

PETROLEUM INDUSTRY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: A. W. Norris

INTERVIEWER: David Finch

DATE: March 2006

DF: Today is the 15<sup>th</sup> of March in the year 2006 and we are with Mr. A. W. Norris at his home at 2 Varal Place, N.W. Calgary and my name is David Finch. So you go by Willy, do you?

WN: Yes.

DF: Yes. Tell us when and where you were born.

WN: I was born in 1922, on October 2<sup>nd</sup>, at a little place called Little Red River, which was the Hudson's Bay Post on the Peace River, at the mouth of Little Red River or Mikkaa River as they call it in Cree.

DF: And why were you born there?

WN: Well, my father was an assistant Hudson Bay Post man. He was fluent in French, Cree and English so he was an ideal person to have trading with the Indian population that lived in the surrounding area.

DF: I'll say. What was his name?

WN: Malcolm Frederic Norris.

DF: Okay. And your mom's name?

WN: I can't think of it.

DF: It will come back to you in a minute. So how did your folks come to be there?

WN: My father married my mom at Fort Vermillion, which is up river about 30 miles. That marriage took place about 1921.

DF: How did your dad come to work for the Hudson's Bay Company?

WN: He lived; I guess . . . my grandfather, John Norris, I think was married 3 times. It was I guess a large family of 10 children was the first marriage, no children with the second and four children with the third. My pop was the eldest of the family of four children. When that happened, before that, John Norris had a home right near the intersection of 118<sup>th</sup> Ave. and St. Albert Tr. When that third family came along I guess there was objection from the first family so he bought a house in St. Albert and they lived right at the base of the cliff there and the first property was up on the hill to the west.

#033 DF: What do you remember from your childhood?

WN: From his childhood?

DF: From your childhood.

WN: I can remember just running wild and enjoying myself.

DF: What kinds of things did you do?

WN: About the earliest thing that I can remember, my mother tells me that I was about 3 ½ then, my grandmother died in Fort Smith, suffering from what they used to call dropsy, now I guess it's just fluid in the legs. I can remember my aunt, Jessie, who was the

younger sister of my pop, taking me to the hospital in Fort Smith to visit my grandmother who was seriously ill. I think she died about 3 days later. The unusual thing about that, that I remember, because I was quite young, there was an Indian lad there and he had an unusually large head, which was a relatively common ailment I guess, amongst the Indian population. This young lad was playing peed-a-boo with me. He was looking in through the hospital room there. I'd look at him and he'd smile. I guess about 3 days later, my grandmother died and I can remember people there putting lumber down the front steps and then sliding the coffin down it. The, something I don't remember though, people tell me that I wanted to jump in when my grandmother was being lowered into the grave.

DF: Why is that?

WN: I don't know, I guess because I liked her.

DF: Okay. What else do you remember from those early years?

WN: I can remember in the spring of the year, when my mom and pop were hunting rats.

DF: What kind of rats?

WN: These were muskrats that were sold as fur, for pelts. And I can remember, my mom was quite good handling a 22, she could knock down ducks sitting in a canoe. I remember she was a marvellous cook, camp cook. I can remember one time where she even baked Christmas cake out on a campfire.

DF: In some kind of an oven or what?

WN: No, on an open campfire, then tilted sideways, held up by a stick, facing the hot embers of the campfire.

DF: Good for her. How did you hunt muskrats?

WN: They were generally done by shooting them with a 22. Both my mother and my father could make a kind of whistling noise, probably imitated the mating call of the muskrat. They'd come right at you when they did this. And then when they got close they were just shot with a 22, generally through the eye, so as not to spoil the pelt.

#072 DF: Now did they sink?

WN: No.

DF: So how did you get them out of the water then?

WN: We'd just paddle up to them in a canoe and take them out and skin and put them on scabbards to dry in the evenings.

DF: What kind of canoes did your family have?

WN: They were standard; they were generally cloth covered, with wood inside. They were pretty well standard and they were generally, usually on the large side, from 18-20 foot canoes.

DF: Do you remember who built those canoes?

WN: I think they were Peterborough, was a standard brand at that time.

DF: And was that something the Hudson's Bay sold?

WN: I have a feeling that we sent out to Edmonton for those, because we were living in Fort Fitzgerald. Fort Fitzgerald was the down end of a 17 mile portage there, where the Slave River passed over rocks of pre-Cambrian Age. Well, on the other . . . throughout the remainder of Alberta, the Slave River flows through rocks of Phenozoic Age, generally. Well, I guess there it would be Devonian and Cretaceous Age. There the water is smooth, it's only when it hits the water of pre-Cambrian Age that they rapids form and the rapids

there is about 17 miles in length and it created a portage with Fort Fitzgerald at the upper end of the portage and Fort Smith the higher end of the portage.

DF: So you were at the Fort Fitzgerald?

WN: I still own land where we had our cabin there at Fort Fitzgerald. It's right on the edge of the Slave River there.

DF: So how did you go to school there?

WN: I didn't. I didn't start school until, well, it would be . . . they came out when I was about 6 years old but when they came to Edmonton they spent 2 more years, I guess my mom and pop did, trapping in the foothills of the mountains. I remember we went in by, where was it now, right at the edge of the mountains there, there's a railway bridge if you have to cross the Athabasca River. I guess we went about 200 miles north, along the edge of the mountains and spent 2 years in that area trapping. Then I didn't come out until about 2 ½ years later when we moved back to Edmonton. My parents had 2 lots there, I can still remember the address of the place, it was about 2 blocks north of 118<sup>th</sup> Ave. and about 2 blocks east of the St. Albert Tr. The address there was 12048-131<sup>st</sup> St. and it was in the Sherbrook area. I started school at this single room school where they taught 1, 2 and 3 grades. I guess in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year, I was really lucky because they put me in an accelerated class and they sent me to the Westmount School, and there I remember, there was a special teacher and her name was Miss Manser. She was an unusual person because she used to write poetry and she would spout off her poetry as she was teaching.

#126 DF: Really?

WN: Oh yes, marvellous person.

DF: So you started school when you were 8?

WN: I was 8 and within a month I turned 9. Up until then I just ran wild I guess.

DF: So how long did it take you to catch up with your age and your grade?

WN: I graduated from high school in my own grade.

DF: So you caught up pretty soon?

WN: Yes.

DF: What can you tell me about your schooling?

WN: I was a good student, I can show you my high school marks.

DF: That's okay, just tell me what you did.

WN: I was very good at the math and sciences. Victoria High School is a very large school where there were 3, 4 rooms for each grade, 10, 11 and 12. I think on two of those years I was within the top 10. Most of the time I was an honour student.

DF: What do you remember from that part of your life?

WN: I enjoyed it. It was good fun, I liked going to school. I remember when I started school, at Sherbrook School, I learned, actually I couldn't read up until then and about halfway to Christmas I was reading. And I think before Christmas I'd read every book in the school.

DF: What kind of sports were you involved in at school?

WN: I played at everything that was at school, I played softball. When I was going to high school there, in softball, of the high schools we won the championship two of the years. And then I played soccer as well, I played hockey.

DF: What position did you play in hockey?

WN: Usually on the forward because I was a fast skater and I could dippy-doodle, I was good at stick handling.

DF: So anything else to say from your high school years? What did you do in the summer?

WN: I generally spent my summers with my cousin and visit on the Callihoo Indian Reserve. At that time my uncle was married to my aunt, the aunt who was the Chief of the reserve. That aunt was the half sister of my pop. The same mother but a different father.

#169 DF: And where is that reserve?

WN: That reserve is about 20 miles northwest of Edmonton. The place name is still on the map.

DF: Okay. Now you say you went there in the summer time, what did you do?

WN: I helped my cousin, we worked on the farm. He had an elderly race horse, I guess that was one of the attractions of going there, he bought this race horse and it could run like the wind and I used to just love riding it.

DF: Is that where you learned to ride?

WN: Yes. And I used this mare to go for the cows in the evening and then to pick them up again and drive them. I remember, he was using 2 quarters of land to pasture about ten to a dozen cows and those had to be milked each day, and the cream separated.

DF: Did you learn to milk?

WN: Oh yes. Sometimes when they were away I would milk all 12 of them.

DF: Good for you. What else do you remember from your summers?

WN: In those days, at school I was very active in scouting and I got to be a Troop Leader and then later on we lost our male Scout Master and a female person came in as a Scout Mistress and a lot of time I also acted as an assistant Scout Master for the troop.

DF: And what kinds of things did you do?

WN: We learned all kinds of things. We learned knotting, we learned map reading, first aid, it was a course that had to be passed each year and it was taught by the St. John Ambulance people in those days. Every May 24<sup>th</sup> weekend I remember there used to be Scout Jamborees and we'd compete in all kinds of things, in bridge building, in signalling, you know, with the Morse code or semaphore, even singing. This lady there, you know, she was very musical and I guess during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War she'd learned most of the songs. In fact, she had a phenomenal memory. In fact, she's a relative, she was part of the Wodehouse family, you remember, one of them was Lord Haha that used to broadcast for Hitler, just across the channel. He used to make fun of the British.

#214 DF: So from high school where did you go next?

WN: I was out of high school I guess, about a year and then I signed up with the RCAF.

DF: What year was that?

WN: That was in 1941. From there, in the winter months we did what they called tarmac duties in Saskatchewan, out in the bald prairie there, I remember it was very cold that winter with temperatures going down to about -40. I remember the chief of the place saying, you have to be tough because all the plumbing here is outside. But it was good fun. Oh, another thing, at that time, I got interested in aircraft recognition and I taught aircraft recognition for awhile.

DF: So how do you teach that?

- WN: Just show them cards, and then they'd come up and you had to give a quick answer as to what it was.
- DF: So it would be, like a silhouette of an airplane?
- WN: Yes, a silhouette.
- DF: From the side, from underneath and so on.
- WN: That's right. And it was something that we had to learn later on anyway, this was just a good way to play the game and learn the aircraft recognition.
- DF: And what was tarmac duty all about?
- WN: Taking grease spots off concrete floors, tidying up, sweeping floors; it was strictly to keep us busy. I remember there was a good library there at that station.
- DF: So what else did you do with the RCAF?
- WN: Later on, in the spring of the year, we were sent to Saskatoon and there we took the first part of your training. They called it initial training. That was done at a high school in Saskatoon. From there . . .
- DF: What did they teach you?
- WN: You went through your high school math, I remember we were taking, in math, annuities, perpetuities, series. I remember they taught us to assess the frequency of playing cards, I remember that stood us in good stead because when we went overseas we used to play a gambling game called Red Dog and I remembered a lot of this math and I could tell the frequency, just by looking at your hand and drawing to it, I could tell my chances, whether I was above average or not. And I remember winning a lot of money, just by being able to remember some of my high school math.
- DF: Really. So you were trained to do what?
- WN: There, well, we did a lot of math. We studied Air Force law there. Things like learning the Morse code, learning how to march of course. An interesting thing about the marching, back in those days, rather than calling it a rest period they called it a smoke break. So you can tell what they thought about smoking in those days. And that was, I think, 15 minutes out of every hour was your smoke break, when you were learning how to march.
- #276 DF: So you were learning to march but where were you headed in the Air Force?
- WN: Depending on your mark, I guess . . . and then from there I was singled out, I guess because of my marks in maths that were high they sent me to a navigation school at Ancienne Lorette, located in Quebec. That was about 8 miles out of Quebec City. I understand there's a little airport there today, dating back to those days.
- DF: So what were you doing there?
- WN: There I trained as a navigator and I guess I was there about 6 months. I remember while I was there I was tops in the navigation things. I graduated with about an 80% average and I guess I was within the top three. When that was completed I took a leave, or they sent us out on leave out here to the west. While I was at home in Edmonton a letter came through that I'd been selected as a Commission Officer.
- DF: So where did you go?
- WN: From there we got notice that we were going to be sent overseas. You were put on a train and we travelled to Halifax. We were there for quite awhile and then we were taken over to England. This was in December 1942 when that occurred. We went over on the Queen

Elizabeth and I remember the gyros on this large ship had been taken out so that the submarines couldn't detect it. When we travelled over there it travelled at top speed all the time and it continually zig-zagged and it could outrun any submarine.

DF: What were the gyros, why were they taken out?

WN: Because with the gyros in the submarines could detect the ship more easily.

DF: What is a gyro?

WN: A gyro is something, when it's spinning; it means you can't rotate it. With that gyro spinning it meant that, if we were buffeted by the waves there would be less tendency for the boat to roll.

DF: Oh yes, so with those out was it a rougher ride?

WN: Oh yes, much rougher. And when we went over we were in a storm that was exceedingly . . . I remember going out one night and there were waves that were literally hitting as high as the ship was, exceedingly violent.

DF: Did you get sick?

WN: No. But I remember we were put in rooms that were originally meant for two and there would be between 18 and 20 people in a single room, so we were packed in like sardines. I think there were about 20,000 people on that one trip. So if we were hit a lot of people would have been . . . I remember one day, most of the fancy furniture had been taken out of the Queen Elizabeth and mostly we were just sitting on the floor you know, some of us were reading, some of us were playing cards, some of us were gambling. I remember a wave caught us and it seemed as if it just rolled over very slowly and everything in the room, including all the large furniture and people just started to slide across the room. They slid across the room and then were slammed up against the wall and then kind of bounced back onto the floor. There were people there with broken bones, broken collar bones, broken arms and legs. I guess the people that were gambling, all their money was mixed up, it was a real shmozzle, furniture broken.

DF: Really, so a big wave.

WN: A big wave hit us, yes.

End of tape

#### Tape 1 Side 2

DF: So when you got to England, what did you do there?

WN: I noticed when we got close to Ireland that a couple of large aircraft came out to meet us, flew around and circled us. I guess we were directed in, past Ireland and then around to the south and into, I guess Liverpool. Then we were taken by train, from there to a place called Bournemouth, on the south shore. I guess back in the Victorian Era it was a town or a city of luxurious hotels, even I guess, up until that time; it was a place where the wealthy people of Britain spent their winters there, at Bournemouth.

DF: Because it was warmer?

WN: Yes. The climate there in the winter time, it's almost like west Vancouver, it's very warm and kind of a mist, it's pretty, coming down all the time. I enjoyed it, it's nice.

DF: So what did you do there?

WN: There they gave us a lot of lectures. When I was there I volunteered to interchange with a part of the 5<sup>th</sup> Canadian Division and they were stationed in Sherwood Park, which is not too far away. And I spent a month there while someone in my place came and spent a

month with the Air Force in Bournemouth. There they put me to work; I think they were people who specialized in artillery. I know beans about artillery but I participated in mock . . . you know, how to handle guns and how to zero in on a target and doing all those things. It was interesting. I learned how other people of the Armed Forces functioned. And I guess the person in my position in Bournemouth there, I guess he learned a little of how the Air Force operated.

#028 DF: So what did you do next?

WN: From there I was posted to a place called Pershore, it's in the midlands area, near Manchester, the manufacturing part of England. There it was a school that had a lot of Tiger Moths and they paired us up, a pilot and a navigator and we practiced map reading. When we were lucky 2 or 3 of these Tiger Moths would get together and we'd play tag, up in around the billowy white clouds. It was lots of fun. That continued until one day, when I was a navigator, trying to land one of these things and he was a little short of the field and he hit a hedge there and the aircraft tumbled. When that happened they took the sticks out of the Tiger Moths. We used to try and get hold of broomsticks and saw off one end and we'd hide the broomsticks in our flying suits so we could use it as a joystick to operate the aircraft. And there we'd go on . . .

DF: Because the navigators weren't supposed to be flying?

WN: No, no. But you were teamed up with a person and then we'd go on three legged trips across there and we'd do that, to practice. Well, the pilot would practice his flying and the navigator would practice his reading maps.

DF: So tell me, as a navigator, what kind of instrumentation did you have to help you?

WN: Right there, not too much. But we looked at a compass . . .

DF: A compass, a map and maybe a watch?

WN: Oh yes, timing was everything. You had a watch, every day at lunch time we'd listen for the time signal to correct your watch.

DF: But those were the only instruments you had then?

WN: Yes, at that very elementary stage. From there, we were first of all trained in Wellingtons. Wellingtons, you know, it had 2 motors rather than 4 motors. These were fairly advanced ones and at that time it was intended that when we trained on these Wellingtons that we would be sent to the Middle East, to the Mediterranean area. Then an order came through that they just cancelled that completely. That came through from Canada. So that was scrubbed. From then on we were trained in Halifaxes, and in the Lancasters. The Lancasters, they had in-line motors and the Halifaxes were air cooled engines, circular things.

DF: Rotaries.

WN: Rotaries, yes. That was very intense. Oh yes, and I remember when we were taken off the Wellingtons and started to train on the 4 engine things, before that happened, we were sent to another little place up in the north of England, I'll show you pictures. This is the picture taken up in the north of England and there's me sitting there. When that was taken I was about 20 yrs. old.

#076 DF: And what are you doing here?

WN: I was sitting in on a briefing for a bombing raid on Berlin. But I was an outsider, I just say in for interest sake. Photo taken at 1664 Conversion Unit, Croft, Yorkshire, between

October 21<sup>st</sup> and November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1943. Our crew was converting from Wellington 10's to Halifax 5 aircraft. I was 20 yrs. old. And here, a typical briefing of Bomber crews 431 and 434 Squadrons at Croft, Yorkshire. The two senior RCAF officers seated in the aisle are Group Captain R. S. Turnbull and Wing Commander A. L. Blackburn.

DF: That's great.

WN: That was cut out of an Air Force magazine that I subscribe to.

DF: So then where did you go from there?

WN: From there I was sent to . . . I could get my log book.

DF: That's fine, just big picture.

WN: Yes. I was sent to another station, all up in Yorkshire, in the north, where we trained in, I guess at that time, Lancasters. And there we had all the advanced navigational aids and everything.

DF: So you say advanced navigation, what were you using then?

WN: Radar was invented by a Scotsman. By that time they had a radar instrument that they referred to as "G". On the land this consisted of a master station, say, here, and what they called a slave station off to one side.

DF: Like, how far away?

WN: About, maybe, 5 miles or so. The idea was that the master station would send out a signal and the slave station over here would send out a signal and then there would be another signal sent out by this master station and then the slave station over here would send one out. When that was plotted on a Mercator projection you'd get, instead of parabolas, you'd have parabolas like this and that represented millionths of a second, the signal sent out. And then you'd have a slave station over here sending out and this other slave station, so where those parabolas crossed, what you'd do, you'd follow these lines, you wanted to take a fix, well, you'd have a cathode ray there and a horizontal line at the top, graduated in, say from 1 to say, 20 and another line below, graduated from 20 to 40 and those are millionths of a second. Then you flicked the switch and you read the fraction in between that. And that was picking up these signals from the station. And then you'd go to your Mercator projection and these lines were there so you'd follow, say, your upper one was 18.56. Well, you went to this big sheet of paper and you followed it along and as you froze that picture you looked at your watch and you put down the time and then you'd do the same for the bottom line and say it was 40.62, well, where those parabolas crossed, that was where you were at that time.

#127 DF: So you were doing this as you were flying?

WN: Yes, well, you were trained on the ground first. Something I should mention too, when we were training at Ancienne Lorette you were put in something like an automatic pilot where you were trained how to fly. Well, there, the clocks were made to run twice as fast as normal and there would be all kinds of disturbing noises you had to put up with, to teach you how to operate at top speed. And then you got used to that.

DF: So when did you get into combat?

WN: That came I guess, about a year later.

DF: What year?

WN: I guess, in '43.

DF: Any stories from that?

WN: The squadron we were sent to was 433 Squadron. It was called Porcupine was our squadron name. Our crew, it was on our tenth operation that we were coming back from bombing Düsseldorf that we were hit by a fighter that came up underneath us. Unfortunately I guess, one of our fuel tanks was hit and the aircraft was burning like a firecracker and we were spiralling down. I remember, for navigators your parachute was on a bracket right beside you and we were down in front of the pilot, down towards the nose and my parachute was up beside me and I had to take it off the bracket, snap it on. I remember when the aircraft got hit I was thrown from my seat and I was kind of fighting my way back and the trap door was underneath the navigator's feet there and I was fighting with it to get the hatch loose. As I was doing that I guess somebody else was just a little more frightened than I was and he came up and he pushed me out of the way and went out. Then I went out after, to this day I don't remember who it was. I remember when I left the aircraft the tail thing just missed my head as I bailed out. Then I don't remember pulling the ripcord. I came to on the ground, I was on the edge of a very low banked, very small canal and my feet were dangling in the water and the parachute was strung out behind me and off in the distance the sky was lit up where our aircraft had crashed and was burning. I guess a family or maybe 2 families jabbering . . . yes, this occurred on the night of April 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup> of 1944. This family, there appeared to be maybe a dozen people in it and in the darkness, they didn't see me, just ran. They were running towards where the sky was lit up and they were talking in a language that I didn't recognize but it turned out that this was near the village of Brocholt, in northeast Belgium. I remember getting up and looking around, it was pitch dark but from what I could see and I went into a very thick growth of willows. These willows were maybe as high as the top of the window there.

#191 DF: So 6-7 feet?

WN: Yes. And I got in there and I went to sleep. I remember before going to sleep I tore off a large part of the parachute and I was going to use it . . . because then I had visions, I would probably get into the underground and escape. I remember waking up I guess, about 6:00 in the morning and I felt my legs because I was a little bit sore and I noticed when I lifted my hand off my hand was all covered in blood. Up until then I didn't realize that I had been hit. It turned out that my legs were beginning to hurt and I found out that both my legs and my ??? had been peppered with flack, pieces of metal from this aircraft that had come up underneath us.

DF: But you could still walk?

WN: Yes. I could still walk.

DF: So what happened next?

WN: When I realized that . . . what I should say is we were equipped with maps, compasses and pencils. I think if I hadn't been hit, I'm pretty sure I could have . . . and then on rice paper, we had addresses of people we could contact in Belgium and France. But when I was hit there, I chewed up the rice paper with all this information on it and I walked to the nearest farmhouse and I asked if I could be taken to a hospital. Some German soldiers came along and they drove me to a tiny little hospital right on the coast there, on the North Sea. I guess there were about 50 of us in there, most of them were Americans that had been . . . they were flying their small, medium bombers every day and I guess many

of them had bailed out. And with them, it was surprising the number that had arms and legs get caught in the ??? and have arms and legs knocked off with hitting the propellers in those. So I thought there was nothing wrong with me compared to some of those guys.

#226 DF: Pretty lucky, eh?

WN: Oh yes, I was exceedingly lucky.

DF: So then what happened after the hospital?

WN: I was there for about a month and a half. From there I was shipped to, it seemed like a warehouse like building on the outskirts of Brussels. I was there a couple of days and then from there we were put in boxcars and we ended up at . . . it was the main interrogation centre there . . . I can't get the name.

DF: It might come to you in a minute. Then what happened?

WN: It was the main interrogation centre where they sent all air crew that were . . . it was where the west German government had their headquarters, you know, after the liberation. At this interrogation, I was there for I guess, about 2 weeks or a little more and there we were . . . and we'd been trained that if you were ever taken prisoner all you had to give was your rank, name and number. I think that's all they got out of me. But I saw some startling things there though. This young guy that was interrogating me, he was, I guess, about my age, very young. He told me that before the war he was training to be a doctor at a university in Chicago and that after the war he intended to go back to Chicago and marry a girl, a lady there. But the thing that I found astounding was, when I gave him my name he talked to an assistant nearby and this assistant brought in some newspapers from Canada and he went down the list and I guess there were about 3 Norris's there in this list. And he came to my name and on it was the date and my number and my rank from this little place in Quebec, Ancienne Lorette in Quebec. Somebody there was passing that information on, but I was astounded to see it there at this place.

#271 DF: And why did they bring that up with you?

WN: They wanted to impress on you that they knew everything already. To open you up.

DF: What kinds of questions did they ask you?

WN: One thing he had there, being as I was the navigator, do you want anything to know and he took me into an education room and he showed me all the navigational aids that the Germans operated with. I was surprised at the sophistication. I think there was a time there, when we were shot down, that the type of radar they used in their fighters were probably maybe superior to what we used. It was apparently a system that they used and worked very well, where they just come up underneath and our people couldn't see underneath. At that time I don't think we had anything that would detect fighter aircraft below us so we were highly vulnerable on that sense.

DF: What was the plane you were in when you were shot down?

WN: It was a Halifax. It had certain advantages over a Lancaster but it also had certain disadvantages. One of them was that fuel consumption in it was much more. On another operation, in fact, I guess, of March we had a very close call too, a raid to Berlin and back.

DF: What happened then?

WN: On the way back, when we were crossing over, we were routed in, from the north of England, over the Scandinavian countries and then from there, down this way to Berlin and we came out the same way. After bombing Berlin we came up here, cross the Scandinavian and when we crossed the Scandinavian countries we went through a weather front where we were fighting winds that were 110-120 miles an hour. We knew that if we had to do that all the way back to the north of England we'd never make it. So we decided to throttle back and lower our altitude to about 200 ft. above the North Sea and then flew up towards Yorkshire on the English coast. I guess when we got to the English coast at night all our petrol gauges were on, indicating that we were out of fuel or close to out of fuel. So when we hit the shore, there was a little tiny air drome that we were heading for, hoping to land there but when we came down there we ploughed through about 3 great big oak trees about like that. So when we hit the ground "Pop" Schnobb, the wireless operator and myself, just as we hit the ground we landed right behind where these wings are attached to the aircraft and got in behind it and both of the wings were knocked off, the front end of the aircraft was knocked off and the tail was knocked off and there was just this midsection that "Pop" and I, the wireless operator and myself were kind of huddled up. And that thing skidded for about 2 or 3 blocks. It finally came to a stop and I took my officers hat on so I could put the microphones on my head and I remember, this officers cap of mine was just ground up like a piece of rag and I wondered why my head wasn't ground up that way too. But there it was, it ground that hat up but both Pop and I were okay. Other than bruises and scratches.

#346 DF: What was the other fellow's name?

WN: His name was Peter Schnobb. He was born in Quebec and then later moved to Ontario but I guess while he was in Quebec he learned, he spoke fluent French. And he worked from the people that look after stuff that was sent in and out, you know, he checked merchandise going in and out of Canada.

DF: And he went by the nickname of "Pop"?

WN: Yes, he was about 10 years, in fact, just before I took a trip this spring I talked to his wife and it happened to be his birthday, that was near the end of March, she said that if he'd been alive he would have been 91 years old. I was 84 at that time and he was 91 so he was older than the rest of us.

End of tape

Tape 2 Side 1

DF: So we had you getting capture in Belgium.

WN: I was on a sidetrack there mentioning when we came back from Berlin.

DF: From the previous time, yes.

WN: Yes, so I'll fill in. From the interrogation centre we were sent in boxcars to a place in what is southeast Poland, in the Silesian area, the coal area of Poland. That was close to a town called Sagan Belaria. It's a coal province in southeast Poland. We were just a few miles out of Sagan but we were also within, maybe 5-10 miles from Stalag-Luft 3. Our camp was called Stalag-Luft 3A. At Stalag-Luft 3 . . .

DF: What's that middle word, what's the word after Stalag?

WN: Luft, it means air. A camp for . . .

DF: Air crew.

WN: Air crew, yes. I remember reaching the gate there and on the gate was a list of the 78 POW's that escaped from Stalag-Luft 3. As they were captured, the first 50 were all shot. You may have seen the show, The Great Escape. I guess everything was pretty well according to . . . except the part of Steve McQueen, you know, when he escaped on the motorcycle and gave the Germans a chase trying to catch him. There was a list there, the 50 POW's that were shot on it. Our camp was I guess, maybe between 5 and 10 kilometres away from their camp. I never did see their camp.

#031 DF: So how did you get back to Canada?

WN: In the second week of January of '45, you see, we had secret radios in the camp and we always knew just how far away the Russians were, if they were advancing and it got terribly cold in that second week of January of '45 and there was about that much snow.

DF: A foot.

WN: Yes, about a foot. And it was around -30. But before that, about a month and a half before that, I'd received a parcel from my father. He must have been psychic or something because he sent me winter underwear, winter socks, he sent me a great big piece of tarp and with that tarp I made a packsack, with a ???line on it and with a bit of wood I got hold of I made a sleigh. Because we pretty well guessed that within a short time we were going to be on the move. So I teamed up with an Australian lad, they're very much like Canadians, they're kind of rough and ready and we got along famously together and we were on the march together. It didn't bother me or my partner very much because I was still very young, I could walk. The only thing I was afraid of, I didn't have very good walking shoes. I had my flying boots and I saved my flying boots but they weren't very good for walking. But they were nice and warm in that cold weather. I guess we walked about halfway and then they put us into boxcars and they took us to a place called Lukenwalde. Lukenwalde is located on the railway line directly south of Berlin. It was a POW camp back during the 1<sup>st</sup> World War and was used again during the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. It was a huge camp, there was everyone there, there were Italians, Russians, Americans, Canadians. Lots of Russians and the Russians were made to do all the dirty work of cleaning the latrines. The stench was just terrible. And it was there that they gave us just enough food to keep us alive. We all ended up being skin and bones; you could count our ribs when we got out of there. On the morning of April 22<sup>nd</sup>, just a year to the day of when we were shot down, our camp was overrun by a large tank brigade. Most of them they looked like mongrel people, and also, many women. Only the officers were Russians and really tough looking guys, and the same with the ladies. I remember when they came to the front gate of our POW camp and I guess one of these big tanks, he didn't wait for the gate to swing open, he just went right through it, knocked it over and then there was a straight road leading into the camp and in the centre of this huge camp there were administrative buildings and I guess, the soup kitchen and other buildings there. And on either side of that road there was a double row of barbed wire and then rolled up barbed wire in between and that was on each side of the road. And when they got to the buildings in the centre of the camp they turned around and they started to come back and there wasn't enough room to pass side by side so the ones that were coming

back were hitting these big fence posts with the barbed wire there and I remember there were a lot of people that had climbed these barbed wire fence and were cheering these Russians and I remember one poor guy got caught on the barbed wire and he couldn't extricate himself from it and when the tank came he just went under and the tank went over him. Right at the moment of liberation he was knocked out.

#088 DF: So how did you get back to Canada?

WN: From there we took over the camp. While I was working in the administration I got into their files and I managed to get hold of my POW card, I've got that. They left a few Russians there to guard the camp and our food picked up a little better. But about 3 days later, I happened to be on guard duty there and I remember, it was about 6:00 in the early morning and three German soldiers came out of a wooded area near the camp with their arms up and these Russians, they just up with their rifles and they just shot them and left them, didn't even go over and look at them. Within half an hour after that it seemed like all hell broke loose. The Russian forces that had gone on and surrounded Berlin, they started a barrage of ??? and you could feel . . . that was about, quite a long ways away, about 20 or 30 kilometres away and the ground was just vibrating with the . . . and that barrage kept up for, it seemed like about an hour. Just a steady barrage of . . .

DF: Artillery?

WN: Artillery, firing it in towards Berlin. I guess about 2 weeks after that they sent Russian trucks into our camp and were taken to an air drome nearby and from there; these were our own Lancasters and Halifaxes and they picked us up at this air drome and we were flown to Brussels. From there we went through a delousing section at Brussels, tossed what clothes we were wearing into a big pile, went through showers and then they had a huge meal. Each of us had, I remember, a bottle of wine sitting by our place and I guess that night I drank way too much wine and I remember being very, very sick.

DF: Just too much on an empty stomach.

WN: Yes, too much. And the following day we were picked up by aircraft and flown to an air field just outside London. From there we were put into a bus and we were taken back to where we started out from, Bournemouth, England, in the south. A few days after that I went into London and I picked up all my, you know, I had a big trunk there and all my stuff had been packed by the padre on the 433 Squadron and everything was in this, all my books and camera and all this stuff, everything was there, nicely packed by the padre of our station.

#127 DF: Now get us back to Canada and tell us how you got into the GSC?

WN: A French boat called the Iles de France was sent to pick us up from Bournemouth. The boat hadn't been cleaned; it was just as filthy as a pigsty. I remember we just marched off it and we refused to go until they cleaned up that boat and they did it. They cleaned it up and in a couple of days we were back on the boat and we were on our way back to Canada. The trip across the Atlantic was beautiful, the weather was just . . . we'd sit out there in that sun. After being in a POW camp it was just like the next thing to heaven.

DF: So what did you do when you got back to Canada?

WN: We were in Halifax for awhile and then we were sent to a rehabilitation centre somewhere along the St. Lawrence River and we were there for a couple of weeks. From

there we were put on trains and I was taken back to my parents, they were living right here in Calgary, right up on top of the hill there, right where the Elbow and the other river come together.

DF: So how did you get into the Geological Survey of Canada?

WN: That first summer, that was in '45 and the summer of '46 my Pop and I, we got a job with a little mining company in Edmonton and we prospected at the north end of North Gordon Lake, about 150 northeast of Yellowknife. A big staking rush was on that summer.

DF: For gold.

WN: For gold, that's right, gold. Wherever you found arseno pyrite, it's referred to mispickel, when you strike it with a hammer you get a strong garlic smell from it but wherever you find arseno pyrite you usually found there was gold associated with it. Generally you couldn't see it but by roasting it in a can and then grinding it to a powder and then washing it with water you could pick out the gold, gold would become evident. My Pop and I, we made a small gold discovery that summer. The name of the company was Gateway Gold. When we came back I started looking around. I remember visiting the high school centre in Edmonton and I got a copy of my transcripts, my high school marks and then I sent those out to, I remember Scarborough was opening up, just outside of Toronto there, I sent a transcript of my high school marks there, a copy to the University of Toronto. One thing we found out was the DVA would not support us if we applied to a graduate school in the United States; it had to be a Canadian university.

#186 DF: And what was the DVA?

WN: Department of Veterans Affairs. We communicated through them because they were very generous to veterans. I guess there were about 3 different options to veterans, you could take out money if you wanted to start a business or start farming or use it for education or use it for starting a small business. In my case I used it for furthering my education.

DF: And where did you go?

WN: I went to the University of Alberta and I got into the Honours course there, that was September of '46. I completed the Honours B.Sc. in '50. Then I applied to enter a Masters course and I got in there, I guess '50 and '51, yes, in the spring of '51 I completed my Masters there at the U. of A. Then I applied to the graduate school at the University of Toronto and I was accepted there. And Christmas of that year I got married. In the spring of '51 I completed the Masters and in September of that year we piled into a bus from Edmonton and went to Toronto. There, in 4 terms, in the spring of '55 I completed my doctorate there at the University of Toronto.

DF: Wow that was fast. So who did you work for? Oh, just a sec, you said you got married, who did you marry in 1951?

WN: Joyce Irene Berry. She was a farm girl that lived close to Callihoo, northwest of Edmonton. She was a good helpmate. The many summers that I was away from home, she looked after the home, and then when two boys came along she looked after the boys.

DF: So what were some of the highlights of your time with the GSC?

WN: Back in those days, in the early part, the main premise of the Geological Survey of Canada was to map Canada geologically at a scale of 4 miles to 1 inch. That was its fine purpose. Because of that, I guess, I participated in 4 helicopter supported and fixed wing

supported big operations, where you're able to do geology at an accelerated pace. The first one I participated in was Operation Franklin, headed by Dr. Yves Fortier. He'd heard that I'd had experience operating in the far north and that I could look after myself doing field work and he was giving a lecture at Simcoe Hall in Toronto, at the graduate school there and he looked me up. He talked me into joining Operation Franklin that first year and he was the head of it. That summer, the summer of 1955, we mapped a large part of the Queen Elizabeth Islands which were north of the Northwest Passage, all those islands north. I think for that publication I investigated 10 areas, which I wrote up and appeared in the final memoir of Operation Franklin.

#258 DF: So tell us what it was like to do this actual work, what was the field work like?

WN: At that time there was close co-operation between the research group that developed special clothing for operating in the high north. They created special mukluks, for example, where you had an inner sock and then a duffle sock and they were inside rubber mukluks and you never got cold in them. Usually your feet were bathed in sweat but your feet were never cold. They supplied us with little tents because a lot of the work was done on traversing. We lived off what we could carry on our back because a lot of it was just traversing from spot to spot. As you collect fossils and rock samples it occupies what you ate in food. In those days I was a chain smoker and I remember being sent out on one of these traverses where we'd set caches about 3 or 4 days apart. Because I smoked so much I left some of my cigarettes at one of these food caches along the way. So I'd pick it up when I was doing the geology and I remember coming to this cache, but I was on the wrong side of this tributary stream when I got there about 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon. At night, everything would freeze solid but by 2, 3, 4 o'clock in the afternoon, if the sun was out, it was just a raging torrent. And there were my cigarettes, about half the distance across the street; I could see my canvas bag there with my cigarettes in it and my food. I never did get those cigarettes back because I was on the wrong side of the stream when I got there. That was good fun, that year. November 21<sup>st</sup> and 22<sup>nd</sup> of this year they got together all the participants of 1955, Operation Franklin and I guess there was about 12-14 people that were left. I think 2 people had died in the meantime. Dr. Yves Fortier was there, he was 91 yrs. old and he was still functioning.

DF: What year were you born again?

WN: 1922. I'm 84 now.

#313 DF: So what were some of the other things you did up north?

WN: After that operation I participated in another one in 1957. It was headed by Dr. Bob Douglas and then another one again in 1962, referred to as Operation Porcupine and it was headed by Dr. Don Norris. Then there was another one in 1967 that covered the Hudson's Bay lowlands and it was headed by Willy Norris, myself. One thing of that Operation Winisk, by that time Dr. Yves Fortier, he'd become Director of the Geological Survey.

DF: What was the name of the last one?

WN: Winisk. Yes, at that time he'd become Director so we'd completed our geological map, put it together and put out a temporary map at a scale of about 16 miles to 1 inch. I remember I interceded with Dr. Fortier, it was completed, if we could have it put up

higher so we could get it published before Christmas and he was able to do that for us, so our map came out the same year that we did the operation with our preliminary results.

DF: That's great. So tell me about that Operation Winisk, what did that involve?

WN: We had 2 helicopters. We were also supported by a Beaver aircraft, and then whenever we made our camp move . . . it covered a huge area, the distance between Moosenee in the south and Churchill in the north is about 1,200 miles, it's quite a big area. About halfway up the shore there, you see, this covered an area that was underlain with Phanerozoic rocks and also some pre-Cambrian rocks as well. You could subdivide it into two areas, there was a Moose River basin in the south and the Severn basin in the north and then with this pre-Cambrian arch about halfway up, at the location of Cape Henrietta Maria. Another interesting thing about that, within that basin we mapped several areas with Kimberlite intrusions. That's the host rock of diamonds. One of them was in the Moose River basin in the south where these Kimberlitic rocks occurred in dikes and fills in Devonian strata. Another one . . .

End of tape.

#### Tape 2 Side 2

WN: Another one of these Kimberlite intrusions occurred up at this Cape Henrietta Maria area and I noticed in one issue of the Calgary Herald this past winter that some diamonds were found in the Kimberlite there and one of them was as large as 3 carats in size.

DF: Wow, that's huge.

WN: Yes, that's quite a big diamond.

DF: But you were just mapping, you weren't looking for anything in particular?

WN: Oh no, no, we were just mapping. I'm a specialist in the Devonian part and in later years I produced, along with another lad, a massive volume on the Devonian of the Hudson Bay Lowlands.

DF: But at first you were just doing the surveys?

WN: Yes, we were just mapping. And how we did it was, we had about half a dozen rubber boats and then starting in the Quebec side there and right up to Churchill, and then we had one base camp at Moosenee and from there we sent out people in rubber boats and they did the geology. We set one on each of the rivers and they just leap-frogged their way as they worked their way northward. Each two-man party had light radios and I guess with the invention of the transistors, you know, the 2 people, I think they won the Nobel Prize for it, it just revolutionized radio. Before that they had to have tubes. I can remember when I worked for the Saskatchewan Geological Survey, it took two Beaver trips to bring in a base camp radio, you know, the radios themselves which had tubes in them and then these dry cell batteries. Well, with these two-way radios we use now they're just a little thing. You can talk from here to Edmonton with them. And the nice thing about radios, when a two-man party would have a radio and we would have a radio at base camp and if they were say, one day ahead of time those two men had daily contact, morning and evening with our base radio. And if they finished two days ahead of time they just, at the radio contact time they'd tell us, send a helicopter out to pick us up tomorrow and move us to a new location or if they had to take longer. That revolutionized field work, speeded up things.

- #30 DF: Give us some detail as to exactly what they were doing as they were going down the river, how often would they stop, what would they do?
- WN: Wherever you saw a rock outcrop along the river.
- DF: And what would you do at each outcrop?
- WN: You'd take out your notebook and you took down all the data at that outcrop, and then you had a measuring stick or tape, you measured it, you described it, you took samples of it.
- DF: How big were the samples?
- WN: They were as big as we could get them because sometimes that sample would be tested for maybe, 2 or 3 things. Maybe part of that sample would be used to get the spores and pollen out of it, another part of it would be used for what we called conodonts. It's an animal that we never knew what they came from but I think we've finally found out that they were sieve like structures, a lamprey like organism.
- DF: These are all fossils?
- WN: These are fossils, yes. So we usually tried to collect, especially for conodonts, they liked their samples quite big and same for spores and pollen. There's a study for that, the fancy term they use for that is palynology. When I did my Master thesis I did a thesis on Cretaceous, I called them kuetenized micro-fossils. That kuetenized material is something that is very, very resistant, tough. Usually, even if you don't have fossils, and they're very good . . . I mean, one thing, certain areas, like the Hudson Bay Lowlands for example, by taking, you'd get lots of kuetenized micro-fossils or spores and pollen from it associated with your fossils like brachiopods and corals and other things. Apparently the spores and pollen were wafted in by the winds you know, and deposited in the sea water and then in turn were entombed in the marine rocks. And it was very nice to tie in that things that grew on land with things that occurred in marine waters. The nice thing about that, spores and pollen in the Devonian rocks of that Hudson Bay Lowlands, they were always there, while I've also studied the Devonians quite extensively in Manitoba and there you never find any spores or pollen in Devonian.
- DF: Why not?
- WN: I don't know. We don't know.
- DF: What got you interested in the Devonian?
- WN: I guess I was first assigned to rocks of Cambrian age but I'd always . . . you see, I did my doctorate on the *venus atrypa* of western Canada, it was a common . . . it was there that I got interested in Devonian rocks. So when an opening came for someone to study the Devonian rocks I jumped at it and I've worked in them ever since and became a ???.

- #080 DF: What else have you done; tell me some stories from the north, what interesting things happened up there?
- WN: I spent two summers working for the Geological Survey of Saskatchewan and I remember an amusing thing that took place. We had an agreement with people in, I guess Flin Flon I guess it was. We sent in our grocery order once a month and our code word we used for ordering beer was klim, you know, milk spelled backwards, dehydrated milk. I guess there was someone knew on the person taking the grocery list and the following trip of groceries that came in, they literally had 12 great big cases of klim, instead of beer. I can remember another instance where we went into a new campsite and it was raining.

This was right at the beginning of the season, the axes were dull and I guess our Party Chief, he was a lad that was doing his doctorate at Princeton in the United States and I guess he hit a young poplar sapling in this rain and with a dull axe, it bounced off that and the blade of the axe caught him right in the calf of the leg and made a great big cut there. Because I'd had a little bit of training in First Aid I was assigned to patch him up so we gave him a shot of whiskey and cleaned the wound with iodine and I sewed him up.

DF: What were you doing for the Geological Survey of Saskatchewan?

WN: We were mapping on the Canadian Shield.

DF: With airplanes or with canoes?

WN: We were using canoes. And leg work, you know, if you couldn't use the canoe you just traversed across muskeg. By that time most of Canada had been photographed, you know, with vertical line overlap photographs. So they were able to make maps at a scale of 4 miles to 1 inch and we mapped directly, put our stational calendars??? directly on those photographs, and then from there to transpose to a map.

DF: So what else have you done in the north that you particularly liked?

WN: I liked doing geology. I enjoyed every part of it, I enjoyed the work back in the office, I enjoyed writing, I enjoyed making maps. When I was on Operation Mackenzie for example, I did the initial work on the Pine Point property on the south shore of Great Slave Lake. I was able to get a key to the drilling that was done there and I wrote letters to Cominco and they gave me permission to use that information and I produced the first geological map of that mining property. The Pyramid Geophysical Company were working in there, using my map and with their geophysics they discovered another ore body there. That first Christmas that I was in Ottawa people from the Pyramid Company came up the 6<sup>th</sup> floor of our Geological Survey building in Ottawa and they plunked a great big case of whiskey on my desk. They made a lot of money, they had a huge ore body they discovered using the help of my maps.

DF: What kind of whiskey?

WN: I think it was that Crown Royal.

DF: Good for you.

WN: I thanked them very kindly for the gesture but I couldn't accept it.

DF: So what did you do with it?

WN: They very reluctantly took it back to their car, back down 6 flights of stairs and they were parked at the back of our place. I think if it was done now I'd accept it.

#141 DF: Yes, I think so; share it with your friends. What other stories do you have from the north? You've recently been awarded the order of Canada, what were some of the things involved with that?

WN: During my stay with the Geological Survey of Canada I've produced 80 peer reviewed papers, bulletins, memoirs, ordinary reports. Do you want to see some of them?

DF: Maybe after we get off tape.

WN: Yes. And on top of that I've produced about 350 or more internal reports for the Survey. So I've been I guess, highly productive.

DF: What did you enjoy most about the process?

WN: I like writing. When I attended school, I think about Grade 9 for example, I took a course in typing and I always did my own typing. I think it was one of the more useful things I learned in school. One thing, I can't think with a typewriter so I usually write it out longhand and then do it, and then type the manuscript from my longhand. Because I never learned I guess, to piece sentences together tapping away. I found that I could do that faster than sending it in to the typing pool. I'd take it home on the weekend and I could type a large manuscript over a weekend. So I was one of the relatively few people on the Survey to be . . . I think we had, well, we started off with three categories of research scientists and I was one of the few to be elevated to the top bracket and there was never any more than six of those people on the Survey at any one time. So it was considered quite . . . we always used to refer to that as, you had to be able to walk on water to make that.

DF: Well, you could walk on water but I'm sure you had some interesting incidents up north. Any bear stories?

WN: Oh yes. Well, I was never afraid of bears.

DF: No?

WN: Until one time, in the northern Yukon, it was in the very early part of the year for the Yukon, I think about mid-May and the north facing slopes of the mountains were still covered by snow. The south facing slopes, some of them were clear. So we were in there in mid-May and it was up in the northern part of the northern Yukon and there were several locations in that area, I think one of them was Johnson Creek where we had a very rare monograptic fossil. *Monograptus yukensis* was a special marker for marking the base of the Devonian and it occurred at several occurrences in that area.

#192 DF: So this is what you were looking for?

WN: This is what I was looking for. A special characteristic was at the end of it, it had a little crook. You'd see it as an impression in dark shaly rocks, you'd look at it and rotate it in light and it would show up as an impression, a shiny impression. Apparently these were organisms that had a float mechanism with them when they were alive and this float mechanism carried them along with the currents and they were spread out that way. At the base of the Devonian this particular fossil is sometimes abundant in dark shale rocks. And it's a good marker for the base of the Devonian, separated from the Silurian underneath.

DF: So you were looking for this?

WN: Yes, I was looking for that. And oh yes, when we got back that evening, we were up on a little plateau and it got much higher and went down into a low area, well, as we were eating our supper we noticed that there were three bears that had just come out. They were rummaging around and kind of going after, I think at one time the area was probably heavily treed because they were going into rotting trees and just breaking them apart and going after these young things that looked like. . . we get them here. . .

DF: Grubs?

WN: Yes, grubs. We noticed that when we were washing our dishes, one of these bears started climbing the incline towards us. We noticed that it got to the top and when it got to the top it stood up and god; he stood about 2 feet above us. We made up our minds that if he came at us my assistant was going to take our dishpan and empty the water and start

beating on it and I was going to go to our container of gasoline that we used for our stove and lantern and take the cap off it and I would douse him or douse the ground in front of it and back in those days I smoked, and light fire to it. Most animals and I think bears are afraid of fire. So I had that ready and he was beating away and this thing, he just suddenly charged us. He got from here to where those two chairs are and he stood up and I'm pretty sure if we'd have ran we'd have been done for. But the trees were just small stunty things anyway.

#234 DF: So he got within about 10 feet of you?

WN: Yes, 10 feet. And then he stopped and looked at us and he was frothing at the mouth, he looked as if he was four feet above us when he got that close. But we stood our ground and I think we out-bluffed it. He just kind of turned and let out a huff and took off in the other direction. But I'm pretty sure if we'd have . . . and ever since then I've never trusted bears but before that I was never afraid. Because usually, you go one direction and they go in another. This time it charged us. And I lost my faith in them.

DF: Any other bear stories?

WN: There's a lad that lives just over here, on the other side of the park. I worked with him when he was still an undergraduate at the University of Alberta. That summer we had one of my university professors with us too, Dr. Charlie Stelck. I remember I was with this lad and I didn't like working with him because he walked so slowly, you know, he didn't do things quickly. We were together this one day and we rounded a bend in a small river and there was a mother bear with a brown cub and a black cub. We saw these things and we turned around and we just ran as hard as we could. We ran a short distance and we stopped and the bear wasn't after us so we sat down on a log and laughed. I always thought I could run pretty fast but this lad was right with me. So all he needed was a bear to make him move.

DF: In all those years you flew in airplanes and helicopters did you have any accidents?

WN: Oh, lots of them?

DF: Lots of them? You were lucky then?

WN: I've always been lucky, I survived. For two summers I worked with another private company, The Yukon Exploration Company in the Yukon Territory, a party headed by Bob Brown. I think one night there, we had two of these helicopters and they were the very early ones that came from Britain. They had wooden propellers and whenever it rained these things became imbalanced. He had to wait maybe three days, they were made of laminated balsam wood and when it rained, when they were imbalanced and I remember the control thing, it came from the ceiling rather than from the bottom. One night the helicopter pilot said, you want to go for a ride, I said, sure. We went up and you know, helicopter pilots are always practicing how to land if their motor cut out. This evening he did that and we auto-rotated all the way down and then you course in the fix just before you land. That puts on the brake and you touch ground for a soft landing. Well, I guess everyone in camp probably saw us up there and they really thought we were in trouble. Boy, I remember, Bob that evening, the Party Chief, he really dressed down both of us, he said, don't you ever do that again; you scared the hell out of everyone in camp.

#299 DF: Yes, I can imagine.

WN: But they all do it, they all practice that. Because another time, this was many years later, also up in the northern Yukon, that day I'd radioed into camp that I was through and I wanted to go into the base camp and be fed and then be sent out to another section. As we were flying I noticed . . . the guy that was flying that aircraft he'd just come back, he was in the North Korean War and he'd just been released from hospital and retrained. I noticed that as we were flying back to base camp, along this river valley, we were going from one open slough area to the next. We were flying towards another slough-like round area and a piston rod broke in the engine. Just a big bang, it sounded like a gun going off. The aircraft was just shaking like that and we auto-rotated right into the centre of an open spot, the thing they practice all the time. Well, we got in there and within 15 minutes I had my radio out and we informed our base camp that we had crash landed in a place, I gave them the latitude and longitude of it. Oh yes, too, I'd just run off a map and it was in the back and I couldn't get to it but luckily when I got on the ground I got out my maps and I could see two mountain tops so I took compass shots on both these mountains and put them back and intersected and gave them the latitude and longitude of that and we had a helicopter from our base camp in half an hour. Then they took us back into base camp and I guess two days later they'd flown in an engine's bearings in from Edmonton and within two days after that they'd replaced the engine and it was flying again.

DF: How about any airplane crashes?

WN: I think most of them were helicopter scares that I've had. Those two years that we were with Peel Plateau Exploration Company, we had many scary trips that summer. One of them, we were flying around a mountain and I think in that case it was a spark plug problem and we had to auto-rotate on the side of a mountain. There again, I was lucky. Within about half an hour I had my own little radio out and I got in contact with my base camp and I told them the part that we needed and they sent a Beaver aircraft in and wrapped the part in a sleeping bag and they dropped it to us on the side of the mountain. We put this spare part back into the helicopter and we were flying in an hour's time.

#368 DF: Wow that is lucky.

WN: It seemed that every time something I was always able to, with the spare radio there, I was able to contact base camp every time something serious happened to get help.

DF: So no crash where you got injured or anything.

WN: No, no.

DF: That's good. Well, this has been a most enjoyable afternoon and on behalf of the Petroleum Industry Oral History Project I'd like to thank you so much for spending a couple of hours with us and sharing some of your life story. I'm sure there's lots more details down in paperwork but it's always good to get the story on tape too.

WN: I'll just show you what my reports are like.

DF: We'll do that in just a sec here, so thank you very much and we'll end the tape recorded part of the interview at this time. Thank you very much.

WN: Yes, thank you.