

The Institution of Engineers, Australia: Sydney Division
Engineering Heritage Committee
ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

INTERVIEWEE **Ron Campbell**

TAPE NUMBERS IEA SYD: **FJ13, FJ14, FJ15**

INTERVIEWER **Frank Jackson**

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INTERVIEW TAPE LOG

Tape: IEA SYD FJ 13 Side A

TAPE COUNTER	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
0 – 75	Introduction – born Kogarah NSW 1927. Father held administrative positions with MWS&DB (Sydney Water Board), finally Asst. Secretary. Mother English, nee Edith Harpham. Two sisters. Attended Kogarah Primary and then 2 years Opportunity Classes at Hurstville Best subjects Geography and History	Kogarah MWS&DB Harpham Opportunity Classes Hurstville
76 – 130	Canterbury High in 1937. Studied Latin German French. Maths strong, and developed an interest in Physics, taking Mechanics in final year. Sport- Rugby & Cricket. Role model for Engineering career was an uncle, Bill Hurd, the Shire Engineer at Lockhart. He became the head of the District Water Works at Wagga	Canterbury High Languages, Physics, Mechanics Bill Hurd
130 - 167	Although interested in engineering career, family finances required some assistance necessary for tertiary training, so in final year applied for a Teachers College Scholarship and a Public Exhibition. Achieved both, but took up the Public Exhibition which supported his engineering studies at Sydney University	Teachers College Scholarship Public Exhibition
168 – 222	In final year at school had been active in swimming, athletics, cricket and rugby. Good Leaving Certif. Pass incl. 2 –2 nd cl. Honours in Maths, A's in Physics, Mechanics & English and B in French. Started Eng. Studies at Univ. of Syd. where Descriptive Geometry and Eng. Drawing were strong subjects	Leaving Certificate Engineering University of Sydney

Continuation of Tape FJ 13 Side A

TAPE COUNTER	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
223 - 272	Although interested in Mech Eng subjects had always focussed on a Civil Eng. Career. Thought Jim Vogan an excellent lecturer.. Two of his student friends were Brian Pearson and Bruce Sinclair	Brian Pearson Bruce Sinclair
273 - 350	His employment with Sydney Water Board not part of an overall career plan. One of a group of 5 fellow students who commenced careers there. Main project was design of Warragamba Dam, involving much time on site - an activity he preferred to work in the Design Office at Sydney H.Q. Engaged in Test Bores on site, and preparation of test concrete samples using 6 in. aggregate. First use of this sized aggregate in Aust.	Sydney Water Board Warragamba Dam
351- 409	Decided on a career move to the Commonwealth Department of Works (Dec.1950). Here he was engaged on the design of reinforced concrete and multi-storied steel framed buildings, and field supervision of the construction phase. Two projects were the Commonwealth Bank, George & Market Sts. Sydney, and the Commonwealth Bank Hobart. He mentioned that neither MWS&DB nor C.D.W. had any formal plan for the training and development of young engineers employed by them. In 1953 he married Gloria Ogle shortly before accepting a position with the British Colonial Service. He had met Malayan students during univ. days and was interested in the country and its problems, and had memories of Kipling's jungle stories from his childhood	Commonwealth Dept. Works Marriage to Gloria Ogle
410-491	He worked for the next 3 yrs. for the P.W.D. of Malaya, first in North Kedah, later in Central Pahang. This work involved operation of quarries, road maintenance and bridge construction. The work was often in remote areas, using primitive equipment and labour intensive work practices. He was provided with a retinue of servants -- very advantageous for domestic life with his wife and newly born son. Their home was in Alor Setar, West Kedah, where they had many friends in the Brit. Col. Service; was playing Rugby during this period These were the times of the communist insurgency, and there was wide-spread banditry throughout the countryside. Curfew requirements were enforced by the police, who also required clearances for travel,. He never came under attack personally, but had to travel armed on one occasion.	North Kedah Central Pahang Dr. Ken Fraser Alor Setar

Tape FJ 13 Side B

0 - 65	Mainly engaged in road maintenance to permit operations against communist insurgents who retreated across the border into Thailand after forays into Malay territory. After 18 months went south to Pahang State where civil works were undertaken, in main for 5 th Malay Regiment,-- parade ground, quarters for troops and the surfacing of a road from Temerloh to Maran	Pahang Temerloh Maran
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Tape FJ 13 Side B (continued)

TAPE COUNTER	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
66 - 164	At first no University graduates among indigenous staff but tech. college trained technical assistants were of high calibre. Local acceptance of white engineers with no negative racial overtones. Australians well accepted particularly, because of Aust. Military presence in Malaya during 1939-45 War. R.C.'s talent for languages very useful during this period; He undertook some formal studies in Malay and became fluent within 18 months, including a working knowledge of Arabic script. (Jan'l)	Jitra
165 - 216	At end of 1956 returned to Australia on leave. He decided to stay, as his father was ill, and he took a position with Concrete Industries (Monier) Ltd. Initially he was Manager of a subsidiary, Monier Prestressed Concrete P/L, and finally became Acting Chief Engineer of the Group. An early project was a Mixing Tower for M.W.S.&D.B., first design in Aust, using prestressed concrete. Designed and produced prestressed conc. Beams for D.M.R.'s small road bridges. 50 ft. span.	1956 Return to Aust. Concrete Industries (Monier)P/L Prestressed concrete
217 - 243	Beams for D.M.R.'s small road bridges. 50 ft. span.	Dept. Main Roads
244 - 269	A major project was for manufacture and installation of precast components for the Tasman Bridge, Tasmania	Tasmania Tasman Bridge
270 - 293	In Sydney, supplied, delivered and installed concrete beams for Sydney Harbour Bridge conversion of tram tracks to roadway. Tight schedule required installation at night to avoid traffic hold-ups.	Sydney Harbour Bridge Argyle Cut
294 - 353	ChE "Bunny" Doney went to N.W. Cape to supervise project and R.C. acted Chief Engineer during his absence. Much of this time was spent in Tasmania, requiring a great deal of travel. With this project drawing to a close, R.C. began looking beyond Monier for employment. He preferred construction projects and these seemed to be ending, for Monier. He considered John Holland, which was just finishing the Captain Cook Bridge across the George's River, but nothing was on offer.	"Bunny" Doney
354 - 416	In July 1967 he accepted a position with Crooks, Michel, Peacock & Stewart, Consulting Engineers at Chatswood, becoming Resident Engineer on the Alcan Aluminium Smelter project, at Kurri Kurri near the Hunter Valley coalfields, a 16-month project from on-site commencement to completion. No community resentment at siting a smelter in a rural environment, probably because it offered alternative employment to coal miners who were losing jobs at this time?	Crooks, Michel, Peacock & Stewart Alcan Al. Smelter Kurri Kurri Environment
417 - 432	In December 1968 R.C. accepted the position of Chief Estimator with Project Development Construction P/L, Civil Engineering Contractors of Crows Nest NSW. He found the work challenging and interesting, finding he had a flair for innovative solutions to construction problems. He had an open mind on handling methods for heavy loads, and he had exploited this capacity on the Hobart job. The essence of winning jobs in a competitive environment was to look beyond the traditional industry solutions for cost savings. He commented on the adaptability of the construction work force, and its willingness to try new methods. Safety was always of prime importance.	Project Development Construction P/L
433 - 492		

Tape FJ 13 Side B (continued)

TAPE COUNTER	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
493 - 506	R.C.'s decision to leave the Coy. Was based on the Principal (Curtis & Clifton) selling the Coy. to Westinghouse which would terminate its activities	

Tape FJ 14 Side A

0 - 51	Correction of some material on previous tape (13 B) Curtis & Clifton, a Westinghouse Coy., was setting up an Australian Coy. for construction of wastewater treatment plants. R.C. was invited to join coy as Chief Estimator.	Curtis & Clifton P/L
52 - 83	First job was for M.W.S.&D.B. at Castle Hill for sewage water treatment, the effluent being used by local Golf Club for greens maintenance.	
83 - 127	Another job was for a treatment plant South of Port Kembla, where an innovative solution was adopted for the de-watering of a swampy site, i.e. instead of using sheet piling around the area, a trench was dug and filled with impermeable clay, which served the same function as piling, allowing the de-watering and then excavation in the contained area	
128 - 193	Tendering for construction jobs was highly competitive and expensive. Construction coys., and the Association of Civil Engineering Contractors sought to reduce these costs by proposing tenderers set up a fund from which the unsuccessful tenderers could receive some compensation for their costs. The proposal never reached fruition because of the collusive nature of the arrangement.	Tendering costs Association of Civil Engineering Contractors
194 - 225	Problems of the tenderer Other jobs - difficulties of competing with other tenderers on small jobs lead to Westinghouse deciding to close down, promoting R.C.'s next career move, which was to the position of Senior Engineer with Vallentine Laurie & Davies, Consulting Engineers. They wanted R.C. to set up an overseas office; initially this was to be in Kenya.	Vallentine Laurie & Davies Miranda NSW
226 - 283	After some overseas traveling on their behalf, he went to Kenya, beginning the process of establishing an office there for V.L.&D. This was the period when the world oil crisis was commencing. This was to have a detrimental effect on World Bank sponsored projects, the main source of V.L. & D.'s activities. He did a tour of Middle East countries to canvass the work possibilities in the region. Shortly after his return, he was again posted to Saudi Arabia. Shortly after arrival, King Feisal was assassinated, and he returned with his wife to Kenya, for a brief period before moving on to Thailand to work on a World Bank project, a study for 12 feeder roads.	World Bank-International Bank for Regional Development King Feisal Saudi Arabia Thailand
284 - 316	R.C. then discussed the modus operandi for World Bank projects. The studies proceeded in several stages, with a final selection by World Bank as to which projects would advance to the final design stage.	
317 - 369	R.C. discusses the political influences bearing on project selection	
370 - 425	R.C. discusses the details of the roads project in Thailand - type, nature of terrain, survey, etc. Role of V.L. & D's engineers in Thailand. Identification of business possibilities in foreign countries	John Laurie John Davies

Tape 14 Side A (continued)

TAPE COUNTER	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
426 - 507	The Project Manager for V.L. & D. in Thailand, George Glaister, had gone to Afghanistan to work on a United Nations project, and suggested, persuasively, to R.C. that the project there would be of interest to him. So, in April 1976 He became Senior Construction Expert for the United Nations Dept. of Technical Cooperation for Development based in Kabul, Afghanistan. It was a Rural Development project, which lasted 4 years, involving civil works such as small roads & bridges, and irrigation projects. R.C.'s responsibilities were mainly with the field activities, which involved labour-intensive construction, often with primitive equipment	George Glaister U.N. Dept. of Tech. Cooperation Afghanistan

Tape FJ 14 Side B

0 - 114	R.C. discusses various United Nations activities through their agencies. He was concerned with the U.N. Development Program, which helped third world countries improve their infrastructure. In Afghanistan he was mainly concerned with roads, bridges and dams for small communities. Concrete bridges and dams were designed and built, replacing often temporary structures built by community using local labour and materials. The new structures conferred great benefit on the communities, enhancing local economic activity, particularly with crop production.	United Nations Agencies
115 - 192	In 1978 the leader of Afghanistan, Daud, was assassinated and a new regime took over the government of the country. It viewed Russia in a favourable light and relations with U.N. deteriorated. In 1979, Russian armies moved in, worsening the situation. In the countryside, U.N. staff became unpopular because it was thought they were representatives of the Afghan government, a regime that was losing support of the rural communities. In 1980, the road project R.C. was engaged on, which provided employment for 1000 workers, was abandoned because of threats from locals'	Afghanistan President Daud
193 - 278	R.C. received the offer of a new World Bank project in Sierra Leone. Ministry of Planning was the prime body co-ordinating the various projects, which were ones of infrastructure improvement - - roads, ports, airports. Problems in dealing with other govt. departments. The S.L. govt. was reluctant to accept advice from the U.N. specialists. It wanted the world fund providers to put up the money and leave the decisions about which projects to pursue, to the Gov. This, of course was unacceptable and the U.N. assistance was withdrawn after three years	Sierra Leone
279 - 345	Ron Campbell's next post was in Malawi, to proceed with a construction project involving roads and bridges. George Glaister had done some preliminary work and had recommended that R.C. be offered the job of completing the project. Although only a small project, (\$6,000,000) it was very satisfying to R.C., involving working with rural communities and providing facilities that they valued highly. Effective control of vehicle size by limiting width of bridges. Footbridges were also constructed, which reduced the isolation of small villages	Malawi

Tape FJ 14 Side B (continued)

TAPE COUNTER	SUBJECT	NAMES & KEYWORDS
346 – 405	and permitted access by villagers to community health centres. Although people were poor by Western standards, nutrition was good during Ron's three-year work period, with plentiful supply of locally grown produce, fruit and vegetables, with fish from rivers and dams providing protein. Only two U.N. staff, but technical assistance from government staff, and also volunteers from Britain. The local field supervisors did not initially respect one of these, a woman, but their prejudice was changed when she demonstrated her professional competence.	Lady engineer Jane Ritchie
406 – 483	Ron's wife accompanied him on this posting. Lived in Mazuzu and later in the capital. She assisted in the library at a local Catholic school. Good living conditions with comfortable houses. Hastings Banda, President of Malawi, had organised supermarkets and meat was also available locally. They had a good cook (ex Mr Glaister!) English widely spoken by indigenous people as it was learned at Primary and High schools; thus unnecessary for foreigners to learn the local African dialect. The great friendliness of the local people was a very enjoyable aspect of this experience.	President Hastings Banda
484 - 507	Ron's last job with U.N. was a project formulation mission to Pakistan. He was disappointed to note that fighting in Afghanistan area had destroyed a great deal of the work done there by his earlier project	Pakistan Afghanistan

Tape FJ 15 Side A

0 - 293	Went to N.Y. after Malawi seeking more U.N. work, but nothing was available. On his return to Aust, he attended the University of New England in 1990, gaining a Graduate Diploma in Economics in 1993. Views on the comparison between the theory and practice of economics. The impact of engineering development on natural resources, and the difficulty in assigning an economic value to the latter. Reflections on the role of the U.S.A. in U.N. Comments on the power of the large international corporations. Private activities – President of the Lakes Golf Club. Speaks about other courses of study. Gloria, Ron's wife, often gave secretarial assistance to various U.N. agencies. They have two sons – one a maths teacher, the other an artist trained at Newcastle Art School, has worked as a graphic artist. Conclusion	University of New England