don't remember how many. Then he applied for a high position here, but still a supervising weighman. He was in charge of the whole city of the weighing staff, as a matter of fact. He--. Oh, God. I've lost my train of thought again. Maybe it will come back to me.

**[1:00:06]**

NP: While you're thinking about that, there's information that we haven't had recorded, and that is just the history of the government elevators. That would be news to people that there was even such a thing as a--.



WT: Well, I don't have a history of it. [Laughs] I wish I did. But anyways, let's see if I can go on here. So when Ross turned it down, Vic Martens said to him, "Who would you recommend?" And Ross said something to the effect that, "Well, we don't have anybody that's just that experienced in the operational end of an elevator." And Vic said words to the effect—I don't know I wasn't there—he said, "We don't care. We want an honest man." And Ross Teeple said, "In that case, I know exactly who you want." So he gave them my name.

And Vic Martens came to Thunder Bay and interviewed me. He did all the talking. Vic was a little domineering. I don't know. You probably don't know him as well as I did, but he did all the talking, and most of it was over my head. I really didn't understand what he was saying, but I still was going to try it. So the next thing I knew, I got a letter appointing me as assistant general manager and asking me when it would be convenient to move. I think I gave them a date in June. This was the middle of the winter. So we had to sell our house and a whole bunch of things. I had a half-ton truck at the time, and my wife drove the car, and we had a young lad. He was 8 years of age. He's now 50-some-odd, and he lived right next door. We had a dog and because of the age of our son and the dog and so on, we stopped overnight in Dryden. I remember that. We went on and stopped in Winnipeg, and before long we--. Oh, we had already bought a house. We had been there on a house hunting trip, and so it wasn't long before we moved into our house. I went--.

NP: I can't recall if we discussed where was it in Winnipeg you set up shop? What house?

WT: The house was in St. Vital, 107 River Road. My memory is poor, but I remember that. Anyway--.

NP: Can I ask you about--. And you made a bit of a reference to it in talking about Mr. Teeple and how he felt about the Canadian Grain Commission. So you moved from a relatively small office, very, very locally focused to the Grain Commission, which was a national organization. What amazed you, surprised you, disheartened you about that whole operation?

WT: Well, being in the same building as the commissioners and the entire Grain Commission staff, that didn't bother me as much as this job that I had just accepted. The general manager was a very strong--. I don't know whether to call him an administrator or what, but he had ideas. Well, I'll give you an idea. He was a colonel in the army during the war. You don't get to be a colonel unless you've got something on the ball.

NP: And what was his name? Colonel somebody or other. [Laughs]

**[1:05:02]**

WT: No, no. God, I know his name, but my memory is--. It'll come to me, and I can assure you--. Oh, Jesus.

NP: How did he end up in the Grain Commission?

WT: He had been on the clerical staff in one of the elevators. Can you imagine? He was office manager or something at Moosejaw, I think. When the general manager retired, they looked around for a replacement from within the organization. They thought that was the way to go. So they grabbed him and brought him in as general manager. He was quite capable, quite competent, understood. He didn't know the operational end of things, and I'm going to tell you the story about that about the Prince Rupert Elevator. Remind me to tell you that story, that's very important.

He was frightening to me. He was just, well, it's hard to explain, but can you imagine somebody that kind of lords it over everybody and looks down his nose at everybody? He was one of those, but brilliant. He had a mind like a steel trap. He gave me little jobs to do, but he didn't really tell me what it was all about. I remember he gave me a project to have the property fenced in, a few jobs like that, but--.

NP: How big was that part of the Commission? Just the two of you or were there--?

WT: Oh, no, no. This was head office for the Canadian Government Elevators was right there in Winnipeg, and he was head of it, and there was an office manager, and there was a staff there of about seven or eight people. Well, the elevators weren't very busy, so there really wasn't much for them to do.

NP: And where were the elevators?

WT: The oldest one was Moosejaw, Saskatoon, Calgary, Edmonton, Lethbridge, and Prince Rupert.

NP: Was Churchill part of that system ever?

WT: No. No, but we did their grain documentation. I just can't remember. If they took in grain, we processed it with the statistics division in the Commission.

NP: Who would have owned the Churchill elevator?

WT: National Harbours Board. They were the titled owners, just like you would say, “Who owned the government elevators?” Well, the government elevators were owned by the government, but the Commission were charged with managing them.

NP: And what--.

WT: Before I go any further, I gave you that stuff to read.

NP: Mhmm.

WT: What did you get out of my statement that there was a conflict of interest? Do you really understand what that means?

NP: Well, tell me.

WT: Okay. First of all, I’m going to give you an example. Many years ago—and you’re too young to remember this, it didn’t happen in your time—but many years ago, CBC was part of the radio licensing authority, and the rest of the broadcasting world were up in arms constantly because the CBC was not only licensing them, but they were in competition with them. Now, that’s exactly what--. That’s the only example I can think of to give you because it was well known, back in the ‘30s and 40’s, it was well known that this conflict of interest existed in the broadcasting business.

**[1:10:05]**

Now, the government elevators owned by the Grain Commission were in the grain handling business, but they were competing with the Commission’s other licensees. Now, if you didn’t get that out of that information, that’s what I wanted you to get. There was such an obvious conflict of interest so that after I--. When they retired the general manager, I didn’t know what it was the elevators were supposed to do. You can’t have six big terminal elevators sitting there doing nothing. It didn’t make sense to me.

So I asked for an appointment with the Commission, and at that time we had three commissioners. The head commissioner was Frank Hamilton. Frank, an unbelievable person. I have to think of him. He went through the war. He was discharged from the Air Force as a squadron leader. You don’t get to be—like a colonel—you don’t get there unless you’ve got something on the ball. But this guy got it through his own determination, and his own courage, and he did—I don’t know—probably two tours on bomber command when you couldn’t survive ten trips. You do 30 for a tour, and I think he did it twice. I’m not sure. This man has my utmost respect.

But as a commissioner, he didn't say a word when I asked for this meeting. There was another commissioner, his name was Lem Shuttleworth, and he was an ex-Minister of Agriculture in the Roblin Government. You might have heard of them. There was a third one, his name was [edited], but he was a complete alcoholic, so he was useless. So I had this meeting in front of the three of them. Frank said nothing, [edited] said nothing, but Lem Shuttleworth-- I asked the question. I said, "What is it these elevators are supposed to do?" And Lem Shuttleworth, a quiet-spoken, hell of a nice guy, smart as a whip, he said, "Bill, we don't know." But he says, "They cost a lot of money to operate. We want you to try and keep them from losing money." I said, "Lem, that's all I need to know. That's all I need to know."

I went out, and I generated business that the other grain companies wouldn't handle, and most of it was off-grains—rapeseed, that's now called canola seed, mustard seed, sunflower seed. All these odd grains that the terminals here hated. They just-- It interfered with their volume of wheat or barley or whatever they were putting through. I started to handle this at any elevator. I made it known. I talked to grain organizations, particularly the-- What the heck was the name of that outfit? They thought the world of me. I handled grain when-- And not until then. They couldn't get anybody to handle it. The terminals wouldn't give them space at the coast or in Thunder Bay, and we took it in.

NP: What would they have done? Just not grown it?

WT: I just don't know. They'd have to sell it cheap to the Americans or something. I really don't know, but they were in a tough spot. Nobody would handle their grain. Well, we made it pay. We handled millions of bushels of rapeseed. Of course, that was the biggest single crop. We handled a lot of mustard. We even did some bagging, and we hated bagging because it was just a labour-intensive thing that didn't pay anything—a few cents a bag or something. It was terrible, but anything to get business.

**[1:15:25]**

And I really don't-- Strangely, the financial people would never tell me how we were doing. I don't know to this day how we did financially, but I know they made a hell of a lot more money than they had ever made. And in one of those articles I gave you to read, the Prince Rupert Elevator handled 40-some-odd million bushels one year when I was there—the most they had ever handled in their career. Prior to that, their record was 12 million. I'm going to tell you how that came about too.

I'd only been in the job a couple of years, and the phone rang one day, and it was the head stevedore in Vancouver. He said, "I understand you're new with the government elevators." "Yeah." He said, "Well, how come the Prince Rupert Elevator can only ship about a quarter as much grain as an elevator of the same size in Vancouver?" I said, "Well, in the first place, I don't believe

that.” I said, “The Prince Rupert Elevator doesn’t get much business. Nobody sends them any business, and I can’t go and get the grain business.” Where was I?

NP: The stevedore had given you a phone call.

WT: Yeah. Oh, the stevedore. Yeah. So I said, “But I’ll tell you what.” I said, “You call me when you hear there’s going to be a boat up there, and I’ll be there.” So he said, “Just a minute. I can tell you right now.” He must have talked to somebody, and he said, “There’s going to be a boat at Prince Rupert in two days’ time.” I said, “I’ll see you there.” I made reservations on an airplane, and up we went.

They were loading this boat, and down on the dock I could see a little stream of grain about like this coming out the spout, you know. So I think the superintendent was with me, and he didn’t know anything about it because he was a clerical guy. He had never gone through the operational end. So I said, “Let’s go upstairs.” We went into the annex, and they ship on a belt, and they divert a grain to a dock spout, a spout that they load the vessel with. I got up there, and the annex man was there. There was a stream of grain on the belt about this wide and about that deep.

NP: About a foot wide and a couple of inches deep.

WT: Yeah, yeah. I said, “How come you haven’t got a bigger load on that belt?” He said, “Oh, you can’t because see that loader up there where it goes into the bin?” He says, “It spills there.” I said, “Show me.” He said, “What do you mean?” I said, “Open the spout. Give it a little more.” He opened it. Nothing happened. He opened it some more. Nothing happened. Some more, and pretty soon we had a stream that wide and that deep on the belt.

NP: Twice as much.

WT: Ten times as much. But when we really got the bin almost wide open that we were pulling from, it started to kick back a little bit, just a few kernels. I said, “Okay. Cut her back a couple of notches.” So he cut it back, and I said, “Now, keep that load there. Don’t cut her back.” And that’s the year we shipped 40 million bushels from 12.

**[1:20:03]**

NP: So why do you think--? Was it just lack of knowledge that--?

WT: No. Government. Nobody cares.

NP: But what difference would it have made if they had opened it up?

WT: What's that?

NP: Why would--?

WT: Well, somebody told him it would spill, so he never tried it. But that's typical of government. The government should not be in that kind of business. It takes a special kind of government operation. The management has to be--. You have to be serious. You have to be sincere. They would have to want to do a job, but most government employees, they're going to get paid no matter what they do. So this guy somewhere—I don't know, long before my time—he just got the idea in his mind that they're going to put this little load on the belt, and that was it. See, the less he shipped, the less the people who wanted to move grain would send to Prince Rupert, so the less work they'd have to do.

NP: Now how do you--? What's the word I'm looking for? How does that jive with your experience in Thunder Bay where the weigh masters and the grain inspectors, they were all government employees.

WT: Yes. Well, the inspection staff had good manners, but not always. When I first started on the job, it wasn't so good, but people come along, and they were appointed because of what they knew and their attitude. Somebody in the inspection went about it the right way.

NP: And the same with the weighing staff because you said--.

WT: Well, there were times--.

NP: Eventually.

WT: Yeah. Eventually. Well, it took a guy like Ross Teeple.

NP: So it was more the individual initiative then?

WT: That's right. Ross Teeple and I, we both drew up training manuals for our staff. We described every step of the way of a job for a trackman, assistant weighman, and a weighman, and what his duties were and how he should go about it. And we actually trained them, and it made the difference.

NP: So when you came in then as the manager—when you moved from the assistant to general manager—and started building business--.

WT: That took a while. That took a few years.

NP: Right. And so, there would have had to be--. If a certain ethic had grown up at the various government elevators, even though they were separated by thousands of kilometres, then there would have had to be some housekeeping or training done there.

WT: Well, I couldn't do that. Not from Winnipeg. You'd have to spend time at each elevator. I started having superintendents' conventions, and a couple of the years, I encouraged them to bring the foremen. The intent was I was hoping I could convince them, but I haven't got the personality for it. Believe me. I'm not the most diplomatic person in the world. Another person could have done it that way, but I couldn't.

NP: The other thing that comes up in my mind when you say that you turned something that was not very successful into something that was at least a whole lot more successful if not successful enough—because I'll get to the article that you had given me to read—what was the reaction of the private trade, then, to--?

WT: They started to treat me worse. They treated me like a pariah. They saw me as a threat, and rightly so. Here the government is financing these elevators. They don't have to worry about where the money comes from, and they're competing with us.

**[1:25:15]**

NP: So did they start taking the product that they weren't going to take?

WT: Yes. Yes. It worked. Then they really went after it, but after I left. They didn't get much until--. Because we got a lot of it. Yeah, they did. They ship a lot of rapeseed through the West Coast now. An awful lot. Canola.

NP: So you showed them how the business could be developed?

WT: I didn't set out to do that, but I think back to Lem Shuttleworth's words when I asked, "What do you want these elevators to do?" He said, "I don't know, but just don't let them lose money." That's all I needed.

NP: Was there much difference between those elevators? Were they all built on the same plan?

WT: No. Only three of them were built on that one plan, and that's Moosejaw, the first one, then Saskatoon, and then Calgary.

NP: And was that the same then as the--?

WT: McCabe's. Exactly. Yeah.

NP: And the other two, then? Or three?

WT: They were more like Canada Malt or Searle or some of those.

NP: Sort of in a straight line--.

WT: Yeah. The one at Prince Rupert is like that. Yeah.

NP: Now, the article that you gave me to read was a Page 1 article on what they called the White Elephants.

WT: Oh, that.

NP: And you were--.

WT: Oh, you've got some questions there. [Laughs]

NP: Yeah. So in spite of improving the fortunes, or perhaps because of the pushback from private industry that suddenly these elevators that weren't creating any stirring of the waters all of a sudden they were actors—so probably some pressure from the private industry—we have this article saying, "White Elephants, what do we do with them?" So how did that--?

WT: See, it was strange the way it happened. They didn't want to handle this stuff, so they didn't miss it when I took it. I didn't take it from them. I just created work that wasn't there. They didn't really know what we did. The Commission never told them



whether our elevators--. They knew by their employees out in the country that that government elevator is starting to get busy. What's going on here? But they never, ever consulted me. I was the enemy.

NP: No, it was likely a higher up in the political realm.

WT: Yeah. In fact, I know that they talked to the Commission. In fact, they had talked to Vic Martens. That's the guy they would talk to. See, Bill McLeod was the secretary to the board, and Bill McLeod was a perfect gentleman. He never, ever confronted anybody. A real gentleman. Tried to settle if there was problems with the licensees. He'd settle them by talking, and so very nice, very gentlemanly. But pretty soon, the Commission could see that he wasn't cutting the mustard. So--.

NP: In what way?

WT: Well, he wasn't aggressive. I'm not sure. I didn't work with the Commission, so I don't know, but I can just tell that they weren't satisfied with his performance. There was a fellow in--. I don't know whether it was with statistics or laboratory or what do you call it? I forget now.

NP: The Grain Research Lab.

WT: Research. Vic Martens. So they brought Vic Martens in to understudy Bill McLeod, be his assistant. Well, Vic--.

**[1:30:09]**

NP: Martens.

WT: Martens was the kind of a guy you give him a little authority, he'll take it all, plus some. And that's what happened. He took over Bill McLeod's job. Pretty soon Bill had virtually nothing to do because Vic did it all.

NP: So I guess I'm just a little bit confused here as to how we got from a situation where you were doing what they had given you permission to do, which was to create business, and then we see then still, in spite of that, a movement towards selling off the--.

WT: Well, that was on my recommendation. This conflict-of-interest situation was just unbearable to me. How the elevators, under the ownership of the Grain Commission, could honestly compete with their own licensees didn't make sense, and it was always embarrassing. The management of the grain business did not like me. I can understand why. I don't blame them. But no, it just--.

And actually, I really don't know how we did. I never was ever told. I've often said to our own office staff, "I'd like to know how we're making out financially." Nobody ever told me, and I could figure it out myself, but I knew we were handling a lot of grain.

NP: So it would be by the time that you left, which is in '76, had they decided that they were going to get out of the--?

WT: No, no. See, what had happened a couple years before that, I had got some help. Our office manager helped me, and I drafted up a proposal to turn the elevators into a crown corporation. I don't know if you know what that means, but that's when the government owns something, but they're in business, a commercial enterprise. The basic civil service rules don't apply. They're a commercial organization owned by the government, which makes a lot of sense. I wanted them to turn these into a crown corporation and let me go out and compete. Well, I guess they would have had quite a reaction from the grain industry if the elevators, built by government taxpayers' money, went out and competed with no investment. You know, the whole thing stunk. So--.

NP: But that didn't happen.

WT: It didn't happen. But as soon as I left, they must have got permission--. See, we were now under the Department of Agriculture in Ottawa, and they started putting out feelers. After that article in the paper, they put out feelers. "Who's interested in these?" They almost gave them away.

NP: Were there takers for all of them?

WT: Oh, yes. Yeah. The Alberta government took the three in Alberta. They own Edmonton, Calgary, and Lethbridge, and I understand they're doing very well.

NP: And they operate as government entities?

WT: Grain elevators. Yeah. I think the Alberta Government owns them.

NP: I'll have to follow that up.

WT: Yeah. You should look into that. Let me know.

NP: [Laughs]

WT: I'd like to know.

NP: Yeah. I don't think any of them were ever mothballed.

WT: No, no. Moosejaw's still going, and Calgary's still--. Saskatoon's still going, and Prince Rupert is going lickety-split. It's handling a lot.

NP: Oh. Thoughts gone from my mind too.

WT: It gets worse with age. [Laughs]

NP: The other--. Oh, I know. The initial reason that those elevators were built, my understanding is that it was part of the whole uncertainty on the part of farmers that they were getting a good deal from the private industry. So they felt that they had to—and a lot of money was made on handling—so they felt they had to have buildings and operations that they felt would be more honest.

**[1:35:42]**

WT: Yes.

NP: Okay. So had that, in your estimation, had that changed by the time--? I mean, that was long ago. That was in 19--.

WT: '12.

NP: Yeah. And even before that because it took a while to get them okayed.

WT: Yeah.

NP: Had the farmers' feelings about the private trade changed to an extent that that initial reason for being no longer existed?

WT: This gets complicated because at no time did the Commission give us, the government elevators, the right to go out and solicit business. We only got business from the grain companies when they couldn't cope. That's what the government elevators eventually became. They just become a surge capacity storage for the grain companies if they needed it. I would like to have been

around when the government politicians were discussing whether or not they should do this, whether they should go into this grain handling business.

NP: Now, there was a time—wartime in particular is the one that comes to mind—where they probably were--.

WT: World War II?

NP: Where they probably were in full storage mode, anyway.

WT: Well, once they filled them up, they couldn't do anything. There was no market. You couldn't ship overseas, very little.

NP: But since that time, there's never been an overcapacity to even come anywhere close to matching that.

WT: Yes. We've had years. The year of the first big China sale, we handled a lot of grain that year because the Wheat Board needed it, and the capacity on the West Coast couldn't handle it. So we really handled a lot of grain. But that's just the one year. You can look that up, and you'll find out what year it was that China made her first big purchase.

NP: Now, I read in the articles as well that there were a couple of things that you were hoping to happen. They eventually did, but it took--.

WT: What was that?

NP: Well, one was the unit trains.

WT: Oh. Yes.

NP: So say a little bit about that.

WT: Well, we could load boxcars like they load boats here. We would have a couple of car loading spouts, we'd spot a car on each track, and *swoosh!* 12-15 minutes it's loaded and out the track, and the next one in. Tank cars were just starting to come in. We could load those like you wouldn't believe. And I couldn't see why this mickey-mouse system where the grain comes into these little wee country elevators in trucks—one-ton, five-ton, not very big—and it goes to the little country elevators. I thought, "Why

can't the grain firms send that grain to the government elevators, and we'll load it out on unit trains?" I really worked hard to get that.

I made my case very well. I remember one particular recommendation. I said, "Give us a unit train, 80 or 90 cars." I forget what I gave the number. "And we'll load them at any or all of our elevators, and we'll send it to the West Coast, and you unload it as a--. The grain's cleaned. There's nothing to do. Unload it into a pit and straight onto a boat." Can you imagine the volume of grain you could handle? Just unbelievable.

**[1:40:26]**

NP: And the--.

WT: They didn't go for it.

NP: Why not?

WT: I don't know. They didn't like me. They didn't like the government. They didn't want the elevators to succeed. Oh, it was a tough situation.

NP: Well, I think one of the other recommendations—again, in reading that article—was that close down the small elevators.

WT: Oh, yes.

NP: But then you would have to have the companies all agree to close down if they were operating four different companies in one town.

WT: Oh, yes. The whole grain industry was--. It was necessary to change, big changes, but it was hard to bring about. Nobody wanted to change. What was it you--? We talked about unit trains, but you said something after that. What was it?

NP: I was just saying the reaction of the companies, but then also having the small elevators closing down.

WT: Oh, yeah. There were 6,000 of those little country elevators at one time. I think there's 4 or 500 now. Not even that? No kidding! [Laughs]

NP: As I said, the unit trains and the disappearance of those elevators--.

WT: Yeah, yeah. Unit train wasn't my original idea, but once the subject came up, I promoted it. I could have--. We did it. We did it from Lethbridge. They had, I think, 80 or 90 cars dedicated to our elevator. We'd load them out, they'd take them right to an elevator in BC, unload them, and bring all the empties back again, and we just kept that up. Worked beautifully, but--.

NP: But it stopped?

WT: Oh, yeah. It was done, I think, for a trial, and when it worked, well, "We don't want the government elevators to do that."

NP: Now, the fact that they have all of the companies—well, a lot of the companies you may have worked with are no longer around—but the ones that are around have gone to building large--.

WT: Inland terminals, yeah.

NP: Inland terminals. Smaller in size, I would think, than--.

WT: I had a hand—or not a hand, a little minor small part—when --. What's the terminal in Saskatchewan?

NP: West--.

WT: Down to the south.

NP: Way--.

WT: Weyburn! Yeah, Weyburn was the first one. Art Mainil was the spark plug. Just died. His write up was in *McLean's Magazine*. Art Mainil. I knew him well.

NP: How is that spelled?

WT: M-A-N-I-L-E or something. I pronounced it Mainil. Art Mainil. You talk about a dynamic going concern. Gosh. Wasn't very big, but he--.

NP: So how would those inland terminals, then, compare to the government elevators?

WT: Well, they weren't as big. They couldn't handle that amount, but he had the right idea. He got a group of farmers together, and they actually built that elevator there. There was still some doubt amongst his own members of his cooperative or whatever it was. They were doubtful. So he invited me--. They invited the Commission or somebody to come and talk to them about terminal elevators. Well, the Commission--. I forget. Vic Martens, maybe. I don't know who it was. Somebody came to me and said, "Would you go and give them a talk?" I said, "Oh, I'd love to." At that time, they had hired--. You know the guy. He's an ex-Air Force pilot. He flew an airplane. Oh, God.

**[1:45:02]**

NP: How would I know him?

WT: Oh, if you interviewed people in Winnipeg, you would have heard of this guy. The name will come to me.

NP: And he was hired to--?

WT: Incidentally, the general manager was Al Wilson.

NP: Okay. [Laughs]

WT: Al Wilson. And I'll come up with this guy's name too. But anyway, this chap and I was a--. Oh, this fellow I'm talking about used to be with Grain Growers, and they had two managers. One managed the terminal end of things. I can't think of his name. But this guy that I'm talking about managed the country elevator terminals. He had a big job, but he lost his job for some reason. There was a little internal politics or something. I don't know, but he lost his job, and the Commission recognized his talents, and they hired him. He was well worth getting a hold of. He had an airplane. Beechcraft Bonanza.

The Commission said, "We'll send what's-his-name with you." So I talked to him. He says, "Oh, let's fly up." "Okay." I was still active in flying, so I enjoyed that very much. We went up there, and I gave a speech of about 40 minutes to the group of shareholders of the Weyburn Terminal, and I think they felt a little better because I'm all for terminal elevators. They couldn't have found a more enthusiastic guy, I don't think. I kind of left them with a good feeling. They went ahead, and they finished building it.

NP: Now, one of the things that you, I think, were quoted as saying in that article was, “We are not a--.” I don’t know if you said a primary or country elevator. “We are a terminal elevator.” When you were talking about the Prairie elevators. What did you mean by that?

WT: The government elevators?

NP: Were terminals not--.

WT: Well, there’s two kinds of licenses. The little ones were licensed as country elevators, and they received no supervision whatsoever from the Grain Commission, but the terminals all had inspection and weighing staff.

NP: Okay. So it was essentially quality control.

WT: Yeah. Well--.

NP: Well, quality control from the standpoint of being able to--.

WT: The Commission had to treat their own elevators the same as their licensees. They couldn’t let their own elevators operate without supervision and expect the other ones to be happy. [Laughs]

NP: But from the standpoint of--. I guess I have a little trouble understanding from the standpoint of--. I always think of terminal elevators as being at a point of shipment onto a ship as opposed to in the middle of the Prairies.

WT: Yeah. Well, no. Those big elevators are referred to as terminal elevators.

NP: And so what--.

WT: Grain terminals. They’re big elevators.

NP: So just the--.

WT: They don’t have to be on the coast or on the waterfront to be a terminal.



NP: So the fact is the size?

WT: They were called inland terminals.

NP: It was just the size? Or did they provide services other than--?

WT: Yeah. Well, it was the service too. They gave government inspected certificates, inward and outward, and government weights. That's what differentiated them.

NP: So they're doing that then. So the elevator in Lethbridge was guaranteeing the quality of the grain that was leaving there in cars going to Prince Rupert?

WT: Yeah.

NP: Does that mean then that they just got free passage when they hit Prince Rupert?

WT: No, the inspection still inspected them, and the weighing still weighed it. Yes.

NP: Okay, my then question is why the double?

WT: I don't know.

NP: Okay.

WT: I don't know. You'd have to ask the Commission. Ask Vic Martens. [Laughing]

NP: Okay. So I think we're probably coming pretty close to our two hours, so I'll ask a final open question. Well, I'm going to ask two questions. One, did you ever regret leaving Thunder Bay and the job that you were doing here and where that career--?

**[1:50:02]**

WT: Yes. Yeah, but it had nothing to do with the job. I love Thunder Bay. My whole life is fishing, hunting, flying, and it just broke my heart to leave that. I thought, “If I got to this big city of Winnipeg, my life’s finished.” I did not look forward to it, but the thought of this new job was exciting.

NP: And in spite of the hardships that you’ve mentioned about it, was it worthwhile?

WT: Well, I’ll tell you. If anybody asked me how I enjoyed my experience with the government elevators, I would say, “I enjoyed it. I wouldn’t have missed it for the world, but I wouldn’t do it again.” To me, it’s like the war. The war was, for me, a great--. I survived so, a great experience, but I wouldn’t want to do it again. No. No, it’s one of those experiences that--. The government elevators was tough. That was a tough experience, especially for me. And I have to emphasize I wasn’t qualified. I had no administration or no management experience.

NP: Now, from the operational side of it—and this may seem like a mundane question, but we’re into mundane stuff as well as exciting stuff—and that is just the actual upkeep of an elevator. What kind of planning did that require? Was there a sort of rotation of updating? You did mention very briefly the persuading them to upgrade the operating systems so that they weren’t going to--.

WT: That was me that did that.

NP: Yes.

WT: You see, the elevator staff knew nothing about it. [Laughs] They were satisfied with the old--. These were big open motors. Looked like a cage. There’s wiring in there and sparks flying all over the place. The air’s full of dust. Oh! Just unbelievable.

NP: But did you have a maintenance plan for each elevator or--?

WT: No, no. Each elevator had a maintenance staff, and it was up to them to do maintenance that they were qualified to do. Anything beyond their qualifications was hired out.

NP: You mentioned painting.

WT: Yes, that was a big one.

NP: Why do you need to paint an elevator, and why is it so expensive?

WT: I don't know. It was done before I got there, and that's what this roving gang that I told you we had, that's what they did. So all the elevators were nice, fresh paint on them, so I didn't have a problem. A paint job at an elevator is good for 10-15 years or maybe more. So no, I would imagine the concrete would deteriorate without the paint. I would think that's the big reason.

NP: Were those elevators still pretty sound when you were--? The equipment might have been a bit outdated, but the structures?

WT: Yeah, the structure was sound. There was no problem on the Prairies like there was here in Thunder Bay. You've probably heard of all the elevators--. Well, Grain Growers caved in because the piles underneath rotted. Searle's had all those rotten piles under the elevators cut off. They cut them a few at a time and filled it with concrete. And Searle's still sits there today because of that work that was done. At Paterson's--.

NP: Remember our scanning?

WT: Paterson's was torn down because they didn't want to spend that kind of money. They had to do it. These wooden pilings underneath, where they stick out of the water, they rot.

NP: Mmhhh. During your time was there the upgrading of the dust control systems in the government elevators, or was that already done by the time you--?

WT: That was part of my rehabilitation. There was a little dust control, but Moosejaw had open bins. No tops on them. That was still that way when I left. I don't know if Saskatoon had open-top bins. No, I--.

**[1:55:05]**

NP: Did you ever have an accident in the elevators?

WT: Me, personally?

NP: No, no. Well, you personally, but--.

WT: Oh, no. You mean the elevator have a serious, major--? No.

NP: No--.

WT: Yes, yes, yes. We were loading a boat one day in Prince Rupert, and we used to hire a lot of casual people when we got busy. We kept a staff of about 25-28 people at every elevator, even when it did nothing, but when we got busy, we hired casuals. Well, this casual somehow got caught in a conveyor belt, and it killed him. That was just about a year or a couple years before I left. I was still fighting when I left to give some compensation to the parents. They were heartbroken. Just a young lad. The government would have nothing to do with any compensation whatsoever. They said, "If we acknowledge any responsibility, they're going to sue us until we're--."

NP: The reason I ask that is not a gruesome interest in the accidents, but I'm quite interested in when something like that happens, where is the study done? Which group within the Commission takes over? The legal side?

WT: No, nobody. The Commission could care less. Being government, the Department of Labour would investigate, and nobody ever told me the results. I was at a level in government where I felt like a mushroom. [Laughs] They didn't tell me what was going on.

NP: Thank you very much for another wonderful two hours worth of good information.

WT: Well, I don't know if it was wonderful, but I enjoyed it. [Laughing]

NP: Good. That's only part of it. We aren't in the business to make you happy. [Laughing]

WT: Yeah, we got a tough one. We got a tough one, the next one, I can assure you.

NP: Okay.

WT: Just talking about it something I haven't--. I've tried to put this out of my mind because it's difficult. The experiences I went through were tough, and it all boils down to the fact that I was ill-equipped to do it. No matter how you look at it, I was not well-equipped.

NP: And I would think from management theory perspective, that was the responsibility of your manager.

WT: Yes, yes. Yes. Absolutely. But they were desperate, I know that. They were.

NP: And now you know why! [Laughs]

WT: Yes, absolutely. I didn't know it then.

NP: Yeah. Well, good evening. I look forward to the next one.

WT: Yeah.

**End of interview.**