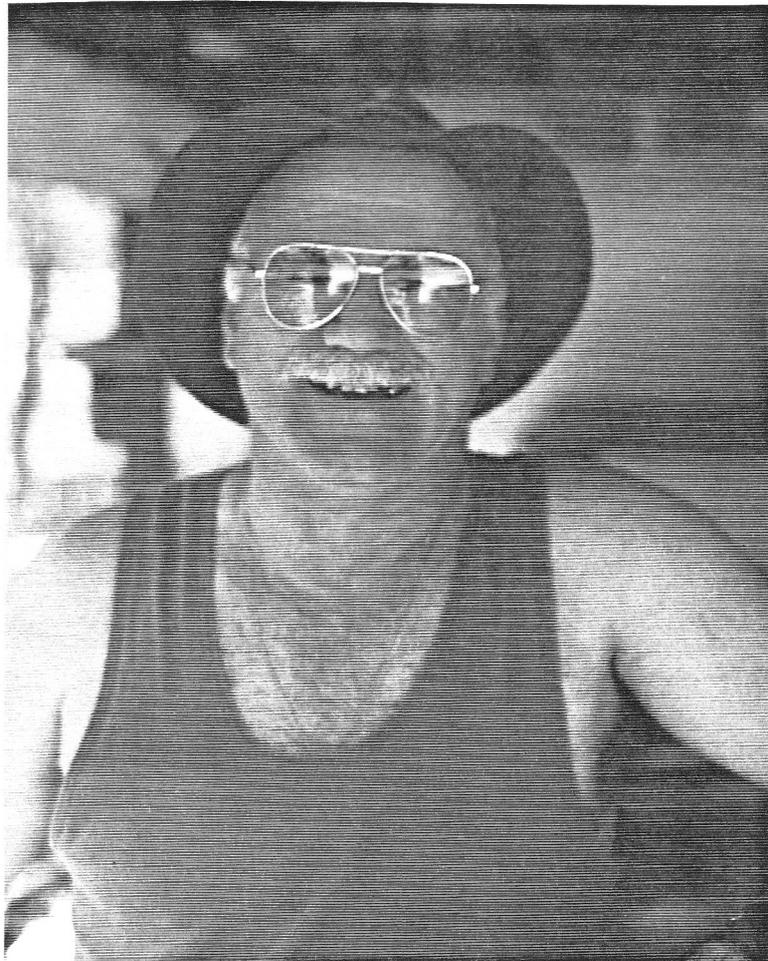


ALAN ROLPH

Born in Paddington, Sydney, in 1941, Alan attended Sutherland High School. In 1956 he became a dairy farmer at Kangaroo Valley, and in 1965 he took up driving concrete trucks for Pioneer Concrete in Canberra. In this role he helped supply concrete to the Bendora Gravity Main. In 1978 he went into security and worked for some years at the Australian War Memorial before going to Wormald, his present employer. Alan married Sandra in 1965 and they have two children.



Tape 1 Side A

The work on the main was done in two sections, and the concrete went in via either Pierces Creek or through [Warks Road] and down the Bendora road. From the Bendora end the nearest river crossing was often the destination for the load, as marked on the dockets [see the dockets reproduced in the illustration section of this report]. From the Pierces Creek end Alan and the other drivers only knew their destination when they saw the water truck. The concrete was taken up dry, and then the contractor's water truck supplied the water for the mix on the site.

The concrete truck was then hitched onto a bulldozer or pipelayer and was lowered down the slope to dump the concrete because the slopes were too steep for the truck to negotiate alone. 'I think I aged about 40 years on that job!...The first time I did it I sat in the truck and they hooked a dozer or pipelayer onto the back of me and I started to go down the hill, my foot firmly on the brake. And I looked in the mirror and I was actually dragging this Caterpillar bulldozer behind me...But there was nothing I could do. I couldn't jump out...I could see the fellows at the bottom of the hill looking up at me, and they took off. Anyway when I eventually got down the bottom of the hill I got out of the truck and I fell over — I couldn't walk, my legs were all jelly. It frightened the living daylights out of me. But after we'd done it 2 or 3 times it was a piece of

cake. Like driving through Civic.' After the load was emptied the dozer then dragged the truck back up the slope. Sometimes the bulldozer would winch the concrete trucks up and down. The cables were so tight you could walk on them.

The concrete was used for making anchor blocks, and for cut-off walls. Two or three cut-off walls might be poured from one load. [The concrete was also used for the submerged river crossings but these are not discussed on the tape. See Ron Moore interview.]

The river sand in the concrete mix was from the Molonglo and was moist. So even though a 'dry' load was carried by the trucks, it could not be left in the truck for too long. Dry concrete was carried because it meant less weight, and because a wet mix would have started to cure owing to the time that the concrete was in the barrel of the truck.

Each trip took up to about 5 hours. There were three trips a day; you'd start at 4.30 in the morning (up at 3.30) and you'd be home by 9.30pm. 'A very long day and a very tiring day. Just as well you were young and silly, that's why we did it.' There were about 3 pipeline days a week.

The pipeline camp was located near river crossing 6, about three-quarters of the way up the line [just east of where the Pipeline Road crosses the Cotter today]. Alan and fellow drivers occasionally had a meal there, telling the cook (in order to be served) that they had just started on the job. The camp was 'very similar to an army camp', like Mulwala Hostel in Canberra. Buildings were weatherboard, with iron roofs.

Sometimes there was snow, and often there was a lot of frost, especially during the first run of the day at dawn in winter. Additional to the water truck, a pump was used to supply river water to the concrete trucks for the wetting of the mix. 'Many a time I've seen the men build a fire and actually wheel this pump into the fire to melt the ice.'

Some other firms were very reluctant to deliver concrete to the main because of the difficult slopes. A Sydney firm once agreed to join Pioneer during a particularly busy time. The driver was so shocked by the first trip that he went home and did not continue.

Alan met American engineers on the main. On looking at the difficulties imposed by the terrain, one said 'my God, if this was in America we'd be using helicopters for this job'.

There were a lot of migrants in Nat Harrison's workforce. Alan says they were 'damned hard workers. Anything to do with concrete is hard work'.

Alan recalls only one pipe storage area near Pierces Creek. From here pipes were taken to the line by a GMC 6x6 truck, one at a time, for laying.

Pioneer Concrete were located at 20 Lithgow Street in Fyshwick. The mix used on the pipeline had five ingredients: coarse blue metal (5/8 inch), 3/8 inch blue metal, washed river sand, bush sand, and cement. And then there were fluids to expel air etc. Pioneer's concrete batching plant was the one used by Clementsons during the building of Bendora Dam. Clementsons brought a lot of their gear from Bendora to this address and subsequently Pioneer acquired it. Clementsons built a number of buildings in Canberra at the time: National Library, Royal Canberra Hospital tower, The Mint, Anzac Pde West.

Alan saw the exhaust fans used inside the pipes when the welders were doing the inside welds.

He didn't really get to know many of the Nat Harrison workforce on the job, because there wasn't much socialising: you all had your job to do and anyway the site was very noisy. You might see them later on other jobs, or in the pub. One worker Alan recalls is Gunner Petersen, the powder monkey. He spoke with a Norwegian accent.

Alan's brother John was another Pioneer driver (he was lucky to escape serious injury when his truck overturned on the pipeline one day). The other three Pioneer drivers (all on the pipeline job) were Jimmy Brown, Theo Van Der Sanders (who was Dutch), and a German, Hans Nicholas (a former U-boat sailor; Alan tells of one day when Hans dropped a cigarette in the cab of his truck and furiously searched for it before the truck caught fire). Pioneer would take 70 cubic yards of concrete a day up to the pipeline, and it was the company's main contract at the time. The truck owner [in this case Bob Gudgeon of R.E.G.Transport who owned the trucks driven by Alan, Jimmy and Theo, and who sub-contracted to Pioneer] was paid \$52 per load, and the drivers got about \$10 per day. If you worked Sundays you got an extra \$52.

Alan's wife Sandra went with him at times. He never saw women employed on the pipeline, though there could have been women in the site office in the camp.

Tape 1 Side B

The site looked unsafe but Alan can't recall seeing any accidents. He talks about the chances of welders slipping down inside the pipeline when doing the inside welds.

Referring again to the camp, Alan says the food was OK, 'typical mass produced, plenty of meat and spuds'. Food was available at any time of the day; Alan believes the job was a 24 hour one.

At low points on the line, a pump was used to drain water from the trench. One night a front-end loader was parked in the trench and the pump failed. When workers arrived next morning only the exhaust stack of the loader was visible above the water. A man was then employed to check on these low areas.

The site seemed 'very isolated. Once you were up there you were on your own'. Alan comments on the importance of 2-way radio communication.

Alan also was involved with Corin Dam for a short period. He helped deliver loads of concrete to the dam. These were for the slab floor of the engineering workshop. The place is now under water. The road into Corin was a drag; it took a long time to get the truck up the grades [leading to Smokers Gap]. Alan thought the bulldozer drivers at Corin were mad. When they were clearing overburden they were on slopes so steep that they had to put their feet on the dashboard to stop sliding off the seat. 'We were crazy — they were mad!'

Reflecting on his memories of the pipeline, Alan concludes: 'I'm glad I did it. I love Canberra. These jobs are a part of Canberra and I'm proud I worked on them'. He loves the mountains, the beauty, clean air and quietness, though he says it wasn't quiet then. He doesn't see any conflict between these views and the job he was doing. There was a job to be done, and he felt regeneration would occur.