

Interview with Don Anderson

CAP Oral History

N: Nick Walter

D: Don Anderson

Intro:

N: Here we go. OK, Don. So where were you born and raised?

D: I grew up in Kingsburg, California., about 20 miles south of Fresno.

N: OK, and looking at your resume for your bachelor's degree, why did you choose to major in Agricultural Engineering?

D: Well, I grew up on a farm and had been pretty closely associated with it, and I had a couple years of electronics at California State Polytechnic State College and then went back to Fresno State because it was closest, and finished up in Agricultural Engineering, and it's kind of a hybrid between mechanical engineering and, you know, irrigation and all these things.

N: OK. And how did you become a Construction Engineer Manager?

D: Well, I went to work for the Bureau of Reclamation in 1961 [1958] and I spent the first 3 years in the regional office in Sacramento in Planning and Hydrology, and what got me into the field was that I was accepted for kind of a little junior, I guess, Executive Management Training Program within the region, and one of my field assignments was to the Trinity River Project when it was going. I was up there for about 3 weeks and I decided office work was not for this kid -- let's go to the field. So I transferred to the Trinity River Project then went to Red Bluff, Calif., and then to Auburn (Calif.) to work on

the Auburn Dam Project and I was the Programs Engineer and Fiscal Officer. [Programs and Budget Engineer} Well I took that for about 18 months and I said, "Let me out." And I went into the field, and my biggest assignment there was I was the Resident Auburn Engineer, which was on the Auburn Foresthill Bridge, which is the highest bridge in California and the fourth-highest bridge in the nation. And then in 1973 my boss suggested that I apply for the construction engineering job at Pyramid Lake, Nev. We're working on a reservation -- building a dam, and some fishery work there -- so that's when I became Construction Engineer.

N: OK.

D: And then way back in '64, '65, I was accepted to the Department of Interior Management Training Program in Washington, D.C. for six months and that's when I met Ed Hallenbeck and we remained friends for the entire time and picked up a lot of stuff there and helped along the way.

N: And your final assignment as a construction supervisor was being the Bureau of Reclamation Construction Engineer and the manager in charge of constructing the Central Arizona Project. What years did you work on the CAP?

D: I went down to CAP, in I believe it was, September of 1983 and worked there until September of '89 when I retired from the Bureau of Reclamation and I was asked to apply for the job by both Regional Directors at the time, Bill Plummer, and Ed Hallenbeck.

N: OK. What would you say was the most challenging aspect for your team in constructing the CAP?

D: Well a lot of it, you know ... we're in desert operations -- long distances to travel -- and when I went down I was given two objectives: get this project back on schedule because it was way behind, and get a project management system. We got the project in six months ahead of time, and we had a project management system that helped us immensely to do that.

N: So how would you describe the general morale and mindset of those involved in construction when you came, became, involved with the project?

D: Yes, it was not good. We had the distant office at Parker, Ariz. The fellow there that was the Resident Engineer was an ex-project construction engineer and then we had the project construction engineer [Construction Engineer] in Phoenix, Andy Dolyniuk, and they did not get along. And there was a real war going there. They had just lost their head of contract administration, so that was in chaos. And the project was way behind schedule. And my orders were to get it back on schedule and make those contract dates.

N: OK. So on the same lines, during construction, CAWCD hired the first groups of engineers, technicians, crafts and trades personnel who worked side by side with BOR as the project was built and apparently BOR employees affectionately referred to these personnel as "water dogs." So they took over operational responsibility as the system was commissioned. From your perspective, how well did this work, and what challenges did it present?

D: I never did call the employees of the water district "water dogs." I considered them my employees. Ed Hallenbeck and Tom Clark had worked out this maintenance agreement whereby all the Bureau of Reclamation forces were transferred over to the water district and there was also a provision there if we needed help, because we could not hire

employees ... I would go to Tom Clark and say, "Hey I need an electrical inspector," or, "I need a this; I need that," and it worked out very well and they were actually working for me, and the good thing about it ... say we hired an electrician inspector at Havasu Pumping Plant, when Havasu went online those people stayed there and they knew the plant because they grew up with it and that was one of the biggest benefits we had out of that contract.

N: What would you say was the biggest breakthrough or milestone of the construction process?

D: Getting water to Phoenix in June of 1985, six months ahead of the contract date of December of '85, and it took a lot of work.

N: And what did the project's completion mean to you?

D: I left before the project was completed but my goal was to keep the project going and it was difficult through some of the areas. I was not involved with the other side – the planning – that was all under my boss Ed Hallenbeck. But we made the milestones; we did some ingenious things to get water to Harquahala Water District, and I believe it was March of '85. And getting water to Phoenix in June of '85, and then we kept working as we went on to Maricopa/Stansfield and all of those, and all of those were interesting contracts because it was a modified PL130 ... the normal PL130 loan is the Bureau of Reclamation advances the money, the water districts hire their own consultant and do the construction. This modified contract did not work real well as far as I was concerned. The Bureau of Reclamation required them to go by all the reclamation rules. And I would have preferred that everything was turned over to the water district construction inspection and everything, and that was a real problem working with that mess.

N: So had you seen anything that compared with the infrastructure of the CAP?

D: Well the Central Valley Project started way back in the '30s, and there was, you know, Shasta, there was Tracy Pumping Plant [C.W. Bill Jones Pumping Plant], those were all integral parts of the CVP. But there was never an organization as large and simple as Central Arizona Project -- possibly the Trinity River Project but that was a remote site in Northern California. But at one time I had about 450 people under the construction division and I don't know how many Ed Hallenbeck had in the rest of the organization. We were a large organization, and we were taking the majority of the Bureau budget every year and we were under tremendous scrutiny by the Congress.

N: And was there anything that could not be anticipated about the construction of the CAP?

D: No, I don't think so. We had the normal problems; we had some failures in the canal lining; we had the fissure problem in the Mesa/Apache Junction area, and a lot of the problem was, you know, trying to do concrete work in 115 degrees and getting through working. We got to Tucson at a difficult place to work, but we did some things there that helped a lot. Originally the canal was supposed to go down to the road -- a highway right south of Tucson, go around the mountains and come back into the Tucson Water Treatment Plant. This was going to require tremendous cuts on the hillsides: scars and everything else. And one of my fellas one day said, "Why don't we tunnel under the Mountain Park at Tucson?" We went in; we tunneled under the park; we did not disturb. And it actually ended up as a cost savings. Dealing with Tucson was not easy. But I managed to get through it -- not getting into any wars with them and we accomplished what we said we were going to do.

N: That's great. Would you say this project's completion was one of the highlights of your career?

D: Oh of course it was! I had never ... at Willows [Reclamation construction office in Calif.] I was responsible for about 55 miles completing this large canal and all of the irrigation district that went along with it, and that particular office – it was still a construction and operations maintenance -- so I had both construction and operations at two canal systems and a number of pumping plants and so when I went down to Arizona, actually when we started up the project -- started delivering water -- the operations maintenance was still under me. So I had the experience and knew what to do even though we were completely with the water district.

N: And since construction has been completed what impacts of the CAP have you seen on the State of Arizona?

D: Well I've seen tremendous, you know, irrigation down in Maricopa/Stanfield, and some of those, Harquahala, but I understand now some a lot of the water has been allocated to the Indian reservations, which we were just getting into when we left. And I know it's given the City of Phoenix probably much better water quality than what they had from their groundwater. A lot of theirs was from the Salt River, which was good water, but the groundwater probably much higher in solids, and that was a problem in Tucson and we were bringing water in that was much softer and easier to treat.

N: OK. And what from your background of experience would you say was the most valuable in supervising this project?

D: Well I grew up under a number of construction engineer people and Ed Hallenbeck and I shared the same management style. I believed in delegation: give the person what you want done and leave them alone. And that was the way I worked there and it worked very well. I did not work well under a person that keeps their thumb right on top of me.

And I had good relations with Tom Clark and the water district. But we really worked on it too.

N: So what keeps you busy these days?

D: Well I'm very active in the Navy League of the United States, a civilian organization which supports the sea services. I've been an officer in the local council and was recently elected as a Northern California-area President and have six councils to worry about from Sacramento up to the Oregon border, and you've got about a 300-mile transit time to get to the unit ... and we've got problems, you know, trying to keep ... it's like most of the organizations, you got a pretty good age factor: we're not getting any younger people and we're declining in membership. And it's a challenge to keep it going but I enjoy working with it ... just a different set of politics – politicians -- that I had to work with in Arizona. It's kind of substituting the Senators and Congressmen for Navy Admirals and this stuff, type of thing. But we're working good together; luckily I was pretty well brushed up in politics, so I know how to work in those atmospheres.

N: OK well that's all the questions that I have so I will (stop the interview).