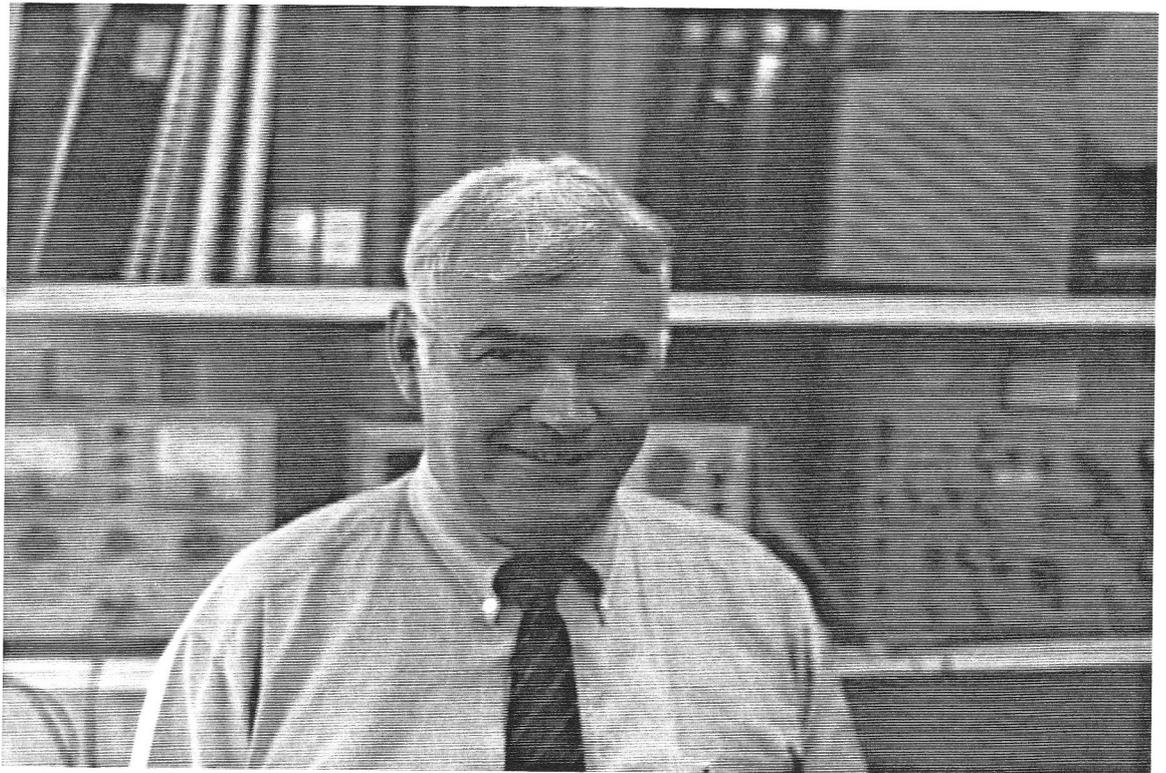


## PETER KOBOLD

*Peter was born in Germany in 1942. By war's end his family were Displaced Persons and they emigrated to Australia, arriving at Michelago in 1953. Peter's father Jacob and brother John worked on the Snowy, as did Peter for a short time after growing up in Cooma. He studied electronics and communications in Sydney. Then after a trip to Europe and a short period back in Cooma, Peter came to Canberra in 1965. He soon joined Gibson and Greaves Electronics who had the contract to supply and service radios for Nat Harrison on the Bendora Gravity Main. Peter eventually bought out Gibson and Greaves, by then known as Electronics Services, and has for years been managing director. He has also recently started another Fyshwick business. Peter married Marjory in 1969 and they have several children.*



### **Tape 1 Side A**

Peter explains that as his aunt was already in Michelago, the family decided to emigrate in 1953. The working and living conditions in Germany were pretty appalling. The family paid their own way in order to get out to Australia more quickly and had to have a house and job arranged before arrival. The parched summer landscape was a shock after the greens of Bavaria, and the train from Sydney was crowded and some of the family had to stand all the way.

'One of the memories of Michelago was having to get a drink from the water tank outside and it was lukewarm water. And I climbed up to look inside and there were dead birds. Having come from Bavaria where we got our water from a spring well and it was crystal clear and cold, it was quite a shock. The brown grass and the warm water are my earliest recollections of Australia.'

Peter's father worked on a farm and then on the Snowy, and the family moved to Cooma. Knowing no English made school difficult for Peter. Eventually the family

moved to Canberra and have been successful in various businesses. Peter worked in Germany briefly in 1963 and when he came back he 'felt Australia was the right place'.

AWA sold the radios to Nat Harrison for use in vehicles on the Bendora Gravity Main, and Canberra firm Gibson and Greaves had the installation and service contract. Peter joined them at this time. The radios were fitted at the firm's Fyshwick premises. Nat Harrison's workforce was divided into two teams on the pipeline and Peter travelled out to them to service and repair the radio equipment. The radios were MRT 25 models which weighed nearly 10 kilos! It was still the era of valves, which made the radios rather fragile, especially in the rough road conditions of the pipeline. Peter says 'the terrain that this thing went over is quite unbelievable'. The radios had to be installed rigidly, yet with shock absorbers. Radio communication fulfilled vital functions on the pipeline.

Peter was most impressed by the fact that the pipeline worked due to gravity. It did not seem possible that the pipe, going over such high mountains, could perform its gravity task, but it did. A lasting memory was seeing two bulldozers at work on either side of a mountain, chained together and one acting as a counterweight to the other due to the steepness.

Peter travelled onto the pipeline fortnightly or more often. The biggest problem with the radios was parts being shaken loose. You could try to fix it in the field, or otherwise you'd install a replacement and bring the broken one back to the workshop. Aerials being torn off vehicles by branches were another problem. Vehicles were fairly roughly handled.

There were American engineers on the job and Peter remembers their accents. Whereas then we imported US engineering know-how, Australia now exports its own.

Nat Harrison's workforce was like that of the Snowy scheme, a group of 'rugged individuals'. The work environment was a dirty one due to all the excavation. Buildings on the pipeline had a lot of dust on the floors.

There was a sense of isolation on the pipeline. Canberra was smaller then and even a trip to Queanbeyan could seem lengthy, so the Cotter-Bendora area seemed very isolated. Peter sometimes travelled in snow and heavy rain; the latter would turn the access road into 'a real, real mess'. In very bad weather he kept away, as Nat Harrison staff advised.

### **Tape 1 Side B**

Bad weather at least gave Nat Harrison a chance to overhaul vehicles and this was a chance for Peter to do radio repairs as well.

Peter recalls the benched mountain area that was the camp, and fairly basic buildings. [The interview gives the impression that the old Bendora Dam camp was the pipeline camp, but the pipeline camp was further down the valley.]

Peter recalls that there were accidents during the project, but cannot recall any details.

Regarding environmental concerns, Peter says yes the work did cause a lot of disturbance which would not be allowed today. But Canberra had to have the water. 'None of us were that conscious [of the environment].' Peter feels that the scars would be healed now, and that the route was not heavily timbered even then [the pipeline route was heavily timbered for much of its length; see Ron Moore interview, and illustrations]. Peter says of the Cotter valley that the 'landscape was quite spectacular', even with the roadworks etc. The pipeline was an engineering feat.

Peter cannot remember seeing any women on the site. There were female workers in Nat Harrison's Canberra office however.