

INSTITUTION OF ENGINEERS AUSTRALIA

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE: Aldis J. BIRZULIS

INTERVIEWER: Frank JACKSON

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NUMBER OF TAPES: 1 IEAS48FJ3

RESTRICTION ON USE: Nil

TAPE LOG

Tape Recorder: Inst. Engurs. "Genexxa"

Tape Counter: Yamaha Stereo Cassette KX-200 (Domestic

model)

Russia

COUNTER

SUBJECT

NAMES &

Tape 1 Side A

KEYWORDS

0 - 013	Introduction	
013- 028	Opening remarks by A.J.B.	
029 - 047	Birthplace Riga in Latvia. One brother Mother's and father's names	Riga, Latvia
048 - 067	Father's history - conscripted into Csar's Army and fought in WWI on Russian side. Joined Latvian freedom fighters ; after War, stayed in Latvian Army. In 1940 Latvia annexed by Soviets and father became Colonel in USSR	Father's history

COUNTER	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
068 - 086	In 1941, German forces overran USSR and father deserted from USSR Army and he became a Colonel in the German army. Served until end of War when he was captured by British.	Father's history
087 - 108	Family fled ex Russia to Germany Learned father POW in Belgium. He rejoined family in 1946 in Displaced Persons' camp. Aldis completed primary school run by Latvian Nationals in the camp, and started Technical High School.	U.S. Zone Bavaria
109 - 124	In 1949 family accepted offer to migrate to Australia. Selected as breadwinner at 16 yrs. as father's poor health at 50 made him a doubtful employment prospect. Aldis undertook to work in any placement for 2 yrs.	Australia offer.
125 - 147	In 1950 given 10 p. and free passage to whole family on S.S. "Brazil" - a voyage of 37 days. Poor food but enjoyed trip. Arrived Sydney 18:11:50	Bremenhaven to Sydney
148 - 179	Went by train to migrant camp at Sofala, Bathurst district. Strange food -- mutton chops, white bread orange juice for breakfast. Earned money picking peas & beans for local farmers.	Sofala Bathurst
180 - 219	At job interview declined porter work with NSW Railways. Suggestion to work at Concord Repat. Hospital accepted so went to Sydney where Hosp. Employment officer told him he could work as an adult wardsman as no junior grades existed in the employment scales. Job as Orderly Class 2 required washing floors, bed linen; helping nurses and restraining patients in psychiatric ward. Lived in Nissan hut, 16 beds per hut. Father joined him, also as Orderly Mother and brother at camp at Greta.	Concord Repat. Hospital
220 - 245	Saved 50 p. and paid deposit of cottage at Bankstown. Sublet rooms to two tenant families. In 18 months paid off 2nd mortgage. Grew vegetables in front lawn. Parents accepting of decline in family's social status, as community group, other Latvians, church and club, were very supportive	Bankstown

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246 - 282	After his first yr. at Hospital enrolled night classes at Sydney Technical College. Sat for Intermediate Certif. but failed, and following year sat for Leaving Certificate and received a pass, but failed English. So, having saved for 3 1/2 yrs. at Hosp. took a year off and did full time study for matriculation. In 1954 he enrolled at U. of NSW in Civil Engineering. Found technical subjects not difficult, and the small classes an advantage. However, many lecturers were young with little experience and indifferent English. After Year 1, elected to go to Tasmanian Hydro-electric Commission for the industrial training component	Sydney Technical College U. of NSW
283 - 308	H.E.C.T. position was tunnel inspector. Long hours, little pay. Dispute with management over pay and conditions. He was sent to the Materials Laboratory at Hobart - billeted at YM CA and enjoyed interesting and challenging work at Lab.	Hydro-Electric Commission of Tasmania
309 - 339	Offered Commonwealth Scholarship and traineeship with Dept. of Main Roads 12 - 15 p. per wk. Accepted. Qualified as Engineer April 1959 and was sent to Bega as Asst. Engr. and worked on upgrading Princes Highway. Romantic interest in Sydney so requested a move. Finally, Dept. agreed and he was posted to Preston nr Liverpool	Dept of Main Roads
340 - 389	Promoted to in-charge position after 6 months. Main task up-grading Hume Highway. 3 1/2 years on roadworks, then went to Bridge Design Section, where he consolidated earlier Uni. studies. Felt it a great advantage to have had the practical experience of job and staff management so soon after graduation.	Preston Bridge Design

COUNTER Tape 1 Side B	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
000 - 009	Introduction	
010 - 078	Work environment Bridge Section not happy one. Work interesting but few promotion opportunities 1964 commenced study for Master's Deg. at U. of NSW. Matrix methods of stiffening and flexibility analysis of great interest. Sought employment outside Dept. but no takers, Resigned in 1965 and went to London.	Master's Degree
079 - 100	Worked for A.C. Ross consultants London. Two assignments then undertook tour of Europe in mini-van and returned broke. Decided to emigrate to Canada where salaries were higher.	London
101 - 110	Worked in Toronto Canada for one year on design of of brewery buildings.	Toronto Canada
111 - 140	In 1968 returned to Australia. Comments on Canadian working situation.	
141 - 158	In Australia, started with Gutteridge, Haskins & Davey Stayed 6 months only tiered management structure not congenial	Australia
159 - 209	Went to Miller Milston & Ferris for structural design of Qantas building. Interesting features of design - blade walls, column-free basement for computer installation A 10 year project. MM&F very competent and attracted high profile architects, - Seidler, Andrews, etc.	Miller Milston & Ferris
210 - 235	Struct. des. for Seidler of Barton Trade Group offices in Canberra, Description of unusual features. Financial climate permitted extensive model construction and testing. Fees of 6% of final costs not an inducement for restraint in the design process. In this period "Australia led the world in spending money"	Seidler Canberra
235 - 269	Next project was Capita building for Harry Seidler. Cost estimate of \$30 m. greatly exceeded. Description of building features. 1st flr 30 m above g.l., floor spacing 4.8 m. Great building but difficult to see from street. Flag staff and flags.	Capita building

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290 - 302	Working with Harry Seidler	Seidler - the man.
303 - 335	Years of directorship - 15 with MM&F. interesting work but not lucrative as rewards were shares rather than cash. Prestige of founding directors great but as they approached retiring age. Aldis felt it would be better if he went "solo" rather than stay in a practice which seemed in decline.	directorship at MM&F
336 - 390	In 1989 Aldis started own practice . The good years Of quality work and attractive fees was over. The Trade Practices Commission had vetoed the fee structure based on project final cost and commissions now awarded on the tender First job was Civic Centre very satisfying and a good foundation for business security. Since then many small jobs e.g. schools, but such work not very challenging	1989 - own practice
391 - 406	Aldis expresses opinions and experience of the application of Value Engineering techniques.	Value Engineering
407 - 416	Last few years in his own business have been enjoyable with good staff relationships.	Conclusion