



Bob Lundeen Oral History Interviews, August 13, 2013

Title

“Moving Up the Ranks at Dow Chemical”

Date

August 13, 2013

Location

Lundeen residence, Lake Oswego, Oregon.

Summary

In interview 3, Lundeen discusses his mother, his teenage years as a Boy Scout, his wartime experiences in China and India, and his receipt of the Bronze Star. The bulk of the interview, however, is devoted to Lundeen's experiences at Dow Chemical, including the development of his business principles, important colleagues, his time working both stateside and in Hong Kong, and the extensive amount of international travel that his work required.

Interviewee

Robert Lundeen

Interviewer

Chris Petersen

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/lundeen/>

Transcript

Chris Petersen: All right, Bob. If you would, introduce yourself again with your name, and today's date.

Bob Lundeen: Today's date? Eight-something.

CP: August 13th.

BL: Yeah. August 13th, 2013.

CP: Right.

BL: Yeah, I'm Bob Lundeen. Graduated from Oregon State in 1942.

CP: So, we are going to talk mostly about your career during this session.

BL: Yeah.

CP: There's a few questions that we wanted to touch upon from our last interview that we didn't get into in much detail; that we want to talk about from before you started working for Dow.

BL: Okay.

CP: And the first subject we wanted to talk about was your mom, and her involvement with the library in Westport.

BL: Yeah, that was—well, both of my parents were keen on education issues, but my mother, who had the time and the interest, decided that she would do something about it, so. During the time she served as a—she was a schoolteacher earlier, before she gets married. She decided we ought to have a library in Westport. And there was no taxing district or anything like that in those days, so she prevailed on the people at the mill, the carpenters and the sawmill management, to build a library building, which was, you know, a very nice little building.

Then we had the next problem: what about the books? And the closest book supply was the county library in Astoria. And my mother, in her own teaching career, had gotten acquainted with the county librarian. So she prevailed on the county librarian to supply our library with books. And, so they were delivered by mail on the SP&S Railway, which train ran from Portland to Astoria, you know, once a day, round trip—one trip outbound, and one inbound. So she would get a bag of books delivered. And then when they had been pretty well pawed over and read, she would put them on the train, send them back to Astoria, get a new bag full of books. And that's how we kept the library supplied. Of course, any contributions from people in our community, if they wanted to put a book in the library, they could do that, too. But it worked out very well.

CP: So there were essentially books on loan from the Astoria library?

BL: That's right. There were books on loan. And that was kind of an example to me. When I had a chance to get more involved in libraries myself, particularly when at Oregon State, I had that kind of example of my mother and how she supported that. So that was my story with the library.

CP: Another thing we wanted to ask you about was the National Scouting Jamboree in 1937.

BL: Yup.

CP: A trip to Washington, D.C.?

BL: Right. Yeah, my brother and I did that. Quite amazed to think about that. It was 1937; economic conditions weren't very good. But my brother and I had both been active in the Boy Scouts and the Sea Scouts in Westport. And the Portland Area Council, which was the subdivision in which we were involved, put together a trip by train for quite a large number—I don't remember how many it was—maybe 100 boys from the Portland Area Council, which covered a big part of the state of Oregon. And so we got on the train in, well, probably left from Portland, I guess, and crossed the country.

And I'm sure I can't remember exactly which order these events came in, but I think we went on the Great Northern Railway one way, and maybe with Union Pacific coming back. [0:05:03] That's not material to the story, but we had a terrific itinerary. We first stopped in Chicago and went to the Field Museum there; I remember that. And then we got to Washington. And I think this trip encompassed—I don't know if it encompassed the Fourth of July or not, but it was right in the middle of the summer, and it was stinking hot in Washington.

And there were a large group of Boy Scouts there from all over the country, several thousand. And so, we got to do all of the things in the—I think we did most of these things on the way. Went Niagara Falls; that was really a big deal. Went to New York, and we went to one of the Horn and Hardart Automats, you know, where you get the food on the tray, and you put a nickel or a dollar, or whatever it was, in the slot and the door opened, and you took a plate of food out of the—we thought that was a terrific, [laughs] terrific advancement!

But the biggest—the biggest thing was seeing the President, Franklin Roosevelt. And rather than—because of his—the President couldn't walk and stand up and review the troops, so what they did is they got—he had an open car, and Boy Scouts lined up on either side of the street, from whatever street it was, and the President proceeded down this row of Boy Scouts on either side. And you know, that was the closest I ever got to the President of the United States. I was about from here to you over there from the President. Very jaunty, you know, with his Panama hat on, and waving at the Boy Scouts. And that was really a big thrill for us.

And then on the way back from the Jamboree, on whatever railroad it was, we went to Akron, Ohio, to see how automobile tires were made. And I think we also went someplace en route to, I don't know whether it was an automobile assembly plant or not, but maybe it was just a tire factory. But one thing stands out is that someplace en route, the train went off the track. And I mean, no damage was done, except to the management's [laughs] embarrassment. That was repaired, but that was also a big adventure. And all in all, it was a tremendous experience, and one that I'll certainly never forget. Yeah.

CP: I'm sure. Well, and another adventure was, you talked a lot about your time in China in World War II. We didn't talk much about India, though. Do you have any specific memories of India during World War II, for you?

BL: Yeah, I guess mostly negative. India was a very difficult place to do business. India was a place where I think bureaucracy was invented. Nothing could be done in short order. Everything was regulated by the government. It's amazingly slow in anything they did. And we had a particular problem, because we had an association with an Indian company, not something that happened on my watch when I was managing Dow's business in Asia, but it had been started some time before.

We got linked up with a band of real rascals who had—it was an Indian company called—I can't even remember the name of the company now. Anyway, it was a Hindu family company; it was a peculiar form of Indian law that you could have something like that. So this had four brothers in it who were the shareholders. It was an Indian public company. So, the Indian part owned 25 percent, and we owned 25 percent, and then the public owned 25 percent, and the shares were traded on the Indian stock exchange. [0:09:58] And it was called Polycam, I remember now. And the company was originated, as I say, before India became part of my territory, but we had to put up with the partners that we had, and they were a bunch of real scoundrels.

And one thing I always remember particularly is that, when it came to pay a dividend on the public shares, they always managed to have that dividend declared at a time just before the Reserve Bank of India had changed the paying date, the dividend declaration date. So we would get our money after the Reserve Bank of India had changed the value of the rupee to a less favorable thing for us. So that's my over [laughs] [unclear] remembrance of India. We had another company that we did a little bit of business with, but there were no positive developments when I was looking after that.

CP: How about during your military service? You spent some time in India, did you not?

BL: Very, very, very, very little. We landed in what—this is before India, before the—

CP: Before it had been—?

BL: Before it had been divided, yeah. So, we went across—we landed in Bombay, before it was Mumbai, and then, from a U.S. military transport. And then we took a British transport from there to Karachi, and then we took a—we flew then in one of our weather squadron airplanes across India to Chabua, which was in the far northeast corner of India. And from there we flew over the Hump to Kunming, China. So, I didn't see too much of India, because we were just—oh, we did see the Taj Mahal; I remember that. That was a pretty impressive site.

And I used to go back to India, go through India, over the years when I was, you know, in charge of Dow Pacific, and I remember the planes [laughs]—the planes always stopped in India in the middle of the night. [Laughs] I mean, that was back in the days of Pan American One, and Pan American Two. They flew around the world one way, and the other one flew around the other way. So my feelings about India were never very favorable. One of my successors finally dumped the business with the Kilachand's—that was the name of the people. My wife, my daughter Nancy always used to call them the Kill-joys, because they [laughs] were people—they were greedy and unscrupulous. So, I still don't have very favorable recollections of India.

CP: The last thing we want to talk about before we get to Dow is your receipt of the Bronze Star.

BL: Yeah.

CP: What were the circumstances around that?

BL: Oh, that was not for valor. You could get the Bronze Star for very good work, and that didn't have to be in a combat zone. So when we were in—when I was in India, and was the operations officer for the 10th Weather Squadron in Kunming, we had sort of a complex problem in the transmission of weather information. First, we had to receive the weather information from all of the weather stations, our own and then the Indian government also had—I mean, the Chinese government also had some weather stations. That data, that weather data—this was during the war, so all of that weather data was encoded.

So it was pretty laborious. First we had to send—first we had to get the information, and we got that from our own weather stations, plus some Chinese weather observers who spoke English. [0:14:59] And then we would send all of that to Kunming. Mind you, that was in the days when they were doing—sending it with dot-dash, and all encoded. So it would be collected in Kunming, and then all of the weather data from all of the stations, the Chinese stations and our own stations, we then redistributed back to the weather stations. I mean, so we had—our communications officer, Greg Headon [?], and I came up with a pretty good scheme for minimizing the time it took the weather information to in-and-out. And it was for that that I got the Bronze Star.

CP: And when was that awarded?

BL: After I actually—I got it after I got back to the states, because it—yeah, and I forgot where it was. Maybe it was over at Marsh Field in California. But I still have it.

CP: Well, in our interviews last time, we left off with you, just the very beginnings of your working at Dow.

BL: Yeah.

CP: And I'd like to start off with your first job at Dow, which was as a research engineer, and this was in Concord?

BL: Yeah, well, we were actually living in Concord. The Dow factory was in Pittsburg. That's Pittsburg with no H.

CP: So, what were you doing in this period of time?

BL: Oh, well, we lived there for fifteen years. All of our children were born there. I started out in the research department, and then—for several years, and then—

CP: Do you remember the types of projects you were working on at that time?

BL: My major project was to—we were designing—well, I was first in the research department, then I got transferred to the engineering department, which was for me a lot more fun. But we were making—I remember our principal activities were making styrene butadiene latex. That was one product. And then another product which we called xanthate, X-A-N-T-H-A-T-E, which was a mining flotation agent. And that business, flotation agents, is something that Dow had developed. It's quite a big business, because there were a lot of mines in the southwest part of the country. Copper, that was one. I'm trying to think the other ones.

And that was a business that put me in touch with a lot of people who had a different skill set than I did. These were mining people, and they would come into Pittsburg frequently, and you would have a chance to learn from them how it was working in the places they worked. And a lot these mining places were in the desert, or in the mountains, or something that—very unpleasant kinds of places to live. And so that gave me a different look at the world than I had in the normal chemical business.

CP: So this work wasn't very satisfying to you?

BL: No, no, I enjoyed that. I enjoyed it a lot. But, I'm just trying to think. Over a period of several years, I sort of morphed out of the engineering design business, into more and more administrative kinds of things—not a unusual career path for Dow employees who did a good job—and so I became acquainted then with a number of people in our Midland, Michigan, headquarters.

CP: Before we get to that, I'm interested in kind of delving in a little bit more into the transition from the research engineering to the engineering design.

BL: Yeah.

CP: And how did that come about? You said that was sort of a natural thing for a lot of Dow employees, to make that move? [0:19:58]

BL: As a general observation, in my case, the management of the western division of Dow Chemical was a little different than the rest of Dow, because that factory which we worked in was actually—was bought from another company, called Great Western Electrochemical Company. And Dow Chemical bought it because the research director who was with Great Western Electrochemical Company, Wilhelm Hirschkind, was a well-known researcher, and had a lot of experience with the products that Dow was interested in. So we had some more independent interest in—maybe a closer interest to management than Dow had in the bigger parts of Dow, I mean, in all of the other divisions—in Texas, where our biggest factory was.

So, what we wanted to do was get more business in the western division, so we'd make part of our operation grow more successfully. So we had a chance, then—during this period of 15 years, more or less, I'd gotten to know local Dow management, most of them who'd come with Great Western Electrochemical, pretty well. And we wanted to make our part of the company bigger and better. And so, I had a chance to go to Midland on a number of occasions, in this promotional work, if you will, and got acquainted with a number of Dow management people there, and a particular group of Dow management.

Well, while I was—and I got a chance to—I was invited to join, to move, from Pittsburg to Midland, and join what was called Dow Chemical International. And then that put me into the much bigger Dow world.

CP: Mm-hm. One of the things that's really striking about your career is the fact that you were trained in engineering at a technical school, basically.

BL: Yeah.

CP: But you wound up becoming a businessman of terrific renown. And I'm wondering, how did you develop those principles, those business principles, that business acumen? Was that through a series of mentorships with people, formal or informal, or, where did you get them?

BL: Well, I would say mostly informal. I had a great mentor there, a fellow by the name of Ben Branch, who had an unusual background. I think he went to Case Institute, in those days, in Cleveland. And he'd also studied in Germany for a year, so. But Ben was a brilliant man, and he was a member of Dow's Board of Directors at that time. And he—well, to make a long story short, he had the idea, and convinced the board of the idea, that Dow should manage its business where the customers were. And so we had customers around the world, but, well, we had some in Canada; which, we had a company there which had been started during the war to make styrene. We had a company in, well, a big company in the United States. We had a company in Latin America. And so the management then, set up, kind of, we had five enterprises. [0:24:59]

Oh, and Dow Chemical USA. That was the last one to be formed, as a matter of fact. Dow had a very complicated management system. But anyway, and Branch was sort of the architect of that. And his management style was quite—well, he set a good example, as a matter of fact, his management style. In the first place, he was a very smart man. I always remember, I'd talk about a business project with Ben, and in the course of the conversation, frequently found out that he knew a lot more about it than I did, so. It wasn't useful to be smart with Branch, because he was always a little smarter than you were. But he was a great coach.

Another thing about Branch is that he got bored stiff, I think, being stuck in Midland, and he loved to get out and see the rest of the Dow world. And so he would—and a substantial part of my career when I was in Midland is that I had travelled to these places. Typically, we had a connection, a big connection, a company with Asahi Chemical in Japan. So, we really started making almost all of our important plastic products, mostly, in a joint company, a 50-50 company we called Asahi-Dow. And it was a big and successful business, certainly the biggest company in my territory. So over the course of my years—and Branch loved to go to Japan. So he'd come to Japan, and we had board meetings that lasted for a whole week, if you can imagine that. It was unbelievable! But we'd have a chance then to—and I had a chance to visit with Branch kind of one-on-one, then. So, and he set a very good example.

Dow had what was called almost an inside board. We only had one member of the board who wasn't an employee—a very unusual thing today. And our civilian, if you will, who was on the board was a Nobel Prize winner, Melvin Calvin, who was a professor at Berkeley. And he made some very important research into the process of photosynthesis, for which he got the Nobel Prize. And the other directors were all managers in the company, like I was, and we all had our own style. And in Dow, if you were a manager in those days, you didn't care much about your, how shall I say, your rank in the company. The thing everybody aspired to be was to be a director.

And the unique thing was that we had this board of directors, and I don't know how to express it exactly. Each of us had a particular knowledge of the company from our own experience in the company. [0:29:58] Also, some of those directors aren't people, if I had had a choice, that I would have put on the board myself, because I found their style not very productive. But Branch thought they were good. So, and I think we had about fifteen directors in those days. And Branch never talked to me about it, but I think he had developed a close personal relationship with each of those people who were on the board, employees that were on the board. And as far as he was concerned, they brought individual talents to the company that he thought were very important.

And I've often said that some of those people I would never have put on the board if I'd had the choice, but I wasn't running the company. And I recognize that that developed a lot of great loyalty between Branch as a person, and the people who were running the business. And they thought so much of Ben, they never would have done something inappropriate. And it was a really interesting relationship. So, I think that's about all I can think of it. It certainly made us different than most American companies.

CP: How would you describe your style? You say everybody had a different style.

BL: [Pause] Hard to say. I—

CP: Did you have any specific principles of leadership or administration that you leaned on as you were developing as an administrator?

BL: I enjoyed, I really enjoyed, the management business. I had one opportunity along the way to be—to get promoted to a job in Michigan, where it would be all engineering work, but a bigger engineering job. And I turned that down, because

it didn't have much fun appeal for me. And I liked, I just liked this management job, because it gave me an opportunity to get around and see a lot of different things.

And when I got to be a, oh, a senior executive, and got on the board, we had three people who were on the board who were running the company then: Earl Barnes, he was an engineering and research guy; Paul Orrefice, who was strong in the marketing side; and then I looked at the sort of outside relationships the company had with the, you know, the population at large, and with other companies. So we found that a very good arrangement in the company. And I really enjoyed having these challenges which presented themselves through all of the public affairs part of the company. As a matter of fact, I had a lot of fun doing that, and of course, it was at the expense of handling an awful lot of service club lunches that the company—places around the United States. But it was part of the business, and I managed doing it.

The other thing is that I got a chance to do a lot of work with the company in, sort of, in foreign affairs. Later in my career, I had—this was before; this was still while we still had East Germany. Germany wasn't reunited. So, we were making business relationships with, but we could still make that when we had business relationships with communist East Germany. [0:35:06] And Orrefice didn't want to have anything to do with that, because he was—he had been born in Italy, and his father had been harassed by Benito Mussolini, and they emigrated to Ecuador. And Paul was very, very smaller, young. And so they emigrated to Ecuador, and then they came back to the United States when Paul was ready to go to college. I think he went to Cornell. He was a chemical engineer, too.

So, but his father had had this very unhappy experience with a communist country, and Orrefice didn't want to have anything to do with those people personally, nothing. And I really enjoyed that, so I had a chance then to visit a lot of—well, mostly East Germany—communist countries, and one of the really interesting parts to that was to go to the annual trade fairs they had in Leipzig. And there you got to meet a number of communist officials in the process of doing business, because there were a lot of political dimensions to doing business. And when we had a project of—we wanted to, we looked on East Germany as primarily a source of raw materials for our factories in West Germany. So we'd go to this trade fair, and it gave you a chance to show your wares to East German officials. And I also got a chance to become acquainted with these, a number of the officials who were part of their commercial attaché's office in New York. But, so one of the most interesting parts of my job allowed me to go to East Germany, to the fair.

And then I'd gotten to know the, as I say, the commercial attaché of the East German Embassy. As a matter of fact, I'd gotten to know the East German Ambassador in the United States. So I had a very good personal—we got along fine. But this fellow's name was Helmut Munsey [?], as I remember. So I prevailed on the friendship one time to organize a trip for me to go from—take a car and driver, and I'm sure one of the—the driver was probably a KGB fellow, or the German equivalent of that, to a German city, the name of which I have forgotten, but it was where my grandmother was born. My father was born in Sweden, and my grandmother was born in Germany. I cannot remember the name of this town.

But it was really interesting. It's a whole different bunch of people, and you saw what the Germans had done. It was a very poor country, very, very poor. And they didn't have much money; the people didn't have much money. All of the businesses were managed by the state, some of them badly run. So I always used to think that the East German government had kind of bribed these people to be loyal. The thing they bribed them with was the arts, and they had marvelous music programs, where you could go for, you know, a dime—not that, but a very small amount of money. They had these wonderful music programs. And it was a fringe benefit that I never would have had before. So this interest in community affairs that I cultivated with the Rotary Club of Cincinnati, I continued doing that in [laughs] in Germany, and I enjoyed that a lot. As a matter of fact, that's part of my career I wouldn't miss for anything.

CP: Was there ever any pressure on Dow not to do business with the Eastern Bloc?

BL: Oh, yeah. We had a few. We had a few of the directors of the company, one of them who really thought it was a waste of time to deal with those people, and why did we have anything to do with them? [0:40:05] And he was one of the directors that I wouldn't put on the board if I had had the choice. [Laughs] But he did a lot of other things very well. He had a very, what I would call a very narrow view of relations with anything that was communist. He didn't want to have anything to do with it.

CP: So, it sounds to me like you evolved into this administrative role in your life pretty naturally?

BL: Yeah.

CP: So, when you were younger, did you have any problems with public speaking, or did you think you could lead meetings well, or is that just, it always came easy to you?

BL: Well, I was lucky in high school. We had a very small high school; Westport High School was a very small high school. As a matter of fact, in my graduating class, there were only seven graduates. But we had an English teacher there who was very [pause]—let me back up a little bit. My father was a member, an Oregon Stater also, graduated in 1917. But he always said that a very important asset for any professional individual is to be able to get up on your hind feet and talk—that was his expression. So I always kept that in mind, and so I was fortunate about that, because we had one of our English teachers at school who taught extemporaneous speech. And I took a course from her at Oregon State, from the head of the Speech Department; the name was Mitchell. And that was probably one of the most valuable courses I took, because to get up on your hind legs and talk in a public group, for a professional man, is a great, great asset. I wouldn't have missed that for the world.

CP: It's a real theme in your life, the extent to which you are sort of an extension of these values that your father instilled in you.

BL: Yeah, well, my parents set great examples, both of them, in their views of education. That was very important. But I spent a lot of time with my dad, working for him in the summer time, summer jobs. And he was the log buyer for the company, among other things. So, sometimes we'd have a batch of logs which we had to scale up in Sauvie's Island, near Portland, and then maybe down there at Young's Bay in Astoria. And that was sort of the—all along the Columbia River. So to get to these places sometimes we had to—I spent a lot of time in the car with my dad, and it gave us—we had a long time to talk. And I think that probably was those abilities to talk with each other, because my dad was a very smart man, and really had his feet on the ground. So I probably became better acquainted with him than I did my mother. And so, it was one of those great advantages of having parents who inform you, in a good way, how important it is to be able to get up on your hind legs and talk. [Laughs]

CP: Well, that takes me to Pittsburg again.

BL: Yeah.

CP: And you mentioned that your children were born there.

BL: Yeah.

CP: So, tell me about setting up the household, and becoming a father and a family man in Pittsburg.

BL: Well, I was—we lived in Concord, which was about, [0:45:00] I don't know, fifteen miles from Pittsburg, something like that. Concord was a really nice little town in those days. We had a couple of houses, and as I say, our kids were all born there. Jack, who's the oldest one, who actually lives here in Lake Oswego now; Peter, who's a University of Michigan graduate; and well, Peter, who was the next child, he went to the University of Michigan, also, and went to medical school there, and became a doctor, and still a practicing physician; lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan. And Nancy, who is the youngest, worked for the Boeing Company here in Seattle for many years. So that's the three kids.

But as I say, I think that my mother met my dad at Oregon State. She went to Oregon Normal School, which was—in those days, an elementary school teacher didn't have to be a four-year degree. And her older brother, Ralph, was an Oregon Stater and a fraternity brother of my dad's. And so she knew—he was an ATO at Oregon State. And so it was through this connection at Oregon State that my mother met my dad, through this fraternity brother. Unfortunately, my Uncle Ralph, I never knew him because he died in the great flu epidemic shortly after World War II, I think. So, I guess it wasn't that much. So, that's sort of how the family got started. So, what else?

CP: Well, so, you finished up in Pittsburg, and then you moved to Midland, Michigan.

BL: Yup.

CP: Take me through that process. How did that come about?

BL: Well, I used to go to Midland when I got in the—fairly frequently. I worked for Ted Doane, who was the son of Leland Doane. And Ted—I'm trying to think. So he was also, he was an executive in the western division. So, but he didn't know much about the technical side of the business. So, he needed—I was his bag carrier. So he was the management person, and I was really subordinate to him, but I gave him the technical backup on our frequent safaris to Midland, and he also became a very good friend of mine over the years.

CP: So, you were providing some help with the some of the specifics of the actual work that Dow was doing, in terms of —?

BL: Yeah, because I was—on our board of directors, we had—all of the guys were technical guys. So we had to be able—wanted to get more business. We wanted to get more investment so the western division would become bigger. And so that's what happened on these trips I went to, hustling a little business for us. [0:50:07] [Pause] And be able to deal with the issues that came up. And this is when we were—these various intervals, and activities, and the like, didn't go on in a nice, necessarily neat batch of events, one after the other, which was another thing that made it interesting, well, that I enjoyed, still think about fondly with that.

CP: So at some point, you made the switch from the engineering position to an administrator position.

BL: Yeah. It was while I was still in Pittsburg. Yeah, but it was when I moved from this engineering role. Sort of half of my career was sort of all on the technical side, and the other half was all on the administrative side. And there was a period kind of in the middle of that, where it was a mixed bag. And well, I think the main thing was that opportunity to go to Midland, and hustle some business for the western division, which enabled me to—really made me want to stay in the business side of the business, rather than—I'm sure I could have gotten a bigger job in the division on the technical side of things, but by that time, I was too far out on the management branch. [Laughs]

CP: So what led to the actual move to Midland?

BL: Well, I got this opportunity to join what was called Dow Chemical International. And it was while working for Dow Chemical International in Midland that I got acquainted with, not only Ben Branch, but with a lot of other management people in Midland.

CP: How did the family feel about moving from California to Michigan?

BL: Well, it was all right. Yeah, they weren't—we had a very nice place to live in Michigan, and good neighbors, and built a nice house there. And the kids—well we had some very good friends in Michigan. It was a nice place to live, in those days. So it went all right.

CP: And how did your work evolve while you were there?

BL: Well, I had a lot of different kinds of assignments. This business with East Germany, and [pause] I think I've commented on most of those. We had a few that we touched. I'm trying to think when—we actually went to Moscow one time. Yeah, that's how we got in the USSR. I can't remember exactly the dates for these, but [pause]—oh, yeah. [0:55:05] We had a trade association called—I forgot what we called it, but it was a—we linked up together with Russian companies, again the same thing, to make them as a source of raw materials for us. They wanted some things that we had, and they wanted some know-how that we had. We didn't sell know-how very easily, but it gave us a chance for this dialogue.

And I remember particularly one time that we had, as I mentioned, this [unclear] fair. And [pause] I'm trying to—it gave us an opportunity. I remember one event, that sometimes we had had to fly on the Soviet airline, which was always kind of a debacle. [Laughs] It was never very comfortable. [Laughs] One time we had a chance to—I forget where we were going. We had a chance to ride on the East German airline, and you know, compared to the—what the hell was the name of that Soviet airline? Anyway, the East German airline, kind of a great positive change from riding in the Soviet airline. I remember that in particular. I think the Soviet airline didn't even have any oxygen masks in those. I mean, it was really a nail-biter [laughs] when you flew up in the airplanes.

CP: How about conditions in general, compared between the Soviet Union and East Germany, in your observation? You mentioned East Germany seemed very poor, but did you observe something similar in the Soviet Union?

BL: Well, we were in—[pause] I don't think so. I don't think so. We had diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union by the time I'm talking about, so I can't really draw any contrasting thoughts about the differences. Pretty poor in both places.

CP: So at some point, you moved to Asia?

BL: Yup.

CP: How did this come about?

BL: Well, that came as a—I was a business development manager for the western division—no, for Dow International, and was living in Midland. And that was when the time, the managers and the directors of the company had decided that we should have this Dow Chemical International. So I had had a lot of—quite a lot of experience by that time, in Asia. So when it came to decide where we were going to headquarter our business, we wanted to have these geographic divisions, and I had by far the best background on Asia of any of our managers. [1:00:02] So you know, I won the shot on that one, when it came to decide where to put the business.

Hong Kong turned out to be the logical place. By that time, I had traveled to back and forth to Asia enough to realize it was a very big territory, for one thing. So when the management was deciding where to put the headquarters, I prevailed on them, and I don't think it took much arm twisting, to put it in Hong Kong. For instance, you can fly from Hong Kong to Tokyo in about three and a half hours. You can fly from Hong Kong to Singapore in about the same time. So that made it appear appealing, and that's why we wound up where we did.

CP: Betty and Nancy came?

BL: Yeah. Nancy went to high school in Hong Kong. She went to what was called Hong Kong international school. The Lutheran Church, Missouri Synod had a very big presence in Hong Kong, in educating young Chinese. But now, by the time I was living in Hong Kong, there was a big influx of foreign-owned companies, which were coming to China. So they had kids they wanted to go to a good school, also. And there wasn't a good international school there for kids, like our—like, for instance, Peter. He would have been in his last year in Midland High School, and there was no good place for him to go to school in Asia. So he stayed with—he lived with a friend of ours who lived in Midland. He was a member of the varsity swimming team, and he wanted to finish his year there.

Jack was enrolled at Kalamazoo College, in Michigan. He unfortunately had a very low draft number, so he had joined the Navy. And he had been color blind, so he couldn't stand the watch; he couldn't tell red from green. So he got in the communications department, and first stayed at Quonset Point Naval Air Station, and then at Balboa in the Canal Zone. And when the war was partly over and it was clear that we were winning, the Navy decided they didn't need so many people in this communications station in Balboa, so Peter got out of the Navy a little early.

He hadn't had a salutary GPA when he was at Kalamazoo, so I prevailed on a good friend of mine who was—who worked with me in Hong Kong—I mean, during the war, and he was on the faculty at the University of Wisconsin. And so he talked to the director of admissions at Wisconsin, who talked to the director of admissions at Michigan, and they looked at Peter's record—I mean Jack's record—and they decided, "Well, if he'll come back now and take a quarter, we'll admit him on a probational basis, and we'll give him one term there. If he passes that term, then we'll let him into school." So that's what happened to Jack. That's why he went to school at—how he got to school at the University of Michigan.

CP: So, tell me about life in Hong Kong. My understanding is it was—

BL: Great, great.

CP: —they were very good years.

BL: Great place to live. Great place to live. We lived there in a great time, and it was back in the colonial days, when it was a British Crown Colony. [1:04:58] Democracy hadn't been invented in Hong Kong yet. The Hong Kong government

had a very rational policy. They wanted to make it as easy as they could for companies to make money there. I mean, make good business in Hong Kong, and that was good for the whole economy. So they had several organizations. They had a chamber of commerce, which I belonged to, and through that and some other things, I got acquainted with a lot of business people in Hong Kong, and we got to know them on a social basis.

So that was one of the things that made it very interesting to live in Hong Kong, because there were a lot of interesting people who lived there. And so that was—so the social life in Hong Kong was, probably didn't have a week went by that didn't have a black-tie dinner, or something or other. So that was one thing I really enjoyed about living in Hong Kong.

CP: How about Betty?

BL: She liked it, yeah. A lot of great restaurants there, and it was pretty easy to keep house. We had a maid, Ahing [?], who had been with us, who was with us all of the time we were in Hong Kong. She lived in the apartment. All of these apartments we lived in had maids' quarters on them, in the kitchen, all in the back room, and the maid had a combination there, too. So, Ahing was a pretty good cook, but if we wanted to have a really nice dinner, we would get the Hong Kong Club, or the American Club, or someplace like that, to just move into the house and cook the dinner there. And the Chinese were great cooks. That was another nice dimension of roughing it in Hong Kong. [Laughs]

CP: How about the language barrier?

BL: Betty learned enough Cantonese, so it was pretty hard for some shopkeeper to cheat her. She and the maid would go down—our driver would drive them downtown and drop them off someplace, and then they would go shopping. And Ahing could pick out all of the good vegetables, and things like that, and so that worked out very well.

CP: What were your responsibilities during this time period, with Dow?

BL: Oh, well, I became director of the company someplace along the way, and then I was—[pause]. Well, my responsibilities were pretty much like any other. I was still the most remote executive, and you know, that job in Hong Kong was really the best job I had in Dow. That was the one that—I enjoyed that more than anything else.

CP: Why is that?

BL: Well, because I had all of these—business was interesting, and I had an interesting job, and I had a lot of independence on the job. And I think that's the thing I enjoyed mostly.

CP: You did a lot of travel?

BL: Lots of travel. Lots of travel. It was back in the days when it was always an interesting experience to try to land at Kai Tak Airport in crummy weather. It was particularly—you probably weren't in Hong Kong in the old airport days, but like, the runway was out here, and you had—it ran that way, but the approaches were right over the roofs of tenements in Hong Kong. So at the last moment, you know, he would bank sharply to the right and flare the airplane out to land, because the end of the runway over there was in the ocean. [1:10:02] It was even more interesting when the other ones were taking off from the ocean, and then, at the last minute there, because they needed all the runway possible, you know, you'd come back on the yoke of the airplane and climb up over the tops of the apartments. They never hit the apartments, although I think there was one airplane that didn't—that landed too long, and wound up in the drink, but nobody was hurt. Now they have a new airport, which is fabulous.

CP: So this was a regular experience for you, though, this takeoff and landing scenario?

BL: Yeah, well, I did a lot of flying as a passenger when I was in the war, not as a pilot, but flying in the 10th Weather Squadron's airplanes. You know, we went in some pretty crummy, some really crummy air [unclear] there, bad weather that—

CP: Were there any memorable trips during this time? You traveled all over the place.

BL: What?

CP: Korea, Japan, Indonesia, Australia, New Zealand.

BL: Any what?

CP: Memorable trips?

BL: Oh!

CP: Trips that really stand out?

BL: Hm. I can't think of any that stand out one more than the other. [Pause] I remember one; well, it's just a little vignette here. When the war was—this is very close to the end of World War II, and I wasn't—I've got to think where. [Pause] This was when we had diplomatic relations with East Germany. I met the ambassador—this was an interesting thing. I met the ambassador, and you know, the Germans were down to the—they were fighting the Russians in those days. The Germans were almost down to the last scratch, and the ambassador was telling me this story, and even during the war, the Germans were going on as if—they were keeping fighting until the end of the war. They were keeping on.

And the ambassador was quite a young man in those days, and he recalled for me that, despite the fact that Germany was clearly losing the war, they were running part of their business as if the war wasn't going on. And he had applied—he had been in the army or something—he had applied to go to the naval academy, the German naval academy. And so, the allies were bombing the hell out of any place for—any place close to the water. But amazingly, they kept running this school for the naval academy. So he was at the naval academy school, which was in Vienna. And while he was there, learning to go to the naval academy—I mean, can you imagine that? The war was clearly lost, but they still kept this thing running.

While he was at the naval academy, the war ended. [1:15:01] So he was in Austria, and he had a pretty good idea what was going to happen when the Russians started really tearing things up in Germany. So he beat it to get into the western part of the country straight away, and met some Americans, and then was able to end his own war. But I always thought that was an interesting thing, to illustrate how people can hang around 'til the last minute. That's maybe the most kind of novel story, and I must say that this fellow who was the ambassador was a very—well, you know, he was a very well educated man. But it was one of those unique experiences. I mean, out of all of my experiences, this is maybe a little capsule of experience that sticks in my mind, that visit we had with him.

CP: What sort of operations were you overseeing? What was happening in Asia when you were in charge out there, for Dow? What kinds of things, or work, was going on?

BL: Oh, we had a big operation in Japan. We mentioned—I mentioned Asahi-Dow, which we ultimately sold our interest in that. We had a huge operation in Korea. We were at one time the biggest foreign investor in Korea. A very good experience, too. That business worked out very well. Not much business in Taiwan; it just wasn't a very interesting business opportunity. We had a building, an operation in Sumatra, and in Aceh Province. They were small agricultural chemical operations, mostly. We had a small, but quite a good operation in Australia. And when we actually sold our interest in Asahi-Dow, which was sort of a sad event, we kept the Styrofoam business. I don't know if they still have that or not, but we didn't sell it. That wasn't in the package of stuff that we sold.

CP: In what way was that a sad event?

BL: Well, you know, we had this very good business running, and then some of the senior Asahi-Dow—Asahi Chemical Company—directors decided they wanted to change the relationship between Dow and Asahi-Dow. Until that time we had put practically all our Dow plastics business in Asahi-Dow, and we hadn't had too much—no interference from, other than these executives that came from Asahi Chemical. And we were kind of old friends, working together in the same business. But then, about this time, some of the other directors of Asahi Chemical decided that they wanted to horn in and start helping us manage Asahi-Dow. We didn't need any help managing Asahi-Dow, but after a very long a protracted negotiation, we decided to sell the business. And I remember it was a very sad event to all of our friends in Japan that we'd jerked the rug out from under them. But that's how life goes.

CP: What was the culture like in these meetings in Japan and Korea?

BL: Oh, we'd always spend time visiting the factories, and dedicating new factories. That was always a big event to a Dow director out there, to break the champagne bottle over a new factory. An awful lot of meals that you had to eat out, so you had to have a pretty good stomach. [1:20:05] We liked Asian food, so that was no big problem for us.

CP: How about alcohol?

BL: Plenty of that. [Laughs] Plenty of that. Yeah, but we had to be pretty careful about that. We never had to drive a car, but I mean, somebody was always provided for a car driver, so you didn't have to worry about any DUI problems. Let's see, what else? Did I tell you about the school?

CP: The school that Nancy attended?

BL: Yeah.

CP: You talked about it a little bit, yeah.

BL: Yeah, okay. So, what else?

CP: How did this time wind up in Asia? How did you make the decision to go back Stateside?

BL: Well, I was sort of selected to go back Stateside. Unfortunately, well, what precipitated it, my successor in Hong Kong—well, I have to back up a little bit. I'd been in Hong Kong for about twelve years, which was probably over-long. I don't think—and so, and the business was very successful. The Latin American business was not successful, because the manager of the Latin American business at that time was not really cutting it.

So the management of the company, in their great wisdom—why they ever did this, I won't know—they decided I should go back to Coral Gables, which was then the headquarters of Dow Latin America, and this fellow who hadn't been cutting it there would move to Hong Kong. I mean, that was a—I didn't really care much for the Latin American job. I always used to say, when the office in Coral Gables, when the five o'clock whistle blew, you could have shot a cannon down the halls, and you never would have hit a soul. In Hong Kong, my secretary would never leave the office until I left the office. But anyway, the fellow who went to Hong Kong didn't do very well there, so we brought him back to Midland, in a staff job where he could keep out of trouble. [Laughs]

CP: Was Ben Branch still in the picture at this point?

BL: No, Branch was—I'm not sure whether Branch was the—maybe Branch was the chairman of the company then. I just don't recall.

CP: Okay, well, I think that's probably a good place to stop for now. Want to grab some lunch? Does that sound good?

BL: Yeah. How much more have we got to do?

CP: A little more.

BL: Okay. [1:24:11]