

[And we have speed]

MR. VERDOIA: O.K. Ted, let, let's start at the beginning. How did Ted Ekker ever get involved with uranium mining.

MR. EKKER: Well, I guess a necessity ah, of life. Ah, when I got out of the army. Of course I was with my parents until that time and when I got out of the army in 1954 the, the boom was in great, it was going and then you had to get in, involved in it. I came home from the army and, and went with my brother down to the ?Shobtaring Mine and worked there for three or four months and then my other brother said he needed ah, a cow puncher so I went to help him on at the <sup>Robber's Roost</sup> ?Robert ?? cattle ranch and then when I finished there that fall, the only other thing was to get involved in the uranium business 'cause that's where the money was at see. Truck driving job ah, paid ah, from here to Temple Mountain round trip paid nine dollars, to the Hidden Splendor Mine paid eighteen ah which was great money. Temple Mountain you could make eighteen dollars a day which was fantastic wages, see. Ah, paid two dollars at a mine for a miner or mucker and, and that was an eight hour shift for sixteen bucks so hey thats was great money in those days and, and that's how I got started. Before that ah, in when I was a young, the first recollection I ever had of living was, was working and living at a, a uranium or vanadium camp ah south of Hanksville. It was the old Utah Vanadium Corporation.

MR. VERDOIA: Now you told us that you probably did just about everything there was associated with mining uranium from

underground to aboveground. Let's start with, with looking for it. With trying to decide where uranium is. Tell me about your experience with that and what would you look for.

MR. EKKER: Alright, ah the first thing you've got to know is the formation. The uranium occurs in this country in two formations, that is the, the <sup>soft wash</sup>?salt moist? member of the Morrison formation which is this right here, see. This is it right here. Ah then at Temple Mountain that's in the ?shinrump, the ?mossback member of the <sup>Shinarump</sup>?shinrump. So you've got to have a little knowledge of geology in order to go prospecting, see, to know where your at. You can't be out in, in the <sup>Manitou shale</sup>?nika shield? hunting for uranium. It just don't happen see. And ah the next thing you've got to know, ah, pretty well where it's gonna occur and, and what put it there, see. If you've got a little bit of knowledge of that, then you go to looking. Ah, years ago my Father, that was the days before Geiger counters so the way they looked for uranium was say for instance we'll go look at this plant that was a type milk <sup>etch</sup>?veg, what we call a woolly milk <sup>etch</sup>?veg or white milk <sup>etch</sup>?veg which grew wherever uranium was. So you'd go there start shoveling around and, and sometimes you'd run into a little stringer of a tree a little bitty of bit like that, follow that and it might turn out to be a big tree. Ah, in an ant bed, you'd go looking through the ant beds and see if there's any little specs of uranium in an ant bed. The ant was digging down in the ground where you couldn't see, see. And if he happened to have some, we've found mines that way, see. Ah, I never will forget the time it was my job and duty in those

days to take care of the horses. We always traveled from the mine to camp on a horseback because it was usually steep and, and we didn't have but one vehicle and we only took it whenever we had a load of ore see. So, ah, we had this old mule tied to a tree and she was fussing. My father said "go find out what's wrong with that old mule" and I went over there and there was a rattlesnake. I'd bothered this old girl and she was a pawing like that, course I had my old dog with me and, and he slipped in there and got the rattlesnake and got it killed. But I looked there where the mule and been pawing and low and behold there was some uranium. That turned out to be one of the largest deposits my dad, that tree was four feet in diameter, 90 feet long and it was only about three feet under the ground and it turned out to be one of the best ones we ever found.

MR. VERDOIA: That's an incredible story.

MR. EKKER: Just that way like that.

MR. VERDOIA: Let, let's move it now from looking above ground to, to working underground. We're right here in front of a mine. What is it like working inside a mine.

MR. EKKER: Well it was the most ah, not the best of conditions, but not the worst for the simple reason you didn't have to put up with any elements. You didn't care whether the wind was blowing. You didn't care whether the sun was shining. You didn't care whether it was ten below zero outside or 100 degrees outside. It was 65 degrees in the mine. Once you get underneath there, it's 65 degrees. Lots of times in, when the temperature, the amun

temperature inversion comes in the fall and the spring its recirculates the air. When it's hot the air is awful still and there's very little circulation, but just the minute it cools off, that warm air, as soon as it gets below 65 out here causes circulation to pull the air from the outside pick up the warm air and push it out the hole, see. So, it could get a little chilly down there if the temperature changed if you had some real good air currents but, but as far as working conditions being dark is the only bad thing about it. It was certainly dark all the time.

MR. VERDOIA: Tell me basically how it worked, you know the, the thing of blasting, drilling and pulling the ore out and getting it up here. Take me through that.

MR. EKKER: Alright. Ah, say we got a little deposit that we wanted to get out of the ground so we have to run some air lines to it and also you have to run some ventilation to it. Whether you have the ventilation coming from outside going down a drill hole and over to this, ah deposit that we want to get out or you bring it in through here, through a fan and, and then tubing down. So we've got to have air line and vent line so that you got air to breath and you go some way of clearing out the smoke as fast as you can. You go in, you set up your drill and say we're going to take a, a, a drift around through. That would be eight by eight by six feet high or by six feet in. You drill with six foot steel. O.K. ah, you have to have a burn. That's were your explosion first starts is in a burn we call it. And, and we use different burn patterns, a five hole pattern. But you drill those holes in about

where they come together down here see. Then your reliever's on the side and then your burden holes around. You, you drill those holes, you fill them with powder and touch the fuse off it burned in there and exploded. So we got that done, we got a pile of muck there see. So, ah before we had loaders we had to hand muck all that. We'd hand muck it either into a little railroad car that we had laid rail back there to it or a diesel powered buggy we called them. A little dump buggy which hauled from one ton up as high as five and six here in, in the later years see. But then you just loaded on there and brought it out to the surface on an incline like this. If you didn't have an incline and had a shaft then you had to take that to the station ah, call for your bucket to come down and you dumped into the bucket from your buggy or whatever, wheelbarrow whatever. Then you pulled her up to the surface that way.

MR. VERDOIA: You mentioned that ah, you worked in mines that were, that were ventilated really well and some that weren't ventilated very well. How could you tell the difference. Could you smell it, could you see it?

MR. EKKER: Oh boy ah, an old mine, ah like we used to call a dead heading you could smell. Ah it was something decomposing, probably the uranium daughters that was decomposing. But it had that certain smell. And, and lots of times in those old places you could see on ah, on the drift where the, on the sides of the drift where the, the cow site would, would oxidize and, and create crystals there see. So, you could sure tell the difference

when you walked in that hole you could tell whether it was well ventilated or it was not. Generally it was warmer. A not so well ventilated hole was warmer than the outside where the ?hollage weighs? and where the ventilation was and, and I think that that is where these people come up with cancer was not necessarily due to the radon but due to smoke that was not ventilated out, from the diesel smoke, from the powder smoke see.

MR. VERDOIA: Let me ask you. Let me ask you the...

[We need to readjust the head. Sure.]

MR. VERDOIA: Yea can you just scoot that head. There, oh there you got it. That's perfect. Ah let's talk a little about the men you worked with ah, you seemed to give me the impression they were a fine group of guys.

MR. EKKER: Oh, ah, those people that were friends then are, are friends today. Ah they were, you could depend on them. Now it was not what you would call a nonsafe, it was pretty hazardous in those places. They always took care of you. Anytime that you were underground with a buddy or a group of men, when you come out to lunch there was always somebody that said, "well, I wonder where he's at, you make sure that he's out of here because I'm shootin' down there, see, and I don't want him to walk in on a shot". That was the most dreaded thing that we could possibly have was to light a shot, leave there and someone come looking for you and walk in on a shot. That has happened. But, when you have great friends and, and people that take care of each other. And that's what we've done. We had to take care of each other because

it's, it, it's oh bad place down there. You got to take care of each other and make sure that everybody 's safe and out of there, see.

MR. VERDOIA: It seems that this era of the boom and especially looking back at the 50's at that special time, that it's a, a place and a time that this country just can't repeat just because it was, it was before lots of regulations, it was a special time when we needed uranium for national security, so why don't you pick up that ball and run with it, ah what about that as a special time in American history.

MR. EKKER: Well, there was, in my life there was none other as well as that, that time them. Because we were, we was younger we were looking for ah, a good job, security and, and ah there was just a air of freedom that you cannot experience today because of the regulations as far as ~~MSHAW~~ safety goes the environmental regulations and things like that and those people were great, fun loving, no bickering, ah very seldom anything any troubles ever happened between us and, and it was just a great time to live I'll tell you. I wish that my children would have experienced, they experienced a little bit of it but, but not like we did. That was a, a great time of life and, and I don't think that, I have not experienced it since and I don't think we ever will.

MR. VERDOIA: One thing we noticed is back in the 1950's government was, was a partner. It wasn't the opponent. The government seemed to be on your side.

MR. EKKER: Oh, ah the AEC was one of the finest organizations in my mind that was ever assembled. Before that during the 1940's when they were looking for in fact that's one of the first jobs that I ever had that paid money. I was wrangling horses at 12 years old for the Bureau of Mines when they were mapping the Morrison formation looking for uranium deposits on the Henry Mountains. And those were great people and great times. And the AEC just ah, would come along and help you in any way. If you needed a road built to a deposit that was a known deposit that they knew about, even if they had drilled it, see, they would build you a road to help you in any possible way that they could. They drilled tremendous amount of holes in the ground and, and it wasn't all free because they were called DMEA holes and I can't remember what that meant, but that was ah department of energy or something. Ah, they would say o.k. we hit this deposit here now, ah you staked it, it was on your property and we've hit this deposit. Now when you mine that out, we would like to have some recollection, a record of what was mined out of there and would you mind paying two or three percent, see. So, that DMEA holes you paid that little two or three percent which was very minimal, that was nothing to it see. Ah because a lot of those was great deposits that, that the AEC had drilled out.

MR. VERDOIA: Ah, one thing that that you mentioned is that...

[Please adjust the head once more.]

MR. VERDOIA: Oh yea...ah it keeps walking on us there.



MR. EKKER: Ah, I can't help it I guess.

MR. VERDOIA: Um, you said that you know you worked with a lot of good men. You also mentioned earlier that some of them ah had, had some health problems. Ah, so, so let's talk about that. Ah, you know I'm not pointing the finger at anyone but I know that some miners have had some hard luck with lung cancer.

MR. EKKER: Well, you know the first one that comes to mind is Reuben Hunt. He was a a ah, a loader operator and that's all Reuben wanted to do was, was operate a loader. He wouldn't, and and the diesel smoke, a loader operator got 90 percent, he just couldn't get away from the diesel smoke for the simple reason that that's what made the diesel smoke was the loader, see. And there he was, and, and he would come out of the mine at noon or evening and his nostrils would be black and even his mouth would black of that old diesel smoke, see. And he died of lung cancer. Jay Marsing which was a buggy operator had no reason to dye of lung cancer because he run in and out. He was not exposed to that diesel smoke as much as, as a Reuben was. Ah, Gilbert McDougal which had leukemia. Gilbert was a good old miner but he spent a lot of his time out on the surface. He didn't, he wasn't, didn't particularly like it underground. He died of leukemia. But, so there's not any of those people, Fred Wine another one ah worked in different mines and different conditions and ah why Fred got lung cancer or cancer nobody knows maybe it was, happened when he was a kid or I can't explain. But those four people is the ones that I knew and ah, there was people that worked right along side of them,

right along side of them everyday, everyday Jack Erwin and Homer Davis there in town worked right along and they're just as clean as can be see. So, who's to tell. Jack and Homer probably had more diesel smoke and powder smoke than anybody.

MR. VERDOIA: Ah, looking at, at this mine, ah go ahead I want you to just take a look back there and say when you come back to this, to this area, what type of memories come back to you? What's the first thing that comes to the mind of Ted Ekker?

MR. EKKER: Well, the first thing that comes to my mind and, ah looking down that hole is a gentleman walking out of there by the name of Ed Canno. He was an old mexican. And he was the most fantastic person in the world. Dragging his machine. A machine is a jack hammer. He would bring his jack hammer out and, and we would work on it, the mechanic and, and Ed would fix it up and he'd go back <sup>in The Hole</sup> and home. But, where we always come out at noon to have our lunch out here at the office and, and sit and talk and, and visit for an hour, Ed would not come out, he'd stay in the hole. He had a, a jug where there was a drill hole coming down that dripped water, that was good water. He tied a jug up there so that he'd have good fresh water all the time. And this water that's going through this is uranium, see, the same thing. And, and he would just stay in the hole until dark come and, and, and he'd come out. He'd go in the morning and he would not come out of the hole until he had his round drilled and shot and everything was alright and then he'd come out. He wouldn't come out at noon. So that's what strikes me. And then the buggies going in and out of

there. Ah, me when I was setting up here loading or maybe at the office or something like that, those buggies continually running in and out and you see every time that buggy come out that, that's another 150, 200 dollars see. So, it was dollar signs running in and out of that hole and it was, there was a lot of money made here.

MR. VERDOIA: I want to ask you a question now I mean you're family's been in this area for a long time and you knew when, when nobody else knew about Eastern Utah, you're family was here? You go to the service, into the service and you come out, you come back in 1954 and like you say the boom was underway this area must have been changing an awful lot.

MR. EKKER: It changed overnight. Ah, before I left, ah, VCA, Vitro Corporation of America had moved in to South Hanksville in ?Trackite and they had a quite an operation going there and they had about 50 or 60 indians working there. I was in partnership with my father in a little store in Hanksville and we sold supplies to the indians. And that's one thing that I might mention, that we had credit with those indians at that time and I never lost one dime, not one dime. They was the most hard working most wonderful people that I was ever around in my life was those Navajo indians that came off the reservation. And ah, Vitro or a VCA come in at that time and, but the boom was not really going really good and when I left to go in the army in '52 it had started a little bit. Temple Mountain was starting to gel and go pretty good, but, but then in that period of '52, '53, '54 when I came home it was in

full swing and there was a lot of people in the community that I didn't even know. You went in knowing everybody when I went in the army and come out and, and you'd go in the bar and you would recognize but just the very few, see. And, and ah it was a great time. Just fantastic.

MR. VERDOIA: There must have been a lot...

[Just once more]

MR. VERDOIA: What?

MR. EKKER: Hand's back, ah that a boy.

MR. VERDOIA: Ah I would imagine you must have seen as a man who knows the land real well and knows how rough this land can be. You must have seen an awful lot of what I would call tender foots coming in here with dollar signs in their eyes.

MR. EKKER: Oh boy. Yea. And some most, ah, people would come in and and, um I know one weekend or Sunday or something this guy come to me and said "Would you go stake me some claims" and I said "Well I don't have any vehicle, all I have is a car" and he said "Well you can take my jeep." And so I called my brother-in-law and I said "Boy I got a jeep for the weekend, let's go stake this guy some claims, he's going to pay us 25 dollars a claim" or something see. So we went out and, and it didn't make no difference where, just stake him some claims and that's all. || And, and people would come in promoting, ah, ah they'd promote ah goat pasture we used to say, this guy's out there on the street promoting goat pasture, see. But in a lot of cases these promoters were, did contribute because they brought some, some outside money

into the country and opened up the mines, the ones that just couldn't quite make it on their own and, and they did contribute tremendous to the ah the production and to the development of the uranium industry. Yea.

MR. VERDOIA: Alright, on that one, let's end it.

