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Fares Please! Retired Transport Workers' Oral History Project

Interview with Tom Ford Biographical Notes and Timed Summary

Background

Tom Ford was born in Queanbeyan in 1927. Of the family of five children, he and his sister were the only ones to be born after the family's move from Goulburn to Queanbeyan. Tom's father was a plasterer and came to the Canberra region for work. He worked on several Canberra building projects of the time and later set up business as a fruiterer and then grocer in Queanbeyan.

Tom went to Queanbeyan Public School and left when he was thirteen. He worked in the family business and then went to Queensland where he worked until the end of the Second World War. Back in Queanbeyan he worked as a brickies labourer on Narrabundah housing construction. He married and moved to O'Connor in Canberra, where he still lives, in 1948-49. He joined Transport in 1949.

Tom first worked in Transport as a conductor and then bus driver. He later became a truck driver. As a truck driver he carted various sorts of material but much of his work involved driving a pole raising truck for the ACT Electricity Authority (now ACTEW). When the Transport Department stopped managing trucks in the 1970s, Tom had the choice of working directly for the Authority or driving cars. He moved over to the Authority and continued doing the same sort of work. Later an injury resulted in a change to stores work and other office based duties. Tom retired in 1992.

Tom's work as a pole raiser started on a Bedford truck when much of the work was done manually. After moving to the ACT Electricity Authority he drove a Volvo which had more automated equipment. His interview details much of the manual work of the earlier days – the 'bullocking' work – as well as the gradual move to automation. It also reflects changes in Transport – from the days when it managed all



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vehicles in Canberra to the time when the growth of the city required a more decentralised approach. Tom commented that the latest development for ACTEW trucks has been the management of the various work they are used for by contract.

Note that Tom makes no distinction between his work on the pole raising truck whether employed by Transport or the ACT Electricity Authority as there was little change in his work as a result of the move from one employer to the other.

The interview was conducted at Tom's home in O'Connor.

Interview Summary

Track 1	0:15:28
0:00:00	Introduction to interview. Coming to Canberra from Queanbeyan. Family in Queanbeyan. Father's work as a plasterer. Schooling and work in family grocery business. Early work in Queensland and return to Canberra. Marriage, move to government house in Canberra.
0:05:11	Joining Transport after work in Narrabundah. Work on buses, cars and trucks. Red Hill to Ainslie bus route. Ainslie Depot. Shifts and last run of night shift. Migrant hostel near airport. Workmen's buses. Driving pole raising truck for ACT Electricity Authority.
0:10:01	Work as truck driver for roadworks. Types of trucks: Fords, bull-nosed Bedfords, ACC trucks for quarry work. Overtime. Other work on trucks: laying asphalt at aerodrome, carting road base from Mugga Lane and Southwell quarries. Move from carting to pole raising truck – took over Frank Smith's 4-wheel drive Bedford. Work on pole raising truck.
0:15:28	END - phone call
Track 2	0:23:00
0:00:00	Pole raising with Bedford truck including pulling poles out, straightening poles, rolling out wire. Mountains and country work.
0:05:04	Thin steel country wire. Removing poles where land resumed for Canberra. Use of Ronnie Zebel's crane in this work. Move from Transport to ACT Electricity Authority. Choice to move or stay with Transport. Volvo truck after move. Raising poles with Volvo – more automated equipment. Putting in transformers [refers to one nearby]. Development of machinery and equipment.
0:10:05	Current organisation of ACTEW work through contractors. ACTEW depots – work at Kingston, Tuggeranong and Mitchell. Changes to Kingston industrial area. Storage area near Causeway for material brought in by rail in the days when the government used to handle everything. [Discussion of location of stores, printing office and bus section]
0:15:04	Bush work with the Bedford in Michelago area – changing transformers to properties. Last years of work with ACTEW after injury working at ACTEW depot in



	Kingston. Work injury and medical support.
0:19:32	Memories of people at Transport: Bobby Griffiths, Laurie Reece, Frank Smith. Trucks of the day. ACTEW responsibility for trucks included maintenance when they took them over. The truck driver's mate – the dogman. Dogman's work. Various work on trucks: carrying wire and poles.
0:23:00	END – doorbell
Track 3	0:25:33
0:00:00	Carrying and unloading poles on Bedford. Handling creosote poles and injury to dogman as result. Various carting jobs for Transport including moving government offices.
0:05:16	Relationship between Transport and Electricity Authority. Overtime and on-call work. Transporting transformers. Carting padmounts for underground cable. Locations of underground cable from Ainslie substation.
0:09:42	Transport as working environment. Union membership and work issues. The need to cart sewage from new suburb of Weston Creek to an area near Coppins Crossing when Canberra was growing so fast that sewage works weren't able to manage.
0:15:00	reflections on working on trucks. Various work. Decision to go to Electricity Authority rather than stay with Transport. Relationship between Transport and Authority.
0:18:35	Changes in Canberra. Driving before suburbs built up. Family connections with Queanbeyan. 'Bullocking' work in the old days. Issues of power lines and trees. Ainslie substation.
0:25:33	END



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