

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: H. J. Kidder

INTERVIEWER: David Finch

DATE: September 2000

DF: Today is the 18<sup>th</sup> day of September in the year 2000 and we are conducting an interview over the telephone with Mr. H. J. Kidder regarding his career as a geophysicist and the time he spent on the executive of the Canadian Society of Exploration Geophysicists in Calgary. My name is David Finch. Before we get started Mr Kidder, I need to read you a statement and get you to agree to the conditions under which we are doing this interview. Is that okay?

HK: That's fine.

DF: Okay, so the statement is called the Interview Release Statement. You have been asked to participate in an oral history project sponsored by the Petroleum History Society in order to preserve the memories and experiences of significant individuals in the Canadian petroleum industry. This project is financed by several organizations including the Canadian Society of Explorations Geophysicists, the Alberta Historical Resources Foundation, the Petroleum History Society, the Glenbow Archives and Oilweek Magazine.

The Petroleum History Society will deposit the recordings and transcripts made in the course of the project with the Glenbow Archives, Calgary, where they will be available for use by anyone interested in the history of the petroleum industry.

Do you, Mr. H. J. Kidder, hereby agree to the recording of an interview by representatives of the Petroleum History Society and donate, transfer and assign, absolutely and forever, your rights, clear deed and universal copyright, ownership, estate and interests in this recording to the Glenbow Archives. If so, please state clearly, "I do."

HK: I do.

DF: Okay. That's the hard part of the interview. Now, can you tell me when and where you were born, please?

HK: I was born in Galveston, Texas, in 1915, on January the 18<sup>th</sup>.

DF: And what were your parents doing?

HK: My father was in Mexico as a Lubrication Engineer for the old Waters Pierce Oil Company and my mother came up to the States to have me. As a result we were born there. It was during the period when the 1915 hurricane hit Galveston, which was a pretty bad storm, it wasn't as bad as the 1900 one of course, but it was there.

DF: Tell me about your childhood?

HK: Well, my father was in Mexico and so we went back after my birth, after about . . . I think I was about 2 years old, possibly 3 years old and I went back to Mexico. Went to school there, through grade school and high school at the American school in Mexico City til I graduated from high school and then came up and attended Rice University for one year and got my degree from Texas University, it's a Bachelor of Science.

#029 DF: Tell me more about that degree?

HK: Well, I really ended up with a degree in math and a degree in physics. I'd heard nothing about geophysics and didn't know what it was about until I was offered a job in it. That's the way I got into geophysics.

DF: And who offered you that job?

HK: Amarato??? Petroleum Company at that time. I worked for a year with them in Louisiana in the swamps. Then we had a recession here and they laid off some people and I was one of the newest hired so I was laid off. After the summer was over with I got a job with Magnolia Petroleum Company as a geophysicist, which later became Mobil Oil and worked for them for eight years. Went to South America, to Columbia for two years, as supervisor of geophysical operations for Mobil, Socony Mobil at that time and then transferred and came to Canada in 1948 I believe it was that I arrived there.

DF: So what brought you to Canada?

HK: The company had started an operation there as Socony Vacuum Oil Company of Canada and they had started a geophysical operation. They didn't have any geophysicist so I came up and took over as their sole geophysicist at that time and finally built up the geophysical department, up to where we had about 115 employees I think it was.

DF: Wow, that's a pretty good size.

HK: Yes, it was a lot of fun starting out with the beginning of it, back in '48, right after Exxon discovered Leduc.

DF: What did you first do when you came here then, were you out in the field?

HK: No, we had contract crews operating at that time and I was the supervisor for the GSI crews that we had. They were working in . . . let me see if I can remember the names of some of the towns now. . . I can't think of any of them. Down in Drumheller for one. We worked there up towards Leduc, in between Drumheller and Leduc. I'm afraid that I've forgotten the names of the towns.

DF: Okay, no problem. How did you come to be associated with the CSEG?

HK: When they started, I was a charter member. It was started back. . . I've forgotten what the date was now.

DF: 1950.

HK: 1950 was it when it started. So I was one of the members of the organization when they formed the charter of the CSEG. Later on, became an officer, worked with them and ended up, through their generosity, being their President for a year. It was also a very great honour, a great experience to work with the CSEG. We had a lot of input with the government and in setting up some of the rules of operations for geophysical crews.

DF: What year did you leave Canada?

HK: I left there in 1964. I was there about 16 years.

DF: So you were here for some of the booms and the busts, weren't you?

HK: Yes, we sure were.

DF: How did those come about?

HK: I don't remember what the cause was for the busts. The booms. . . most of the time I was there it seemed to be booming pretty good. A lot of our work was up in the Northwest Territories. I supervised the crews there and ran the geophysical department for Mobil. My memory is not as good as it used to be, I keep forgetting things.

DF: That's fine. I have an article here from the Daily Oil Bulletin in 1961 at a one day conference called, "Exploration Geophysics, Today and Tomorrow" theme of regional conference at Calgary, February 27, 1961. You were the Chairman of the morning session. One of the sessions that day was called "Personnel Problems-Employment Problems, Alternative Employment for Geophysicists in the Oil Industry, Impact of the Present Slump on Geophysical Education". What did some of the people do who ran out of work?

HK: Well, they either went into business for themselves as consultants or they were transferred to other areas outside of Canada, back to the States or back to Britain. Some of them went over to Australia, one of our employees left us and went over to Australia to work. The problem was that during this period we were having trouble getting people interested in going to work in geophysics. It was such a new operation especially out in the . . . about the only place in the oil industry at least, in Canada, was in Alberta and Saskatchewan and British Columbia. We would recruit our students from the various universities all the way across the province and it was difficult to get them interested in that because they viewed geophysics as basically mining. So the oil industry was a new area for them. University of Toronto was one of the few, that and Alberta, were the few that really had a lot of activity going in their geophysical, educational area, for geophysics in the oil industry, seismic work.

#098 DF: So how did you interest people who weren't already interested?

HK: We told them what the opportunities were and what the challenges were. We had the universities set up times for us to come, looking for geologists and geophysicists. We just told them what the situation was and what the future looked like to us and we were quite successful in most cases in getting a lot of people to work for us.

DF: Anything else you remember about the year you were President?

HK: Well, let's see, we had a number of sessions with the Alberta government on trying to work up in the muskeg and not erode so much. . . you know, we were bulldozing trails up there and after the thaw . . . We'd worked in the winter time when it was all frozen and after the thaw that made a pretty good place for runoff and it caused quite a bit of erosion. So we were working with the government to set up some regulations as to how we would repair it and what would be done there. Sort of an environmental operation and I was involved in that, as a member of the SEG and also as a representative for Mobil.

DF: Do you remember any of the specific individuals who were affected by that downturn in the early 1960's?

HK: No, not really. I can't think of any specifics on that. As I say, one of our employees had left and gone to Australia to work. I can't even think of what his name was now.

DF: What did you enjoy most of the time that you spent in Canada?

HK: The people, the surroundings in Alberta. It was a beautiful place to live, it was a wonderful place to raise our children. My daughter was four years old when we moved

there and she graduated from high school in Elbow Park. My eldest son, when we moved back to Dallas. . .he was one year old as we crossed the border into Alberta, ran into a blizzard when we were coming up. I was so new at it, I'd been there about a month looking for places to live and I thought it was a chinook, it turned out to be a bad blizzard. But we made it into Calgary all right. And our youngest son was born in Calgary. We were very active in the community association there in Elbow Park and the society. We got into square dancing and had a lot of fun. People were just so friendly and they made us feel so completely at home and we were so thankful that our children got to grow up there, in fact my daughter still lives there.

DF: Really, good for her.

HK: She married a Canadian boy from Calgary and they now live in Edmonton.

#137 DF: What was it that caused you to leave Canada and go elsewhere?

HK: I came back with Mobil, to Dallas and this was my wife's home originally and she wanted to get back here to Dallas. And I wanted the children to know a little bit about the U.S., they had never lived here really. Most of the boys hadn't lived here at all, of course, they had visited but they hadn't lived here. And we were American citizens and I wanted them to know what their country was like as well. So we decided to come back. We've been here even since but the boys have visited Canada quite a bit and they call it home too. As we do, we really have a lot of feeling for the Canadians and western Canada.

DF: Any regrets about the time that you spent here, anything that you wish you had done that you didn't get to do?

HK: It took us . . . .yes. I didn't get to go to Jasper until after we had moved back to the States and went to Jasper finally on one of our trips up there. I think that was about the only regret that I had. We now regret that we don't get that nice cool weather that you have up there. We've had awful hot weather here in Dallas this summer. But no, I had no regrets living in Canada, we thought it was wonderful, it was a privilege.

DF: Anything else you'd like to say about the CSEG?

HK: I think it's a wonderful organization, I think they've done a good job and I was proud to be a part of the organizing members and I'm proud of the work that they've done since and the members that they've sent down to be on the national SEG and their officers that have come down here. It was a real privilege to serve as President there.

DF: Do you remember anything about the founding, that original meeting?

HK: We met in the Palliser Hotel, up in their Ballroom I think it was, up on the top floor. I wish I could remember some of the names of the people that were there to start it out. But we just all got together and decided that we were going to become a member of the Society of Exploration Geophysicists, a chapter of it. Charlie Moore was there, Norm Christie, there were a bunch of them, I couldn't start to name them all but I know that we had our picture taken at that meeting as the foundation or the founding father if you will. It was quite a moving experience at the time.

DF: Quite a day.

HK: Quite a day. I think they've done a wonderful job, I'm proud to have been able to contribute a little bit to it.

DF: Well, we're proud to have you come and spend some time here.

HK: We certainly have been pleased to have been able to do it and I'm most appreciative of

you giving me this opportunity.

DF: Thank you so much for spending these few minutes with us to tell us some of your recollections. We're sorry you couldn't come up for the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations this summer. On behalf of the Petroleum Industry Oral History Project and especially the Canadian Society of Exploration Geophysicists, I think you again for allowing us to interview you this afternoon by telephone and we'll end the formal part of the interview at this time.

HK: Thank you very much.