
RAY GILLESPIE

Date and place of birth (if available): Belfast, Ireland

Date and place of interview: Cold Lake Oil & Gas Galleries at the Cold Lake Museum

Name of interviewer: Peter McKenzie-Brown

Name of videographer: Peter Tombrowski

Full names (spelled out) of all others present: Cal Sikstrom (CS)

Consent form signed: Yes

Transcript reviewed by subject:

Interview Duration: 1 hour and 15 minutes

Initials of Interviewer: PMB

Last name of subject: GILLESPIE

PMB: So, once again we're interviewing in Cold Lake. Today we're interviewing Ray Gillespie who began working here in 1979 as a project superintendent before it all began. This time Cal Sikstrom is also in the room with me. Cal and I would be sharing the interview. We'll be interviewing Cal later on as well. He has a great deal of historical knowledge about the oil industry and has worked on this project for quite a while. So, I feel very privileged to have him. And of course, Peter Tombrowski is here and he's doing the video recording. So, ready? Good to have you here. Can you begin by telling us a little bit about your career in the whole industry? Maybe start with where you were born? Where you were educated? Where you started working and how it came to pass that you ended up working for Esso Cold Lake here in the City?

GILLESPIE: Well, that's going back quite a ways now. I was born in Belfast, Ireland. But, I lived with my parents in southern Ireland on a farm. We came over to Canada in 1956 and didn't have a job. So, I went and bought a newspaper at Mike's Newsstand in Edmonton and they were looking for... big ad in the paper they were looking for people for the bank. So, it was the Bank of Montreal and I while I was standing on Jasper Avenue I looked right across the street and there was the Bank of Montreal. So, I walked over and applied for a job. And, was hired right away but after about three months, I knew this wasn't my style of life. My lifestyle, it didn't suit me at all.



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PMB: Before you continue, would you go back and talk about your education? What had you studied in Ireland?

GILLESPIE: I attended Wesley College in my final years, in Dublin, in Ireland. And then I spent a number of years back on the farm and I didn't feel that really I was suited for farming.

PMB: What did you study in Wesley College?

GILLESPIE: This was the regular curriculum, the high school curriculum. Then when I left Wesley College I went back to the home farm. Conditions were pretty erratic at that time, as they are now. Farming, if you've any experience in farming, it's a sort of a lifestyle where it's got ups and downs, humps and hollows and there were quite a few hollows. And, I didn't feel I was making any progress there.

PMB: My mom grew up on a farm in the west of Ireland near [?]

GILLESPIE: Did she? Oh, my goodness. What part of Ireland?

PMB: Well, near Galway, Loughrea.

GILLESPIE: Well, we were in Roscommon. So, I had a girlfriend at the time but it wasn't like we were getting married. So, decided to immigrate to Canada.

PMB: So, you ended up in Edmonton working for the Bank of Montreal.

GILLESPIE: I ended up in Edmonton working for nobody. I was just an immigrant and I arrived and that was it. But yes, we got on to Bank of Montreal but after a couple of months I went in and was required to give them a months' notice. I went in to give the manager a months' notice and he said that, well he said, "When I started, there was no work around," so, he said, "I was happy to get in the bank." But I always thought that he wasn't really cut out either to be a bank manager, it was my observation. Because, if anything went wrong in the bank, he was out there with a screwdriver and he was a lot happier at that. But he said, "One thing I am going to advise is to try and get yourself a job before winter sets in," because, this was my first winter in Canada. So, I went down to the Esso office and applied for a job and they had one vacancy in Red Water that was sent in. Of course, I didn't know where Red Water was. I went to Red Water and started there, on the 1st of November, 1956 in the new gas plant that was just starting up.

I had very fond memories of Red Water. I worked there for nine years. I went through the entire process from one end to the other, from gas gathering to maintenance to loading time cards, running the process, got a steam ticket, ran the steam plant and just kept on working from there. But, my flare was always mechanical. So, I did a lot of maintenance there. And back in those days, the employees, operators and maintenance, they conducted the shut-down with very contracts were involved. So, we went in, opened the vessels, went through the vessels, inspected them all, so we got to know every last piece of the plant. And that plant was only a small one, which was only a ten



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million cubic foot plant. But, it had everything. We generated our own power. We treated our own water. We even treated the water for the town of Red Water. We were the first ones to add fluoride to the water, at that time, back in the early 60s. The water treatment plant was built right beside the Esso plant and we treated the water for the town of Red Water. So, that was an interesting step too. So, water treatment and the plant itself, we had the fractionation and ship the oil by pipeline. We didn't get oil at that time. This was before it was unitized. This was back when it was just gas; a gas plant.

PMB: But, you fractionated out gas.

GILLESPIE: We fractionated propane, butane and pentane deposit and we shipped them by rail. So, we got to load the tank cars. And then, a lot of the mutual propane trucks used to come around and fill up with propane at the site and they trip around the country. So, that plant had everything. We had sulphur we were able to get, like I said, had that oil tank. Then after that, I went to Swan Hills. At that time, I was working on the heavy equipment in Swan Hills.

PMB: And, Swan Hills was primarily an oil project?

GILLESPIE: It was oil and gas but I was on some of the gas side. I didn't do any production in the field at all. It was always on the gas side. So, we had the whole... it was a unitized field operation there for the gas. We collected the gas from all the other companies in the Swan Hills area, so it went right from House Mountain down to Judy Creek, then across to Virginia Hills. Virginia Hills was just north of Whitecourt and we took the gas from Virginia Hills to the plant as well and processed it up. But, we didn't do fractionation.

CS: How many years were you in Swan Hills, so from 1965 until?

GILLESPIE: I went up to Swan Hills. I think it was in '63 and was there for a couple of years. And then, got a call... a call came in one day to go to the office. So, I went to the office and the superintendent was there and he said, "What do you think about an assignment to Australia?" And I thought, "Australia? Me?" So, that was a tremendous opportunity to go to Australia. Exxon were drilling off the Bass Straight and this is off-shore. And, our assignment was going to be to train... there were four Canadians went over with families and we were to train the Australians to operate the facility. And, the facility was a 400 million cubic foot gas plant and 200,000 barrels of oil. This was brand new to it but it was partially constructed when we got over there. So, we were there for the construction, for the completion and for the start-up and to train these Australian employees to operate the plant.

And, we set up a school there and we had some... Americans came over from Texas and there was an instructor there who set out a program and we developed a program into a manual. It was a pretty hefty manual. And, we had classroom instruction plus on-site instruction all through the building of this plant. It was called the Longfoot Plant, it was a major project. There was deadline on when the gas had to be delivered. If the gas wasn't delivered, I believe it was in March or March of '68 I believe, there was a penalty clause for everyday that they missed. It was amazing trying to get



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the thing started at that date, because of the construction problems that were going on at the time, but we did. We opened it up and had gas going down the line on the date. It was there [?] first, brought the gas in and the oil. The gas came in first and there were a lot of teething problems like there are in any plant. It was a major development. Then, I got transferred back here because we were starting a plant down in Quirk Creek, outside Millarville. So, we started that up and I was there on maintenance foreman on that project. Then I got another call if I would be interested in going to Libya on an assignment. So, we jumped at that idea too. These assignments, by the way, the whole family came. It wasn't a single status thing. So, the family came. Our youngest daughter was born in Australia and of course we kid her a lot about being the little Aussie of the family. In Libya then, our eldest daughter, they only had schooling up to Grade 8 in the town side. We stayed in Brega, as a matter of fact, when they were trying to get Gaddafi and that was Exxon's town.

PMB: Now you had, if I'm not mistaken, this would just be two or three years after he took over...

GILLESPIE: That's right.

PMB: ...isn't it?

GILLESPIE: That is correct, yes. But, we didn't have any problems. You knew that you were in somebody else's country and as long as you followed the rules and regulations, you didn't have any problem. If you decided that you were going to do things your own way, well then there was lots of problems.

PMB: Now, moving forward to coming to back to Canada. If I recall, you told me that you returned to Swan Hills after a couple of years after you came back from Libya.

GILLESPIE: That's right.

PMB: Then you came up in 1979 to Cold Lake.

GILLESPIE: Right.

PMB: Can you tell us a little bit about that, please? Because, this part now. You started out in gas and after the first, and you'd done a little work with oil and now all of a sudden you're in bitumen. And, I'd like to hear that story a bit please.

GILLESPIE: Well, I of course went to production and we were on embattled with the one in Australia because that 200,000 barrel plant, we started that one up as well. But, out in the actual field, working in the oil business itself that hasn't been my expertise at all. So, here I was involved in the process again in the plant.

PMB: Here at Cold Lake?



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GILLESPIE: In Cold Lake, yeah and Leming and May-Ethyl. And, it was the maintenance of the equipment there that... and running the maintenance crew and the electrical crew; and then, of course any contractors that we had coming in, in connection with these things because Cold Lake was just starting to ramp up.

PMB: Leming and May-Ethyl, those were the test pilots that had developed here at that time.

GILLESPIE: Before I came here, most of the experimental work was done at May-Ethyl was the original thing. I think you've interviewed some of the former employees who've worked there and they could tell you what the start was. When I came in, it was already an operation.

PMB: In 1979, if I'm not mistaken, is the year that Imperial announced that it was going to build a \$5 Billion mega project here? Was it '78 or '79?

GILLESPIE: I'm not sure on the dates when this happened, but I can remember following the producing news. We used to get a paper at that time, company publication called the Producing News and there was a lot of talk about this mega project that was going to take place. And, Jack Armstrong was the president at that time. And, I can recall a statement that was made then and he said that it was that mega project... The price had started to escalate and costs started escalating beyond all imagination because we were talking \$2 or \$3 Million this was running into Billions, that we're talking. And, Jack said that it's too large an operation, words to these effect, for one company to take on. It's too large a cost. The cost is too great for a company to take on. Then they decided we can do this another way; we can do it in phases. So, this is when the phasing then started.

PMB: Between these two events, between the time they announced the big project and the time I think it was '83 or '84 that they decided to do it in phases. There were two other things that I believe happened. One of them was the National Energy Program and the other one was that oil prices began to fall.

GILLESPIE: That's right.

PMB: Right up in '79 and '80 because of the Iran/Iraq War and then they began to fall and then in the mid-80s they collapsed.

GILLESPIE: That's true and the price of oil went way down too. So, it was a very wise decision in retrospect, when you think about it. But, the planning was all there, so they decided first of all, we have the pilot projects and there was some experimenting with new boilers for this high pressure steam. So, there were a couple of these built in Calgary and they were brought up to Leming and installed in Leming, two came up. 200,000 barrels... or was it two? I just forget the figures on the generators. But, they were largest generators around, this is steam generators. They were put in Leming and they brought on stream, of course we were there involved with all the maintenance around them. And, the contractors, there were a lot of contractors starting coming in. And, of course, when you're bringing in extra equipment because our staff was just to maintain the plant, it wasn't to build the plant. So, we got a lot of new equipment in and then we started to drill the pads



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and that involved with the electrical instrumentation, we had to take on more staff. So, the growth started and it started to perpetuate and kept on going from there.

CS: Yeah, the ramp up. Did you ever think the Leming plant would still be running today?

GILLESPIE: Well, yes, as a matter of fact. Leming plant was the... They started this salt water recovery in Leming and they had a little pilot project there. And, it had a lot of headaches too with it and the lab people were up all the time. We got to know them very well also. There was Mike Bridle was one of the prime movers in that and there were a lot of people that were coming in and new ideas coming in to try and recover this salt water. Anytime you have a pilot project, you have always got a lot of input from everybody around the boat.

CS: Yeah.

GILLESPIE: You know, from ourselves and if you worked in that... This is where the cyclic comes in, because I always enjoyed a plant that was starting and to de-bug it. Standard operation when everything is going smooth, it becomes very boring to me. And that's why I like all these new plants and going to different places. See, Swan Hills it was going onward up there. Red Water became, after the initial start-up then it became just a routine operation. The costs start to be cut and your staff starts to drop and you get... it is not exciting, it's a stable operation, yes. And, we try to get efficiencies, but there isn't the same challenge to that, that you do with a plant that isn't functioning properly in the first place.

PMB: Can you tell us a little bit about the Leming project? How it originated? How it developed? I didn't realize that it was still up and running.

GILLESPIE: Oh, yeah.

PMB: So, can you tell us a little bit? What did they develop there? Is that where CSS really originated?

GILLESPIE: CSS?

PMB: Mm-hmm.

CS: Cyclic Steam Stimulation.

PMB: Cyclic Steam Stimulation, sorry.

GILLESPIE: Oh, oh, okay. Well, it is... yes, this is where they have the high pressure... We had high pressure steam before from four small generators. But, they didn't generate a great quantity. There weren't that many wells. Then when these big generators come in and they... I don't know do you remember when that...is it 200,000 pounds an hour or something?



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CS: I don't know if...

GILLESPIE: I can't... don't quote me on the figures even though you're requiring them. These generators they required a larger water treatment facility to retain the salt water. Because, they had to reduce the salts that were coming to recycle the water, the water came back with the production and then the production was separated in the plant and the water went to the water treatment plant so it could be reused. This is had a lot of headaches too because if the equipment didn't remove the water then you were jeopardizing... remove the solids or the salts, you were jeopardizing the generator itself. So, these are all the teething problems that you run into when you're... It's not just a case of lighting the fire and getting the steam out the back end. Then there was unscheduled shut-downs and the pumps, they were new pumps and different centrifugal pumps. The old pumps were old reciprocating pumps.

All of this stuff was all added into it and with all this steam that we could generate when we put these new generators in, you required more wells. Then Leming had pads, they were small pads. They didn't have the pads of May-Ethyl. They went out individual wells. And, of course, the pads were a concept too that was new. By the pads, you cut down on the amount of land that you had to clear... you can elaborate a lot more on that than I can. But, the idea was to consolidate all the pumps. There was one battery there that had 32 wells in a horseshoe shape around the production facilities. And, I was very impressed to show people. And this was all part of this expansion that went on.

PMB: The Leming project, remind me when that began? What year did that begin, Leming?

GILLESPIE: Well, it was before I came here.

PMB: Was it '78 or '77?

GILLESPIE: I can't tell you exactly, so. It must've been longer than.

CS: I don't remember the year it started. But, I have a supplementary question. Leming, itself why was it called Leming? We have Maskwa which means bear, we have Mahihkan and it means wolf and the anomaly is Leming because it's not double "M". Do you know why it's called Leming?

GILLESPIE: I took it to be just... took it after the bird it was. A Lemming it is spelled with two "M's" in the bird case.

CS: Just as an aside, I think it's named of one of the original Dutch emigrants who came to the Cold Lake area and pioneered in this area. It's a trick question because everyone thinks it's a Lemming but it's after this Dutch pioneer.

GILLESPIE: Oh, is that what it is?

CS: I think so.



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PMB: Well, that's interesting. Now, you mentioned a couple of other projects. I'd like you to spell them please.

CS: Maskwa, MASKWA and that's Cree and it means bear. And, Mahihikan, MAHIHKAN is for wolf.

PMB: That's also Cree.

CS: That's also Cree, which caused a bit of concern because Cold Lake First Nations is Chipewyan or Dene and they didn't like that to a certain degree. But, Nabiye the latest expansion, NABIYE and that is otter in Dene language.

PMB: In Dene language.

CS: Yeah. So, that helped a little bit with the relationship with Cold Lake First Nations who are Dene, particularly, Alex Janvier. Did you know Alex Janvier and the paintings that he did for the...

GILLESPIE: Yes, I have one.

CS: Ah!

GILLESPIE: Yeah, we were presented with one by the president, actually, when we opened Maskwa. And, each employee that was there, on that site... and it's of the bear. Yes, yes.

CS: So, each one of those paintings has a theme related to the plant name.

PMB: Alex Janvier is really one of the most famous Alberta artists and one of Canada's most famous aboriginal artists and he's been around since the 50s, hasn't he?

GILLESPIE: He had a studio in Cold Lake North. It was the old ATB, bank building. And, I don't think he's operating that anymore.

CS: He just closed it out in the last two weeks. I saw them moving the paintings out and he's gone out to the reserve. So, now he's selling his paintings off the reserve.

GILLESPIE: Actually, I have two paintings of his at home that I have to give him. My daughter brought them out from the city. I think the paintings he bought... well at least he expressed a desire to get them. I have them at the house and I have to get them to him.

PMB: Enough on that. So, where are we on this?

CS: Well, you were talking about the ramp up in 1979 towards the projects development. So, at that time, did they start constructing the Maskwa phase development or was it Mahihkan first?



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GILLESPIE: Well, Leming came on first and then later they started the Maskwa operation, phases one and two. And they put them at Maskwa and then we started them up, and then we went over to Mahihkan and put three and four over there. And then they came back to Maskwa and put five and six at Maskwa. So, it's go one, two, five and six at Maskwa. And then they went back, and this was after I had retired and that would be in '86, they started building seven, eight, nine and ten, they put four phases up at Mahihkan. And, the price of oil dropped again that year and that would be the incentive that we got to take our retirement. Our retirement was in '86 and so they had reduced that then and cut back. But, they had already committed. All the engineering and vessel purchased and everything else for building these last four stages. So, they built them at [?] and they didn't run for a quite a few years after and that was over at Mahihikan.

PMB: So, the irony is then that the project opened. It officially opened in 1985, am I right?

GILLESPIE: That was...

PMB: What we now would call the Cold Lake Project?

GILLESPIE: Can you come up with the...

CS: I think 1985 because it opened the same year as the Norman Wells project which I was involved in.

GILLESPIE: Oh, okay.

PMB: To celebrate, oil prices collapsed.

GILLESPIE: I don't think that was the reason they collapsed but no, the work situation, that's what caused the collapse. History and dates, I can remember a lot of this history but I can't put the dates on them, so. But, I know that things really did grind down and there was a lot of concern. And again, this is happening right now. Oil is under \$80.00 a barrel today and that's going to hit Athabasca. Just give it time and if it carries on... So, it's very cyclical the whole thing. We were getting \$3.00 and something a barrel when I went to Red Water, can you believe that? That's how it's changed over the years.

CS: During the period ramp up there were a number of places on the Cold Lake lease that were given names for people that were involved in the project. Are you familiar with any of them?

GILLESPIE: Oh, like umm...

CS: There was Dickie's Duckpond...

GILLESPIE: Who?

CS:...and Dingle's Swamp



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GILLESPIE: Oh, yeah, yeah. Yes.

CS: Why was it called Dingle's Swamp?

GILLESPIE: I don't know. Howard Dingle was the superintendent here at in '86 and everything they built of course was getting a name. And, I think Dingle Swamp, I don't know the background on it but it's just the same as Jack Sampson's Hill or something...

CS: Jack Sampson's Hill, yes.

GILLESPIE: Jack Sampson's Hill, well he was a construction supervisor at the time. And, I knew Jack well. As a matter of fact, I heard he just retired?

CS: Yes, he did.

GILLESPIE: Jack, he was involved with the... he worked out of Calgary and then he came out to the site here actually and he was living in the area. But, this was a little humor I guess that they put into some of these things.

CS: You needed some humor to deal with some of the problems that were being encountered.

GILLESPIE: Oh, yeah. Oh, yes. Just like they happened to be... Howard Dingle was involved with the building of that Amisk Office.

PMB: What office?

GILLESPIE: Amisk Office.

CS: It means Beaver.

PMB: Okay, Amisk Office.

GILLESPIE: That is the operational office right now. See, the first office that we built was down at Leming and we moved into that office, out of this trailer that they had at May-Ethyl back in '86. Then a few years later, when the project started to move then we required a new office. So, they built a lovely office out there and I don't know if you've been to the facility or not.

PMB: Not yet.

GILLESPIE: But, that office now is being used as a field office. But, it was the main office for a while and it's very nice and the warehouse was right beside it and the warehouse came under the maintenance umbrella as well. The field office was at one end of the... the field office, at that time, for the operations people was at one end of the warehouse. There was an office added to that. So,



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there were the two places: the main Leming Office and then the warehouse is on the area, the same property. And, that's just outside Leming.

PMB: Now, about the time that this thing, that oil prices collapsed and the project had just started up. So, oil had been I think, \$36.00 and then it sank to around I think, \$10.00. I think globally there were even trades at \$5.00 a barrel, that horrible period. I guess my question is, how much did it cost per use of barrel of bitumen here at Cold Lake.

GILLESPIE: I'm the wrong department for that. The only budget... I couldn't remember honestly. Peter, I can't remember those figures. The budget, like we were responsible for the maintenance budget and I had to turn that in every year. But, you see the figures but really I cannot remember them.

PMB: How badly were your budgets cut over the last couple of years?

GILLESPIE: Actually, they weren't really cut because we were expanding. So, maybe you didn't get all you wanted to get but you still got enough to keep going. And all this money was committed, so it's just like now, there is a long delivery on a lot of this stuff and it comes from dear knows where. And so, the money has been appropriated in advance and there isn't... you can't really back out unless you're going to lose the whole thing. It's just like starting that plant in Australia; we were committed to a penalty clause if we didn't get the gas down the line. And, penalty clauses, I suppose they came in maybe around that time because of labor problems and that kind of thing. So, some of the customers would put in penalty clauses just to make sure that you lived up to what you had originally agreed to. I can't give you those figures off the top of my head.

PMB: What were the original challenges that you faced? I know that you've talked about it a little bit. But, can you give us sort of the big picture of the challenges you faced? As you were here for a six year period, looking after maintenance, what kinds of problems were you dealing with?

GILLESPIE: Well, the one major concern was the safety of your staff because you're dealing with high pressure steam and high temperatures. And, you know if you touch a pipe it'll fry your hands. So, you always have that in the back in your mind or the front of your mind when you went out and you wanted to tear someone to pieces. First of all, you had to isolate it from this high pressure and temperature. So, you had to work closely with the operators. Actually, operations were usually the people that give you a work request in the first place because they were running the plant. Unless the operator had a leak someplace, a line leak or a valve leak, it was "packing in a valve". You grab the handle of the valve, with the packing is leaking, this stuff is coming right out at your hand where you're going to grab the... so that's a hazard. So, you'd get a work request in the morning, usually, what I'd like to do is go down to the operators in the morning before the guys got in and talk to the guys coming off shift, because the shift changed at about a quarter to eight.

The night shift and the daylight shift, at that time we didn't work 12 hour shifts by the way, either. We worked three shifts. There were eight hours shifts: so I'd work from 12:00 until 8:00, from 8:00 until 4:00, and from 4:00 until 12:00. And, if you caught the fellow coming off a night shift he could



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have the complete story right there, what had happened and what had happened in the preceding 24 hours. So, you got your maintenance request and they asked for this, this and this, so much stuff. And that was, kind of, the setup of what you were going to do for the day. And, if they have some vessel that had to be taken down then we had to isolate the vessel and purge it out, clean it. So, it could be entered. These are all the types of things. You had your PM work which was your Preventative Maintenance work. But, usually, the emergency stuff superseded that and then you could tell your staff to come in at 8:00 o'clock to such and such has been isolated and is ready to work on, get your crew out there and do it. And that welding, there were a lot of welders around because of adding equipment that you were welding in an operation, another concern; because you have to make your safety people look after the safety of the equipment so that it could be worked on. And, these are the types of things that you were looking at on a daily basis.

PMB: So, you mentioned heat and steam as a major problem and industrial processes, like looking after welding and so on. Were there any chemicals? I'm thinking you talked about the salts that had to be removed from the water. Were they dangerous in any way? Were there any sulphur emissions?

GILLESPIE: Everything that comes in a container, there's a certain hazard to it and there's a label on it. And again, the water... there is a water treatment to go into the boiler. There's the process has gas, natural gas is used for firing the boilers. We use any surplus gas and we also have to buy gas as well. So, this was all used for fuel. Again, gas is a hazard on its own because, you know... You can become gassed if you're not aware of what's going on. You can do it in your house too by turning on the stove and not lighting it, let's say this type of thing. So, these are all the things that sort of come with the territory. And, when you go to an operating area, you get the operator that's operating the area to isolate the vessels, isolate the equipment. Then, if it needs to be purged then they purge it steam or nitrogen or something... there is different processes for each phase of the operation, just depending on where you work. If you're out there with one of the crude oil tanks you want to make sure that you're not going to have a fire if you've got your well around you. All of this stuff you have to think about it all the time.

And, then of course, your crew is getting trained, you have courses and lectures and pamphlets on how to put on a gas mask. Well, actually it's fresh air mask. It's not a gas mask. That's a misnomer. It's a fresh air mask to work in a hazardous location. This is required at times. So, you have to prepare and make sure that everything is right. This is all part of the workers' responsibility too. He just doesn't go into this stuff blind-eyed. He's told that if you're going to remove a certain piece of equipment you tag... Electrical, if there is a motor running bad, has it been shut off at the breaker, has it got a tag. These are things that have evolved through the years. When I first started out there were none of these tags or any of this kind of stuff.

CS: When you first started out, what was thinking about environmental concerns at that time?

GILLESPIE: It was always a concern because if you made a spill and it went out there, man, it was about five minutes later there was somebody out the door saying, "Hey, look! Look!" I'll tell you this, when I first started, my first year. There was a pipeline leak at one of the wells. It was actually



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somebody left a valve partially open or something. And, it leaked a bunch of oil around the wellhead.

PMB: Was this here at Cold Lake?

GILLESPIE: No, this was in Red Water. And, it leaked a bunch of oil around one of the wellheads. And, there was a farmer out there and he had an old horse. And, he drove the old horse into the oil. And, they came running down to the office and said that, "My horse dead in the oil." And, he wanted to claim for this horse. So, the crowd went out to the... one of the lab fellows and somebody else went out to see this horse. Well, the horse wasn't dead. The horse was alive but it was all covered with oil. So, they brought him into the... at that time there was a garage handy. They brought him into the garage, washed him all down, gave him a few boots and the old horse came to. There are these stories and I had to give him back his horse and he was very disappointed. So, there's a lot of stuff goes on that isn't...

PMB: My experience was that... and I worked at the old Canadian Petroleum Association through the 80s and into the 90s. That was a period when an environmental focus and especially focus really began to move along.

GILLESPIE: That's right.

PMB: I think there were times when industrial accidents were not... they were a shame. But now, they're absolutely everything that could possibly be done to avoid them is. How much of that development from over here where, "Too bad that so and so was killed on the job last week." Which I think is almost way things were in the 50s then to today's thing where they are very strong rules that are in respect to safety. How much did you see and how did you see it developing?

GILLESPIE: Well, it has developed. It's developed a lot, because back well... Back when I started there was no such thing as hard hats. We didn't have hard hats. We had little caps on our head if we wanted one and you didn't have anything if you didn't. And then, the hard hat was introduced. That was a hard sell too because personally, I hated the thing.

PMB: Roughly, what period is this?

GILLESPIE: This was back in the 50s, about 60 probably. Roughly in that area when the hard hat became... First of all, it was recommended and then it became mandatory that if you went out and you were working on equipment. Maintenance, it's again, it's a training process because you put the hard hat on when you try to get down into something and wasn't going to get in with the hard hat, it was hitting everything. The old cap it never... the odd time you got a bump on the head but that was pretty irregular. That was the first thing. Then the next thing, were ear muffs. We used to get little earplugs and that wasn't mandatory either and then it became... it evolved and said that if you're out at a noisy location, wear earmuffs. And then, they improved on the ear muffs with the pads. And then, they put the pads... the ear actually the pad and then attached it to the hat. So, you were



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starting to get more stuff. Vessels, there was an odd accident where somebody went into a vessel and it hadn't been purged properly. Well, we had a safety...

PMB: So, in that case the person would die?

GILLESPIE: Well, they might die. I'm glad to say I've never seen anybody die in my crew, which was something that you're very thankful for. There's a lot of faith has to be exercised in any environment. Things happen and sometimes you say, "Well, man I was lucky that that didn't happen." And sometimes, you weren't. I know we had a safety supervisor or officer, I guess, just come out of the office in Edmonton. Main office was in Edmonton back in the early days. He used to come out every month and we had a safety meeting and it usually involved breathing equipment or something like that. And everybody had to attend and everybody had to get it one and put it on the other guy and this type of stuff. So, you got hands-on training. This was...

PMB: What period was this?

GILLESPIE: This was in the late 50s.

PMB: Oh?

GILLESPIE: And actually, right from when I went to Red Water when this plant was started in '56 to '63, they always had this safety. And this superintendent, Bill Sage, used to come out as well. And he would sit in on the meeting and he'd kind of fill you in on what was going on. There were developments, Swan Hills was starting up. Drayton Valley was starting up. There was maybe some report of somebody got hurt someplace along the way and that was brought to the attention. And, watch out for such and such. If you're working near acid you have to have rubber gloves. This was all provided. The rubber gloves were provided by the company for the boiler guys. We used to... In boiler treatment, you were using sulphuric acid or muriatic acid and salt. The salt was just the common salt for putting in a boiler tank. This was a... Muriatic is hydrochloric acid actually, that was used. Out here they use chemicals, although I'm not sure what they're using them... they're using them in the field, I think. And, the boiler treatment, the boiler treatment you usually have chemicals or something.

PMB: Steel-toed boots. Any idea when they came in? When they became mandatory?

GILLESPIE: Yes. Hard-toed shoes and we actually got... they were provided. Yeah, hard-toed shoes were provided.

PMB: Roughly, what year?

GILLESPIE: I'm sorry?

PMB: Approximately, when did this happen?



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GILLESPIE: That'll be around the early 60s, probably be the early 60s, yeah.

PMB: So, these developments did come fairly early and far back?

GILLESPIE: Yeah. And, you've got I think the company paid for one pair of shoes and safety... but you had to buy them from a recognized... a safety supplier used to bring the shoes up. And they would bring the rubber suits up too. They had... in the steam plant if there were, for this handling you have to gas mask, you had a rubber suit as well, rubber gloves...

PMB: So, by the time you had moved to Cold Lake, really a lot of these safety measures were already in place?

GILLESPIE: Yeah, they were. When we'd have these meetings in the plant with staff and it was pretty informal because the superintendent was out there and if there was something that somebody felt should be around the place, they would discuss it. And, he would say yes or nay. Anything to do with safety, he was usually there. Medical, the same thing; we had medicals every three years. If you were under 40, I think it was every year... the company medicals, which was I always thought was an excellent safety measure for the company's part of it.

PMB: For large operations you would have the very minimum clinic with a nurse or something?

GILLESPIE: Now, after... But, this has been legislated since back in those days. It's been legislated now I think after so many employees you have to have a qualified nurse on staff or in the... That all happened here after we started to grow.

PMB: So, that would've been in the 80s?

GILLESPIE: Yeah, mm-hmm.

PMB: When you became big...

GILLESPIE: But, it was in the 80s because we have all those plants in the 80s. We had Maskwa, we had the... it was an '86 one or '87 when they finished phases, what did I say... up to ten. That was done so we had the nurse there before I left.

CS: You mentioned earlier the efforts to recover salt water at the Leming plant. Was there salt water recovery at the May-Ethyl plants?

GILLESPIE: In May-Ethyl?

CS: Yeah.

GILLESPIE: I can't tell you that. I don't...



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CS: Okay.

GILLESPIE: I don't really know if they... Yeah, they've got salt recovery, sure. Because, where you take the salt, yes sure. It's injected into the salt wells there.

CS: Ah, okay.

GILLESPIE: Yeah, it was, right. But, we weren't treating. What I meant by the recovery down at Leming is that the produced water used to be injected back into the formation but in order to conserve water, we got into the water we used.

CS: So, you would start to reuse the water.

GILLESPIE: That's right, yeah. It was to recover.

CS: So, that was an advanced recovery...

GILLESPIE: Oh, absolutely.

CS: ...Ethyl and May.

GILLESPIE: But, I'm aware, I've done this before. But, I don't know if that little plant is still down there in Leming or not. It wasn't very big but it was a sort of fun thing trying to get it to work. But, it was, like everything else to keep out of... The lab people are a... you become very well acquainted with them. I was always interested in finding out about stuff. So, I'd go out and I'd spend time with them. I'd ride along with... in fact, he's still working there I believe. It was one of the fellows that used to be... used to be there back in those days. And, he was in the lab and he did a lot of work on boiler treatment. And then they'd go around and they'd test the product as well. Red Water was a good example, as a matter of fact I worked in the lab first in Red Water too. And, we took specific gravities of the gas and ran a course of the product. The product was taken every day and checked for the vapour pressure to make sure that the product was all up to snuff. Any chemicals that were a biohazard, you know used, they were all checked. Red Water had a lab there for daily use. Cold Lake here has the lab too. I forget the name of the fellow that was in the lab but he's still...

CS: In Cold Lake?

GILLESPIE: ... an employee?

CS: Joe Bodeux?

GILLESPIE: Joe Bodeux, but before Joe. Yeah, I know Joe. Joe was there when...

PMB: Bodeux?



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CS: B-O-T-E-U-X.

PMB: B-O-D...

CS: ...E-U-X.

PMB: Ray, you've been living here for now... You came here on an assignment in 1979; 33 years later when are you planning to go back to civilization?

GILLESPIE: Tell me a better spot.

PMB: You tell me about this spot.

GILLESPIE: I haven't gone. I am happy. We're happy here. My wife's here. We have everything we want. And as long as the good Lord gives us the health and to stay, that's where...we're content. We go down south for the winter so we have the best of both worlds. We go down for five months and come back for seven. You can't beat that. We were in... Yesterday, I golfed at an Esso Annuitants, I golfed south and it is actually just south of Highway 21, south of Fort Saskatchewan on Highway 21 going south, Fort Saskatchewan, Legends Golf Course. This is an annual thing and it's the Annuitants Club which any retiree of Esso can become a member if they want. The people out here, very few of them are members because they were nearly all hired locally. So, this is where they lived and this is where they... they don't have the interest. Being around the plants that I was in, in all the different areas, I got to know all these people because we have a joint industrial council where the employees would nominate delegates to go in and talk to management about what employees' wishes are. Like, looking for increase in wage or a shoe benefit or something like this and Swan Hills was built there and the company supplied houses but there were no garages, so that carried on for quite a while.

Walt Dingle was the superintendent at that time which was Howard's dad. And Walt was an old man from the discovery of Leduc and those places, but you go in and meet with them once a month and the employees in each area, that was Camrose and Devon and Red Water and Swan Hills and Saskatchewan too, the guys from Saskatchewan used to come over as well. So, you got to meet all these people. And now that we're all retired and the survivors they have meetings and activities as an Esso company.

PMB: Now, here in Cold Lake are the people... are any of the staff unionized? Do they have unions?

GILLESPIE: Unions? Not at Cold Lake, no. Some of the company facilities have, but they have a... well nowadays, I'm not sure about that. But, I know back when I was there they had what they called a "Joint Industrial Council" and the Council, the delegates from the Council which were elected by the employees in an area would say... Well, let's say there are four of us here and you were nominated as the delegate, well then you and he attend at the meeting with management and there were about six or eight in management. From each are there was a delegate. So, we had a meeting before, the main meeting and discussed what was of interest to the people, going back to Swan Hills,



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one of the big concerns was there were no garages. Well, the company built houses and sent the people up there but there was no garage to put your car in and Swan Hills is the coldest place on earth in the winter time. And of course, a lot of the cars wouldn't start. So, the people wanted them and the company said, "Well, okay then. We'll give you a single car garage." And that would be added to the price of your properties. This type of thing or maybe there was a health benefit that hadn't been covered. But, like the safety shoes when you mentioned about safety shoes and the company said, "Okay." And you go in and there was usually an increase every year discussed, but yeah, the offer. There was very little strife. Back when I came to Canada, it was backward compared to Europe. Like, there was not hard top. A hard top never entered Red Water until 1956. The hard top from Edmonton, the rest was gravel.

PMB: The paved road.

GILLESPIE: The paved road, right. And it ended right around the corner of Red Water, the back corner and that was it. Sewer and water means in these times, it was non-existent. Esso brought the water... when Esso discovered the Red Water field there wasn't the housing in Red Water to look after their staff. So, they got a section of land in the town and provided housing for the employees. There was no water in Red Water. So, the water was piped in from the North Saskatchewan, the lines were put in and the sewer system was all put in. That was all put in just prior to the housing development in Red Water. And then, these houses were sold to the employees. You bought them on a term basis and they whole thing... Back in the 50s in places like Red Water, biffies were all sitting out behind the stores. It was primitive. Coming from overseas there, it was enlightening.

PMB: I'm just about exhausted. You've done a great job. Cal, what questions do you have?

CS: Well, I was just wondering at the 20th anniversary you were a guest speaker for the anniversary of the production, the 20th anniversary production of the Cold Lake operations.

GILLESPIE: No. I was at them but I wasn't a speaker.

CS: Oh, okay. I was just wondering if you had anything to say to those people at that time or what would you say now. It's like 30 years after now.

GILLESPIE: Well, to say to the people here?

CS: Well, if you were to say to here's a group of people who are celebrating their 30 years of Cold Lake production and you were instrumental in its development in those critical years of 1979 to 1985, what would you like to say to them?

GILLESPIE: There's been a tremendous amount of advancements in the last 30 years and I think because of all the development and the resources around this area, has contributed to the town. Because this town has grown a tremendous amount in the last number of years and every year it's improving. And sometimes it is and sometimes not.



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CS: Yeah, we drove in on the double lane highway.

GILLESPIE: Well, yeah. Well, you know you've got that double lane highway. But, I think that the facilities and everything have improved so much. In fact, that hospital that's out in Cold Lake. That was built... the original hospital was right in town and it was only a bunch of portables put together.

CS: Hospital Point.

GILLESPIE: Hospital Point, right. It was Hospital Point. The...

PMB: So, it was just trailers, sort of... Like, portable trailers all put together?

GILLESPIE: Something of that nature. It's been quite a while since it was all moved, but it was sitting up on top of the hill there and it was just...wooden floors and that type of stuff. It served its purpose in the time. You could get an x-ray there if you wanted and treatment. But, it was an old facility. That has all been developed and of course they're developing houses and they've become a lot better. Ours is one of the older houses, actually, the one that we're living in was built in the 70s. But, the conditions around here... the high school... And, now we have the Lakeland College. So, the town has grown astronomically. When Esso were talking about the development here, they bought that whole section of land that they donated to the town for the...

CS: Energy Centre.

GILLESPIE: ...Energy Centre is and all those sports fields behind, that's all part of land that Esso gave them. But, they bought that land they bought that land so that they would be able to build houses if it was required. But, I guess it wasn't required. The influx of people was over such an extended period that the local contractors got in and started building houses in another part of town. They've evolved from that too. Oh yeah, there's been a tremendous change here. But, there's still about it, there's still a lot of change. Look at all the equipment you passed just coming over here this morning? I passed this thing just coming up around the corner and it's like that all over? Did you get a chance to go through the town? Did you go up to the lake?

PMB: Yes, we've driven around it.

GILLESPIE: Did you? What did you think about it?

PMB: Oh, it's a beautiful part of the world.

GILLESPIE: Well, there.

PMB: I was teasing you...it's a beautiful part of the world and I just love it, I do love it here, I must say.

CS: I brought them out to Murray Lake.



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GILLESPIE: Have you been there?

PMB: We're overnighing with Cal for two nights.

GILLESPIE: Oh, he hasn't been there yet.

PMB: Last night.

CS: Last night they were in the cabin.

GILLESPIE: Oh he did, yeah. Well, there's another jewel.

PMB: Absolutely. I'm just going to ask you to repeat something you told us last night, Cal. We were looking out over Murray Lake and you said it's hard to imagine that just on the other side of that lake there are so many wells and you gave me a number.

CS: Well, at the time I said 4,000. It might be more now. Wells that are active and then there are wells that are abandoned but then there's the plants and Maskwa Lake, Mahkeses, Leming and they're across the lake. But, you didn't hear a thing, you didn't see a thing. In the winter you can because of the steam. And, I gave an example of working with the Murray Lake Land and Watershed Society to reduce the lighting because it was visible to people out at Murray Lake and for the Mahkeses plant we actually reduced the lighting in response to people's concerns. So, that's an evolution I think of caring for the environment. You mentioned water use. I know they used to take water from Ethyl Lake to supply the Ethyl plant.

GILLESPIE: That's right.

CS: They abandoned that pipeline and we restored it. We don't take water from Ethyl but we have water from Cold Lake but then we've built brackish water reserves to reduce the amount of fresh water use. So, it's evolved and I'm glad to hear that it was recognized even in 1979, that you had to be more efficient.

PMB: So, what was really neat that we're looking over this pristine lake and these beautiful forests and just over there are 4,000 or more wells that are active or have been active and pipelines and just all sorts of facilities. It was quite an interesting comment on the way development is going on here.

GILLESPIE: There's a resolve with everything. There's give and take. If you leave everything the way it was then they're going to have to go back to the horse and buggy. And, I don't see many people really going back to the horse and buggy. So, there is a resolve and that's both in everything else you try to balance going against the other. You can't stop progress. If you stop progress you go into retrograde and if you can do it, if you can do it without spoiling everything. Like, when I go out on Cold Lake and we go out on Cold Lake a lot. We go out on Cold Lake nearly every day in the summer time. The boats down at the marina, it's another reason for staying here. And, we go out to fish or to bring people out to the other side of the lake, almost 20 miles across. And, the pristine



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forest there and go out and just sit in the lake fishing and enjoy the eagles and I was very offended when I read that article the other day about the guy killing the eagles, that local trap.

CS: Was it in the Cold Lake Sun?

GILLESPIE: Yeah, yeah. That's... the week before. He's been fined and he's a guide... a game guide and he's been shooting the golden eagle and the bald eagle.

CS: Oh, what a shame.

GILLESPIE: Every year we go out and there are several nests around the lake and of course, you see these things in the evening. We'd go out and the eagle is there and maybe he'd be down sitting there waiting for a fish or up in the tree. But, you'd spot the bald eagle and there were about four or five of them around the lake and this year we've only seen two.

CS: Ah, okay.

GILLESPIE: This fellow, he was killing the eagles and selling their, whatever...

PMB: Feathers.

GILLESPIE: But, there was one golden eagle that they would on the back road there. And, we saw him a couple of years ago nesting and I haven't seen him since. If that's that golden eagle that he shot, he should be shot himself.

PMB: I think that pretty much takes care of it, anything else?

CS: No, no that's good. Thank you.

PMB: Thank you very much, Ray. That was great.

GILLESPIE: You're welcome.

[END OF INTERVIEW]



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