

George Lutz and Jack Vetleson:

## Working and Quitting on the B. C. Coast

*George Lutz and Jack Vetleson, though not old, are members of a dying breed, the old-time coastal loggers. They are both Supervisors at Canadian Forest Products Ltd. Nimpkish Valley operations on northern Vancouver Island. This summer they spent one evening with Derek Reimer, reminiscing about "the old days." It is stories like these that will eventually become part of the folklore of British Columbia logging.*

MR. REIMER: How were the bunkhouse conditions in the 1940's different from now?

MR. VETLESON: You'd see a bunkhouse with forty men and all the wet clothes hanging up, and a big heater in the middle. The guy beside the heater — he'd turn the damper down, and the guy on the far end of the bunkhouse would open it up.

MR. LUTZ: The smell in the morning, you know what I mean, you'd get up and, of course, it would be so darned cold out there . . . we'd all rush for the heater. That heater sounded just like a steam-engine. You had a five gallon bucket of oil, the side of the stove there, so you'd take this little tobacco tin, and you'd open the door, and you'd fire that in there, then you'd close the door real fast, then she'd go poof-poof-poof-poof, (laughing) and the cloud of smoke coming out! It was the only way to get warm in there. But we had "bullcooks" that would fire up at five o'clock.

MR. VETLESON: Guys in there would snore. It never bothered me when I was young . . . when I went to sleep, I died, but some of the older guys that didn't snore, they used to curse and swear all night long. (laughing) The ideal place to be was about half way between the door and the stove, and if you stayed in camp about three months, then you ended up with a bed just about where you wanted it, but by the time you got a bed where you wanted it, you were getting pretty "stakey" — you were ready for a trip to town — so it didn't last very long (laughter) always uncomfortable . . . you never got a bed where you wanted it.

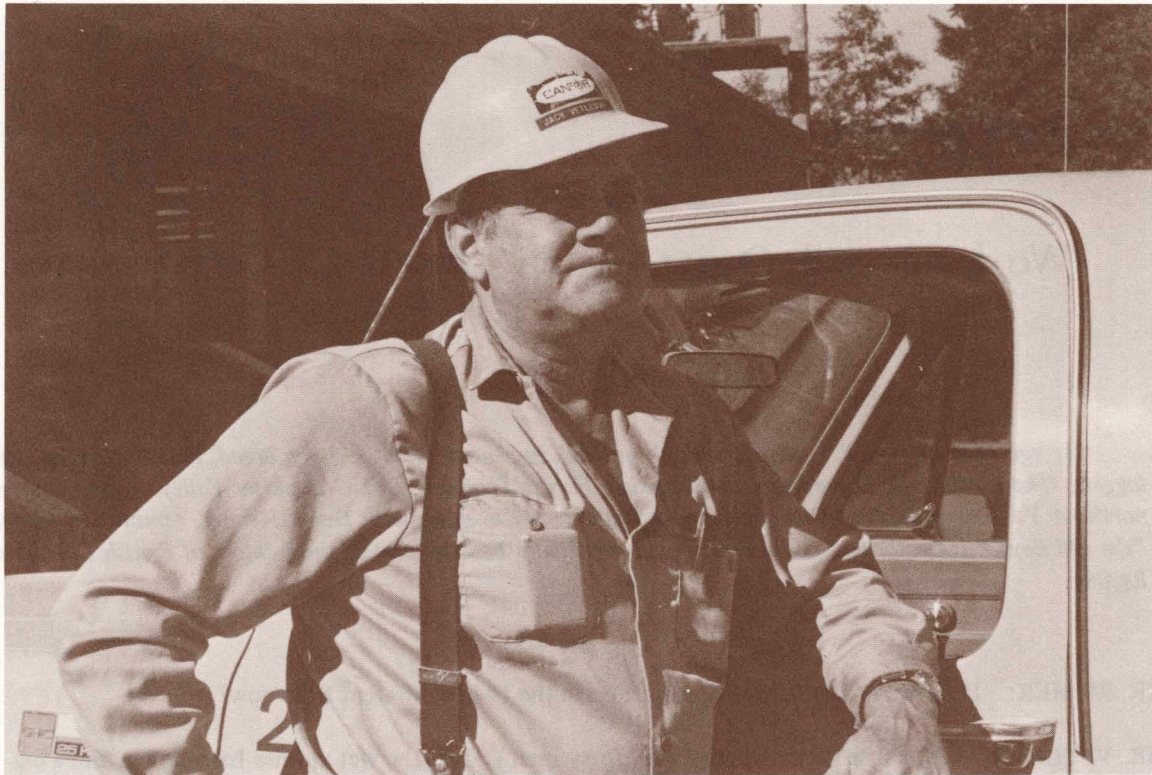
MR. LUTZ: Actually, it was rather fun. You know what I mean . . . you were all together.

MR. REIMER: What about the cookhouse? What was it like?

MR. VETLESON: The cookhouses then were what they called "family style." The food was always good in the camps . . . I don't remember working in a camp where you didn't get good food. It was plentiful — there was lots of steaks. We never used to get ice-cream and fresh milk — that's the only thing that was lacking, really, but the food was right out of this world. Always has been.

MR. LUTZ: You always ate good in a camp . . .





*Jack Vetleson*

MR. VETLESON: If the food wasn't good, nobody stayed. That was one thing a logger wouldn't put up with, was poor food.

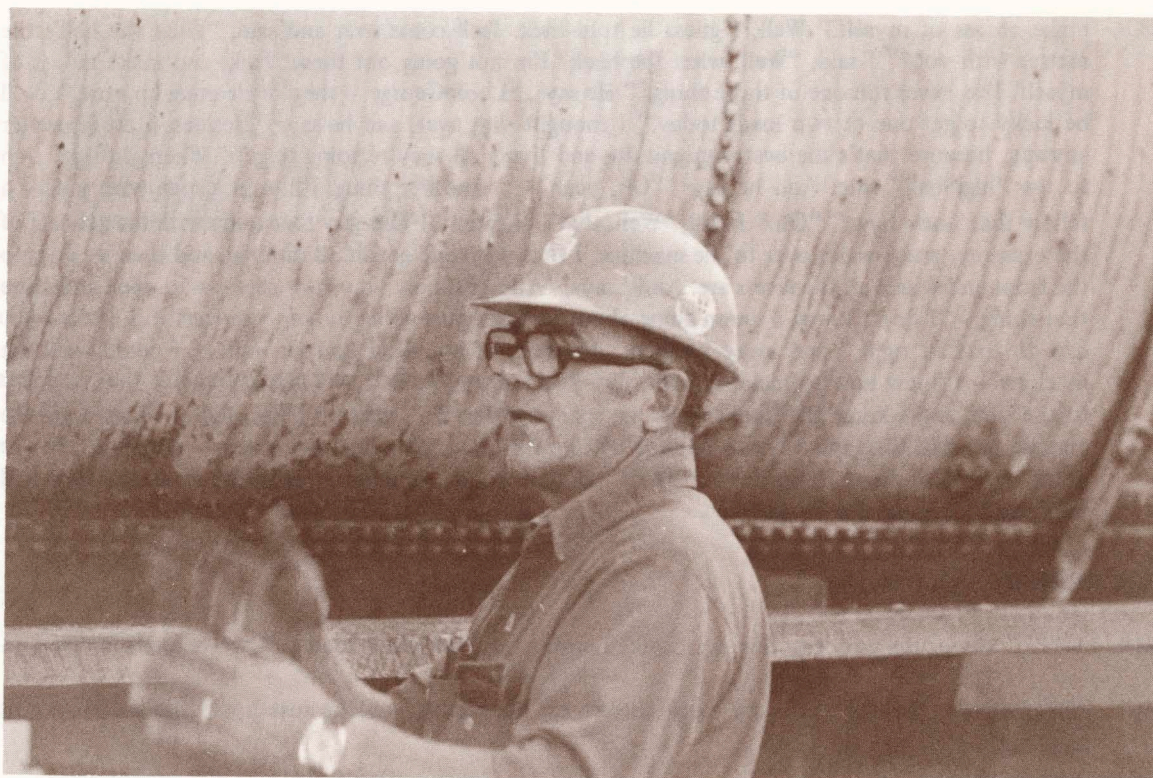
MR. LUTZ: There was about eight men to a table, and the only thing you had to watch is where you sat . . . in fact, everybody had their own place. There was no name on it, or nothing, but you sorta built up seniority in the cookhouse, and that was your chair — your place — and boy, no-one sat in that. And my biggest problem was, I sat . . . (Mr. Vetleson laughs) He's started to laugh already! (Mr. Lutz laughs) I starved to death where I sat, because all the food coming from the kitchen would be put on this end of the table, and if it was steak, they would gorge themselves, so that when the plate got to me, it would be empty. "Pass the potatoes" — they'd all take potatoes and the plate would be empty when it got to me. And one day — I guess I was in one of my bad moods — I slammed everything down and walked out, and they never forgot it. I was *so* mad!

MR. VETLESON: He had ten plates come to him. Every one was empty. (all laugh) We'd hand him the empty plate and he'd have to hold it there, so that when the "flunky" went by, he'd grab it and fill it up again. We were eating like hell, to keep our plates empty enough so we could put some more on, and George was sitting there starving. (still laughing)

MR. REIMER: The guys used to eat a lot, eh?

MR. VETLESON: Oh, yeah . . . there was no such a thing as "coffee" . . . coffee breaks, or anything like that. You ate your breakfast and you ate your lunch, and you ate your supper. And *that* was your eatin' for the day. And we were all skinny as rakes. Believe it or not, I was only 160 pounds.





*George Lutz*

MR. LUTZ: And I was only 120 or 130.

MR. REIMER: You must be at least 140 now.

MR. LUTZ: (laughing) Oh, yes, I'm well over that now.

MR. VETLESON: You should give him a quarter, George. (all laugh)

MR. LUTZ: At that time, it was good to have a handyman in a camp, because you didn't know when a guy was going to quit or anything like that. Well, I'd come out in the morning — I didn't know where I was going, and first thing you know, Jack would holler, "Hey, you'd better come with us guys today. I need a cat driver." O.K., I'd go that way. Some mornings, I'd come out to work there, and all the crew would get onto the crummies and everybody would go this way, and I'm left standing, all alone. Nobody wants me. (laughs)

MR. VETLESON: One morning, I said to George I needed a grapple operator, and he says, "I never run that grapple before . . ."

MR. LUTZ: Jack, let *me* tell that story. You know, them new grapple machines come in and I just never had the opportunity to go out on 'em, you see. So this one day, my boss came over to me and he says, "Jack wants to see you," and I says, "What for?" He says, "I thing he wants you to go out with the grapple." I said, "Well you can just go and tell Jack Vetleson what the hell he can do with that grapple . . . He had lots of chances to try me out on a grapple and I'm not going to go out there and



make an ass of myself." Well, I guess he told Jack. Jack come over and said, "What the hell's the matter with you?" I said, "Well, what the heck? I'm not going out there, Jack, and make an ass of myself. I've never run one of those things." He says, "Look George — they're cleaning up now. You'd be lucky to get one or two loads today." I thought that over, and he says, "Besides, it don't matter anyway, because that's the best you can do, and that's all they're going to get." Where do I go? I go to the "high-ball" side. And he says, "Oh, yeah, . . . another thing. I'll send a man with you — a fellow that nows how." "Oh," I said, "Well, that's different." This guy that came with me gets off of the crummy, and I walks over to the machine, I fires it up and gets it all running, and then we goes to the front end where all the levers are. And I says, "All right, now you show me how to open and close that thing." "I don't know a damn thing about it. I was just going to help you *start* it. I can see you can do that all right," and away he went. So then, of course, I had to walk it. I could walk the machine — I knew how to make it walk, you know, travel with it, and everything like that, so I gets to the side, and I knew the hooker and the spar-engineer. So I goes up there, and of course I get the grapple out like this, and I try to open it up like this, and get a log, and I hears "Atta boy! You're doing it! You're doing it, boy! You got it!" Do you know, we loaded out twelve loads that day, and they had to stop me for dinner.

MR. REIMER: (laughing)

MR. LUTZ: About the only guy that ever walked onto a machine and loaded out twelve loads in one day.

MR. VETLESON: Hooker hangs an extra choker on the rigging, and he just pours the wood . . . (all laughing)

MR. LUTZ: Oh, did they ever give it to me. Then I started casting, you know, with the grapple and that guy up in that machine — King Farouk we called him . . . "Atta boy, Georgie! Atta boy! One more try! One more try!" Everybody was all cheers and I got into the swing of it, and boy, we had a ball that day!

MR. REIMER: How often did a logger take a trip to town.

MR. VETLESON: Well, some guys stayed three months. Some guys stayed six months. Some guys stayed a year, like George says . . . but there were guys like "Eight-Day Wilson" (laughing in background) that only . . .

MR. REIMER: (laughing) Who's "Eight-Day Wilson"?

MR. VETLESON: He never worked more than eight days in his life. He's an old timer. He's long gone, years ago, you know. He was proud of the fact that he'd never worked in a camp more than eight days. And he was a good man. He could always get a job. He did his work and he did it well while he was there, but he never worked more than eight days. (all laughing) There was "Eight-Day Wilson", there was "Panicky Bill", there was "Panicky Pete", there was "Hungry Bill", and oh, you could go on and on with these names.

MR. LUTZ: They all had lots of names, loggers . . .

MR. VETLESON: I remember this "Hungry John" we used to have here. When the penicillin first come out, he read in the paper where they got this penicillin from mould from the bread. He used to take bread down to his bunkhouse and get it mouldy and eat it. He figured that was good for his health. (chuckling)

MR. REIMER: How did you go about quitting?



MR. VETLESON: You just went into the office and asked for your time, and then it was made out right then and there for you. That's all. There were no machines, them days. There was no deductions or . . . no income tax, or no medical or no . . . *nothing*. There was just your store bill and that was it . . . and your board, of course.

MR. LUTZ: It was all cut and dried . . . You'd just go in and say, "I quit."

MR. VETLESON: It took the time-keeper about ten minutes and he had her all made up . . . We had three crews, two working and one in town. And these guys just kept going round and round. There was no leave-of-absence, or anything like you have today. When that guy was ready to come back, he went down to the Loggers' Agency, and if he was a good man he was on a slip: "Return anytime". So they sent him up and as soon as he got here, there was a battle then . . . who was going to go to town. Cause we had an extra driver, or an extra cat-hooker, or anything like that. He didn't have to worry about a job. It was the guy that was going to go to town. There was a fight then that he had two guys, and maybe one spare man. Both been here the same length of time. They'd have to pull straws or flip a coin. They wouldn't go on a leave, but they would quit, actually quit . . . but they wouldn't leave you short and you wouldn't leave them short.

MR. LUTZ: There wasn't the turnover in men as there is today, at that time. A man would come and he would work for six months or a year. Some would stay on longer. Like, this camp here . . . I travelled the coast before I came here . . . I worked at "gyppo" outfits, and I just moved from camp to camp and just went all over. I was looking for the right place, I guess. I don't know, but this was the trend. But, when I came here, it surprised me that there were so many people that had been here for a long time, and the turnover at that time wasn't that great.

I quit myself, in '45. I got into a row with the boss and I said, "All right, that's it. I quit!" And he says, "No way, man. You're fired!" I says, "Oh, no, I beat you to it! I *quit*! And I *did*." I left and took everything with me and I went to town and I stayed in town, I guess, two months. You know, I had quite a stake and everything like that, and staying in a hotel. Finally, I was getting low on funds, and I got a job with the bridge crew at Port Hardy. I was just hired out for there, when our "man-catcher" . . .

MR. REIMER: Your what-catcher?

MR. LUTZ: "*Man-catcher*". He's the fellow in Vancouver, in the office there . . . they would phone down and say, "Now look, you find that fellow and get a hold of him, and send him up here!" So that fellow — he'd go out and find you, you see. Well this fellow, our man-catcher, Arnold Smith . . .

MR. VETLESON: We call him "Two Dollar Smith".

MR. LUTZ: Yeah . . .

MR. VETLESON: You'd ask for a "drag" before ya left town . . . that was the common thing. You'd hire out and you'd be broke. You wouldn't hire out until you didn't have any money left, so then you'd say, "Well, I'd like some money, so I can get a bottle to take back to camp with me." Well, most outfits would give you fifty bucks, some would give you a hundred, you know. Arnold Smith would offer you two dollars.

MR. LUTZ: (laughing) . . . Smith would give you two dollars!

MR. VETLESON: Used to call him "Two Dollar Smith". (Mr. Reimer laughing)

MR. LUTZ: I'll tell you, the strange part is he came up there to the room — found out where I was at — he came up and he said, "They want you back at Englewood", and I said, "No, I'm going to Port



Hardy, and I'm finished up there." "No," he said, "Jack called up for you." . . . Vetleson here . . . And I said, "Oh, how's he doing?" "Fine, but he wants you up there *right* away. I'm to get you up there." . . . That's how I got back, because he sent the man-catcher after me.

MR. REIMER: Tell me some more about this "man-catcher". What kind of a guy would he be?

MR. VETLESON: They call him a "personnel man" today. They're more refined. Some of them are even "personnel managers", you know. And they've got an office and everything, and a telephone, and they don't do anything, but them days the guy had to get out on the streets, and go around the beer parlours and look these guys up . . . Most of the big outfits had one . . .

MR. LUTZ: If they wanted to get hold of a certain fellow, they'd send him out and he knew where to go. He'd go into a certain beer parlour. We all hung out at the Belmont, and he'd just go in there, and, of course being the man-catcher, he was known by everyone and he'd just say "Have you seen Lutz around anywhere?", and the guy says, "Yeah, by gosh, he was in here just a few days ago." "Well, have you any idea where he's staying?" "No" Well as a rule we always stayed in the same hotel. We either stayed at the York or the Belmont.

MR. VETLESON: You only had to go to six or seven hotels in Vancouver at that time . . . You'd find eighty per cent of the loggers in these six or seven hotels. Maybe ten hotels. And if they weren't there, there would be somebody there that knew where they were. A guy stayed at the same hotel for years and years. Some of them left their clothes there. When they went back to the woods their clothes would be put away for them, and when they came back, their shirts would be ironed and their suits would be pressed. When you went broke, you never worried about a hotel bill. You worried about changing the desk clerk, because there might be a new guy on there, and you come in three o'clock in the morning and need twenty bucks and you wouldn't know the desk clerk, and that was your biggest worry. If you stayed in the same hotel you'd just walk down there, and say "I need some money", you know, and out it would come. They gave it to you and you always went back to that hotel because if you *didn't* go back to that hotel, nobody knew where to find you when you got to town — you were a stranger. And loggers, them times, went to a beer parlour and they always sat together. At two o'clock in the afternoon their table would have twenty or thirty . . . and you knew everybody at the table.

MR. LUTZ: That's what loggers do. They go to Vancouver — they do all their logging in the beer parlour, then they come back here and they do all the girls back here. (all laugh) But you go back thirty years ago, or even a little longer, if you want and I know myself — this one incident — I was going around with a girl in Vancouver — quite a respectable girl, and everything. So her parents wanted to meet me, you see, and she'd told them that she'd met a logger. Well, that was no problem. Certainly! So I went up there. They invited me for dinner. Well, I was always a well-dresser, and most loggers always were. Most people I knew were always well-dressed.

MR. REIMER: When you went to town . . .

MR. LUTZ: Yeah. and when I got up to their place and knocked at the door, I tell you, her mother just turned white! I think she expected me with cork boots. After a while we got talking and they asked me about camp and they were surprised just how well we *were* living. They didn't know. Most people in Vancouver just thought we were . . . I don't know what they thought we were, but . . .

MR. VETLESON: Loggers used to make good money, you know.

MR. LUTZ: . . . and really raised hell in town, and this is where they got the bad name. But it was just that you didn't have time. Loggers were out for six, seven, eight months at a time, then they'd go to



town and they've only got two weeks. Well, I know they'd blow *thousands* of dollars in that two weeks, and at that time, that was a *lot* of money. And everyone came back broke.

MR. REIMER: There was no thought of saving?

MR. LUTZ: No.

MR. VETLESON: Oh, some did . . . I tell you, it used to be quite a thing coming down from the Queen Charlottes and going under that Lions Gate Bridge. It's quite a feeling for a young fellow who's been in camp for a year, you know. By God, now . . . and worked every day, had one day off . . . the first day of July . . . and you see those lights, and they look pretty good. And look good going out, too, you know . . . (laughs) but coming in, I think they looked the best.

MR. LUTZ: Then when you landed in Vancouver, all the "queens" would be there, waiting for their boys . . . what you didn't see there! Oh, I'm telling you!

MR. VETLESON: Oi! Hee! Oscar!

MR. LUTZ: "*There she is! There she is!*", you know. (laughing) All the girls picking up their boys, and you'd never see them until they were bringing them back, and shoving them on the boat again. Broke.

MR. REIMER: Would you go on one last drunk before heading back out to camp?

MR. LUTZ: Oh, that was every time, boy! Every time! The last party.

MR. VETLESON: The old Macquinna that used to travel the west coast would call in on the radio somewhere between Victoria and the coast, and they used to say "We've got 150 loggers and 50 passengers." (chuckling) That's the way they defined everybody.

MR. REIMER: Would it stop at all the camps on the way up?

MR. LUTZ: Oh, yes, that is what took so long. We were put off on a little float out in the water, just a little twelve by twelve float. If the wind was blowing, you hung on for dear life! Then you'd see one of these great big boats come in and try to tie up to that little thing. They wouldn't even tie up — they'd drift right into it, you know, and then they'd open up the side doors — at the side of the hatch — then they'd grab you and bail you aboard that way. There was no such a thing as putting a ladder down.

MR. VETLESON: They've been known to let loggers off on boomsticks, in the middle of the night, and their suitcases, and everything. (background laughter) That wasn't too uncommon. The little "gyppo" camps didn't have a float and we made it. I never hear of anybody drowning. (all chuckle)

MR. LUTZ: A lot of people fell in, though! (laughs)

MR. VETLESON: Oh, Jesus, yes. It was worse going to town, with all that money in your pockets. "Jeez! I don't want to drown now!", but coming back, you're broke, and feeling kind of sick, anyhow. (laughs) It wouldn't matter so much.

MR. REIMER: That must have been something in wintertime, with the choppy water . . .

MR. VETLESON: Oh, I don't know. You were pretty "catty" in them days, you know, and you could jump pretty high, it didn't bother you. I've been in camps where they didn't even have boomsticks,



and the big boat wouldn't even stop. They'd open up the doors in the side of the boat, and the other boat would pull alongside and they'd both be moving, and you'd bail into the big boat. Right out in the water . . . and the big boat only slowed down for them.

MR. REIMER: How often did the boat come in to Englewood?

MR. LUTZ: Once a week . . . then twice a week.

MR. VETLESON: Then the CPR started calling, and it called once a week, and the Union called once a week. The CPR used to be the nice boats to travel on. Everybody was first-class. We had the *Princess Mary*.

MR. LUTZ: Everybody got first-class service and their food was good. The Union boats — if we didn't have a state-room — down in the hold we went, with the Chinamen . . . referred to as the "glory hole". (all laugh) It was just one of the big holds there, and they had a bunch of bunks around the walls, you know. That's where you went if you wanted to lay down. If you could get a bunk . . . it was rough, though, bringing your wife back when all the crew were coming up.

MR. VETLESON: But, you know, them loggers never swore if there was women and kids around.

MR. LUTZ: No, no. But some of them were pretty drunk, though.

MR. VETLESON: Well, they would be drunk and fall asleep and fall over, and fall down, but you know, they never interfered with women. Even going down, there'd be women go on that boat. I've been on lots of special boats and I've never seen women bothered on a boat yet. At Salmon River when you got on the boat at Christmas time, Dewey Anderson used to be down there and give everybody a bottle of whiskey.

I remember one time, coming up on the barge . . . the wife was with me and this old hook tender — an awful man to drink. Oh, when he run out of booze, he suffered the Gods o'Hell. And he was on the barge, and nobody would give him a drink, so he come to me, and said, "You must have a bottle, Jack", and I'd set chokers for him years ago at Rock Bay . . . and he says, "*You* must have a bottle, Jack." He kept hounding me and hounding me to give him a bottle. Well, I had a bottle in the suitcase, but I didn't want to give it to him because you weren't going to do him a favour by giving him a drink. He needed to dry out a little bit. Anyhow, about halfway up the lake, I got so tired of him bugging me for a bottle, finally I got an empty bottle and I reached over and I poured it about half-full of lake water, and I said, "Here, Bill, have a drink." Oh! He grabbed that bottle, you know, and he tipped it up, and he took a drink out of it, and he put it down and he said "water" in the dirtiest way I ever heard anybody say it! (all laugh) I never knew you could say "water" and swear, without saying anything else. Everybody laughed . . . they were watching him. They were all sitting around . . . there was nothing else to do, and they were watching. Talk about everybody roaring . . . never bothered him. Just that "water."

I remember one time at Camp "A", we were celebratin' on the weekend, and we run out of booze, and these guys sent me out . . . they all gave me some money, to go and see if I could buy a few bottles. I had about fifty dollars, I guess, and that was quite a bit of money, them days. When I went out of the bunkhouse and down the road, the crummy was just going by, and the crummy driver says, "Do you want to go for a ride?" and I says, "Yeah." He says, "Plane just come in, and I'm going to pick up this passenger." I thought, "That's just what I want. Somebody with a heavy suitcase." (laughing) So, down to the plane we go, and the plane was just pulling out as we got there and I don't know yet why it stopped, because there was nobody on the dock. I waved at the plane and it come back, and the fellow says, "What do you want?" and I — just for the hell of it — I says, "I want to go to town. Not to get just stuck up here."



MR. LUTZ: You had fifty dollars! (laughing)

MR. VETLESON: We gassed up, you know, and I jumped on the plane. I give him fifteen dollars for fare and away I went to town.

MR. REIMER: To Vancouver?

MR. VETLESON: Vancouver, yeah. And these guys, I guess they waited and waited, you know. (laughing) Of course, I get to town and spend the fifty dollars, and make a few drags here and there. I guess a hundred dollars or so, and that would last you quite a bit, so I come back in about two weeks, and they says, "Jesus! Where were you?" (all laughing) All that saved me was I had their bottles with me. They were glad I got them, because they wouldn't have had them that day, they'd have been drank two weeks ago, and gone. They laughed about that, you know . . .

There used to be two powder monkeys here — Powder-men — Rockmen . . . they were heavy drinkers called Oscar and Einer. They came back from town and they're sicker than a dog. One guy's not too bad but the other guy — he's shaking like a leaf, and the only way they can sober him up is get him out of the bunkhouse — and there's snow on the railroad track so the Superintendent sent'em out there to fix the phone line — at least get'em out in the fresh air all day. I guess he figured it would do'em good. So they come to this bridge — it's pretty high — 120 feet. Oscar — he's shivering and shaking and he says, "I'm not going to walk across that bridge for nothing." Einer says, "Come on, Oscar. We were sent out to fix the phone lines — we got to fix it. We've got to do it." He says, "I'll break a trail back and forth across the bridge, and then I'll help you across." So Einer . . . he walks back and forth across the bridge, and he tramps a trail in the snow, and finally gets ahold of Oscar by the arm, and they're going sideways, one step at a time across the bridge. Einer's worried whether he's going to get Oscar across there, and he's not saying anything. They get about to the middle of the bridge, and Oscar says . . . "For Christ's sakes, Einer *say* something to me! Speak! *Say* something! *Say anything*, Einer!" Einer says, "Jesus, Oscar! This must be just about the highest bridge in the claim!" (much laughter)

MR. LUTZ: A lot guys . . . drinking was actually their only pastime. And the trip was so dead . . . so long . . . boring.

MR. VETLESON: You see, you couldn't get liquor in camp. You couldn't send for liquor. The liquor store wouldn't even send it to you, because the company wouldn't accept it at their post office. You could send an order into the liquor store, and they'd just send your cheque back to you. So, the liquor you brought to camp — when that was gone, that was the end of your booze, unless some . . . We used to go out there and say, "Could I carry your suitcase?" (background chuckles) to anybody coming from town. Or "Would you like to see me before supper?"

MR. LUTZ: Jack and I still use it. Jack will walk by and say, "Did you want to see me before supper?" "Yeah, O.K." That means you come down for a drink. Well, at one time that was the saying in camp. "Want to see me before supper?" You know . . . give'em the old "highball". (chuckles)

MR. LUTZ: But there was one thing too . . . you were a real happy bunch. You all worked together and there was always competition. We were always trying to get one more log than the other fellow . . . There was always a game, or some darn thing. Or if you were coming into the landing with the cats, or something like that, you'd try to just touch that log way out on the corner and knock that fellow off of it. Never ever hurt a man. But that was the game, you know, and you always seemed to be playing a game. You'd go back — racing! — back with the cats just to try to catch up to the other guy, and if you couldn't get around the stump, or something, pass him. There was always something to do, but right now it's a different story altogether.