

Dennis E. “Pete” Byrd, Sr.

Interview by Detta Dahl in Moab, 2003.

Q: This is Detta Dahl. I’m talking with Pete Byrd at his house.

Pete: My name is Dennis E. Byrd, Sr.

Q: Thank you. We’re at his house in Moab, Utah. Good morning.

Pete: Good morning to you.

Q: Can I call you “Pete”?

Pete: Sure. I didn’t hear the name “Pete” for 25 years, till I came to Moab.

Q: Were you named Pete when you came to Moab?

Pete: No. The only person that called me Pete when I came to Moab was Charlie.

Q: Charlie Steen?

Pete: Yes.

Q: Because he knew you from before?

Pete: Turn that off a minute. (Tape turned off).

Q: Okay, Pete, how did you come to Moab? And why did you come to Moab?

Pete It's a long story. I grew up on a little ranch in Brown County, Texas, during the Depression and graduated from Brownwood High School. The next year my stepmother, who had been a schoolteacher, took me to Stephenville, Texas, and I enrolled in John Tarleton College. Tarleton was an ROTC military school and branch of Texas A&M. We rented a room off campus in a private home which was to be shared with some unknown student. When school started, my unknown roommate was a kid from Houston named Charles A. Steen. My first date at the school was Minnie Lee Holland who later became Charlie's wife. The next year Charlie transferred to El Paso School of Mines and, on June 24, 1941, I enlisted in the Marine Corps and lost track of Charlie until 1947 and again until 1952.

At Corpus Christi Naval Air Station, two months before I graduated from Naval Flight Training I January 1944, I met a Navy Wave named Mary Ruth Green. After completing Operation Flight Training at Jacksonville, Florida, I returned to Corpus Christi and married Mary on April 15. We had two weeks before I had to report to Marine Fighter Squadron VMF-523 which was located at Congaree Field, South Carolina. VMF 523 was equipped with the new 2000HP Chance Voight F4U fighter airplanes called the Corsair. It was America's first 400 mph fighter plane. We were trained by veteran Marine combat pilots who had fought Jap Zeros over Raboul, New Britain. Most of them were fighter aces who had shot down at least five enemy planes.

The only way for a Wave to get discharged from the Navy at that time was if she was pregnant. In May, the rabbit died and Mary joined me at Columbia, S.C. Christmas Day 1944 I was on the ship USS Earnest headed back to the Solomon Islands in the South Pacific. In January 1945, I received a Red Cross telegram at Leyte, P.I. that Virginia Fay Byrd had been born at the Columbia, S.C. Army Air Base nine months and ten days after our marriage. I was in VMF-115 at Zambonango when the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan and WWII ended. VMF-115 was packed and waiting for an airfield on the mainland of Japan to be captured so we could fly north and fly close air support for the ground troops trying to capture Japan.

I remained in the Marine Corps until July 14, 1950. During that time I went to several service schools and had two cruises as a fighter pilot aboard aircraft carriers. Returning from a fouled-up maneuver to Labrador in the winter of 1949, I decided to resign my commission in the Regular Marine Corps and go into the ranching business with my father in Brown County, Texas. My daughter Elise Adele had been born at the Camp Lejuene Marine Base. Dorothy Jean was born at the Marine Air Station, Cherry Point, N.C. and Mary was pregnant again. We were living in a 33-foot house trailer. Congress and president Harry Truman were not funding the Marine Corps well enough for us to buy gasoline, tires, and batteries so we could operate. Three months later, the squadron I left was in Korea.

We arrived at the Stone Ranch in July 1950 and moved out of our beautiful house trailer into an old shack of a ranch house on the 2300 acre ranch. We were stocked up on food and clothing, we owned a paid-for car and pick-up, were ahead on our trailer payments and had over \$5,000 cash we had saved. That fall, in partnership with my father, we stocked the ranch with lambs and calves. It rained enough that winter for us to make a little money when we sold out the next spring. The fall of 1951 we stocked the ranch again. It stopped raining and we didn't make any money when we sold that spring. In the fall of 1952 we borrowed, took in a third partner and restocked the ranch again. The drought continued and that period came to be known as "The Time It Never Rained." By October, I was feeding a pick-up load of feed plus cutting brush and burning the sticklers off prickly pears so our livestock would have something to eat. Before Christmas 1952, Mary and I decided that when we sold out the next spring, we were going to move some place, like her home in Pennsylvania, where there was green grass and trees.

In November, my sister who was teaching school at Hobbs, New Mexico, sent me an inch long clipping from the *Los Angeles Times* stapled to a sheet of paper. It had a Grand Junction dateline and it said that a geologist by the name of Charles A. Steen claimed to have discovered a rich deposit of uranium ore in Southeast Utah. On the paper she wrote, "I wonder if this is the Charles Steen who was your roommate in college?" Below her note on the paper I wrote, "If it is the same Charles Steen, congratulations" and gave him my address. I mailed the sheet of paper to the Grand Junction newspaper. The paper forwarded the note to Charlie and soon I had a letter from him.

A county road ran beside our ranch house. It was so rough and dusty that we could hear a car and see the dust from cars miles away. We heard a car coming the day after Christmas Day. As was the custom

of people living on that road, we went out to see who it was. Soon an unknown, old, beat-up Chevrolet turned in at our gate and skidded to a stop.

A big black and white dog with black spots leaped out of the right hand window of the car and started running through the chickens. The chickens started flying up in the trees squawking and the dog was barking and I yelled at the dog and the dog didn't pay any attention to me. About that time the driver's door opened up and a guy jumped out that I recognized as Charlie Steen. He saw me and he started yelling "Pete, I'm rich, I'm rich, I'm filthy rich!" He had just gotten out of this old car. It was a beat-up, gray Chevrolet Sedan. It sure didn't look like a rich man's car. We went in, this was right after Christmas, and we went in by the stove and sat down and talked. He kept talking about his mine, how rich he was, and how he drilled this hole and how his wife and kids were 65 miles away in Cisco and he was down there by himself with his mother, camping and sleeping on the ground. It just didn't make very much sense. Finally, I said "Well, how did you get this mine?" He said, "I staked mining claims." Well, I'd never heard of anybody staking a mining claim. I just figured when he showed up there he was going to try to get a loan from me and I wasn't the person who could loan him anything. We talked awhile and he kept telling me about all of his adventures in Utah and everything about Utah. He had just rented an apartment in Moab. Finally I kept trying to find out about staking these mining claims so he told me that all you had to do to get 20 acres of BLM land was put up four posts and a discovery notice on them and go record a "Location Notice" in the courthouse. I was real interested in getting some land and that sounded interesting. Well, I had a set of encyclopedias that I'd carried around all over the five states and had never used. I got the encyclopedias down and we looked up mining claims and lode mining claims. Somewhere we got off onto the homesteading idea and we looked homesteading up. He says "Well, there's lots of land that you can homestead around Moab." To get 160 acres, all you got to do is pay a small fee and live on it. The reason he came by our house was he'd been in Houston at Christmas. He'd gone from Houston to Dallas and bought a Mahew drilling rig that was to be delivered whenever he had money to pay for it. The only money he had was some money that somebody named Dan O'Laurie had loaned him to go to Houston for Christmas. We looked up homesteading and desert entries. It said you could get 320 acres if you made a desert entry and irrigated the land. By the time Charlie left, we'd come up with a plan; I would go to Moab. I might move to Moab with my family and we would live on the land and we would take up these homesteads for both of our families

and his mother. I think you could get extra land for each kid. With him being a geologist, he was going to drill the water wells with his new drilling rig and we were going to homestead all over Grand County. By the time he left, I decided I was going to Moab, make a quick trip to Moab and see what it was like. So I jumped in the car and drove nonstop 1,000 miles. I got to Moab about 2:30 in the morning. I think it was the 28th of December, 1952. Between Monticello and Moab, I could see that I'd never seen a world that looked like this country. On the top of Blue Hill there were a lot of lights. I learned later that it was an AEC camp. It looked bigger and brighter than Moab. When I got to Moab, I dropped into the valley on the old highway. It was real smoky. You could hardly see. It was like being in fog. The road came in by Hecla Subdivision and down Fourth East and turned down Center Street and, at Main, it turned north. There were about six street lights in town but you could hardly see them for the smoke. There was only one lighted sign in town. It read "Mom's Café." I pulled in there and when I got out of the car, coal and wood smoke just almost strangled me. I parked next to a little F6 Ford Dump Truck with a load of rock. Main Street was just the two lane highway going through town. The sides weren't paved. Along side of the pavement there were big things that looked like rocks. Actually they were gobs of mud and ice that had fallen off the uranium ore trucks during the day when it was warm and then they froze. You had to dodge between them to find a parking place. I went into this café where there was a truck driver and the waitress. It was located just between that two-story, rock building on Main Street and what's now the Slickrock Building. It was a little adobe building that has now been torn down. I ordered a cup of coffee asked this waitress if she knew where Charlie Steen lived. She replied "I've lived here all my life and I think I know everybody in this county and I never heard the name Steen before." The truck driver hadn't either. I sat there for awhile and she says "Why don't you call the telephone operator and maybe she knows something about Steen." So I dialed zero. Moab had a dial telephone. Grand Junction didn't have a dial system and Provo didn't have a dial system but Moab had a dial telephone system. So I dialed the operator and it rang and rang. Finally, I hung up and she said "Oh, you have to let it ring longer than that because it takes a long time to wake up the operator." Finally I got hold of the operator and she said "Well, Skeeter Stocks installed a phone for somebody named Steen yesterday, but I don't know where he lives." She gave me the telephone number. A little while later another truck driver came in and the waitress asked "Do you know anybody by the name of Steen?" He says "Yeah, that's that crazy son of a bitch from Texas. He claims he's found a uranium mine." Finally,

I went back up on the hill above the smoke and napped until it got daylight. Then I went down and called Charlie and then went to his house.

Q: And that's how you came to Moab.

Pete: That's how I came to Moab. When I got hold of Charlie on the telephone later that morning, I went to his house. He lived in a duplex on Third South that was just east of Mill Creek. There wasn't a bridge, it was just a place where you could ford the creek. We went and picked up Andy McGill and the three of us (Charlie drove) went out to Thompson. We drove out that old highway up out of the valley. Charlie was sitting there talking to Andy in the backseat and was turned around most of the time. That was the scariest road I ever was on and I think I was never as scared driving with anyone else. Charlie never was a very good driver.

Q: Charlie was driving?

Pete: Yeah. We went to Thompson. At Thompson, there was a uranium ore-buying station for the Atomic Energy Commission right beside the railroad. It was about 2 or 3 acres of land covered with piles of brown rock and a crusher and a place where they could load this uranium ore onto trains to ship it to Denver or to Salt Lake or to someplace else to be milled. An awful lot of people in Moab had little uranium mines. Before Charlie discovered his mine, there were probably three or four hundred so-called uranium mines within 40 miles of Moab and in all directions. Most of them were just gopher holes, and 2-man operations where they mined with picks or shovels and maybe a jackhammer and wheel barrows. A lot of the miners figured you could get rich if you could find a dinosaur skeleton that had uranium mineralization in the bone or a good big petrified tree. There were mines all along the cliffs with the gray streaks. That was the main place they prospected and, of course, all over Yellow Cat District, the area between Thompson and Cisco and the Colorado River. Charlie showed us some ore that had been dumped over in a corner that was separate from the brown ore piles. Charlie's ore was black. He says

“This is pitchblende that has come out of my Utex mine. It’s the richest stuff they’ve ever seen.” The only trouble was, they weren’t crushing it. It was just dumped over there in the corner.

We left Thompson and went on out into Yellow Cat area. There was an old caboose sitting on the top of a hill out there. It was a mining shaft shack and a couple of guys working a gopher-hole type mine. There was a little pile of ore that they’d hauled out with wheelbarrows, maybe 10 wheelbarrows loads, something like that. That was their production of ore since the last time they’d hauled ore to town. Normally the practice was to mine like that and then haul it into town and pile it in their yard until they got a truckload. Then they would hire a truck to haul it to Thompson.

From there we went toward Cisco on a dirt road, Right out in the middle of the desert, in the middle of no place, we stopped and Charlie says “This is where we lived in our trailer the winter of ‘51.” Charlie and his three or four kids, I think there was three and his wife spent the winter out there in a 13-foot travel trailer. They hauled their water. Luckily they didn’t have one of these bad winters. He had a little drill rig and prospected out there. They starved out and then went on to Tucson where he worked at the aircraft factory where they were building for Hughes Aircraft Company until he had made enough money to come back to Moab and try out prospecting again. That time they rented a tar paper shack at Cisco for \$15 a month. They didn’t have enough money to eat.

We went on to Cisco from there. He introduced me to Buddy Cowger and his wife, Mary. They ran the filling station at Cisco. Buddy Cowger was a paraplegic. He operated a wrecker and ran that filling station on a creeper board he’d fixed up so he could get around. He’d lift himself onto the wrecker and, of course, in those days, that road was narrow and people went fast and there were lots of wrecks. Buddy had a Geiger counter. Everybody was prospecting and most prospectors had Geiger counters. But Charlie didn’t have a Geiger counter. He was a geologist. He thought he knew what ore was when he saw it. A little later on, he drilled right through a huge ore body and didn’t know it. This leads into a whole chapter of this book.

Q: I guess we are getting the history of Charlie Steen. Maybe we need to get back to you.

You came out and ran around with him and...

Pete: I went out with Bob Barrett who was running the Utex mine. I don't know how we can separate the stories. The next day Charlie and I went to the Utex mine. I met Bob Barrett and I met Dan O'Laurie. Dan was all shook. He was the president of Utex Exploration Company. He'd loaned the company money to get Charley to set up the company and the mine. His loan was based on the wild assumption that Charley had discovered uranium. Let me go back and tell you about Buddy.

Charlie and his mother and a guy named Big Hoot had been down in Big Indian Minng District with a drill rig, loaned to Charlie by Bill McCormick. They drilled one hole. Charlie drilled right through the uranium ore and he continued drilling until he broke the drill pipe off which plugged up the hole. For some reason he'd thrown some of the cores that he'd taken out of this hole into his Jeep. After he broke the pipe, off he went to Denver and I don't know where all, trying to get some money to buy some more pipe. While he was gone, Bill sent somebody up there and took the drill rig away. So all Charlie had, when he got to Cisco after breaking off the pipe was some round core samples his kids had brought in. Buddy Cowger was checking some rocks that his kids had picked up and Charlie says "I got some that good" and so he went out and got these cores out of his old red Jeep. He brought them in and Buddy put the counter on them. No one had ever seen anything that radioactive before. When Charlie saw it, he took off running, screaming to his wife, who was about 100 yards away, "We're rich, we're rich" and he ran right through a clothesline full of clothes and broke it down. They were living in Cisco.

Then he went and got this good friend, Bob Barrett, who'd give him pinto beans and buckskin to keep his family from starving to death and sometimes filled up Charlie's Jeep with gas when he couldn't afford to buy any. They went out and they staked claims around the six claims where Charlie had his "discovery" hole. Then Bob and Charlie staked alternating claims all up and down that Big Indian hill. Then they got some publicity like the clipping my sister sent to me. The story appeared in the Denver Post one morning when Dan O'Laurie and Bill Hudson

were waiting for a plane to go to Casper. They were in the oil tank-building business. They saw the news item and contacted Charlie. Now Dan was the office manager, and Bill Hudson was over Dan at Chicago Bridge Company in Houston when they were in college and they'd loaned Charlie money to go to college. They knew him and they'd also given him jobs during the summer when he was in high school. They called him up and asked him if he needed some help. As a result of that, Dan flew down here to look the thing over and based on this one hole that Charlie said this core came out of, Dan raised the money, his own and from his friend, to sink a shaft to put the mine in production. They incorporated it and called it Utex Exploration Company. Dan was the president and Charlie and his mother had 51% of the stock and Dan and Bob Barrett had 49%. We met Dan on the way when we went to the mine in the bottom of a creek bed out there. Dan was all shook up because the AEC told him that the kind of ore that they'd shipped didn't have any buying schedule. The AEC had a buying schedule and it only for the types of ore they knew about. The experts didn't think there would ever be any of that kind of uraninite ore in America. So they'd shipped this ore and Dan was afraid that he and his friend had made a bad investment and would lose their money.

From there, we went on up to the mine and I met Bob Barrett. The next day I went out with Bob. We went down in the shaft which was an interesting experience for me. Riding a bucket down 85 feet into this hole when I've never been six feet underground in my life. Got down there and jackhammers were going all around and dust and noise so you couldn't talk in a room about maybe 900 square feet and the walls were about 8 feet high. And they were all black ore. Charlie had a Geiger counter by then and he ran it up and down these walls with all uranium ore, real hot stuff. I said "Is this stuff dangerous to be in?" He said "Oh, no. It's not hot enough to be unhealthy." There were five or six guys working down there including Oren Moore. Oren was the mine superintendent. Bob was the general mine manager and, in addition to that, Virginia Johnson was the cook and served all the workers wonderful food, (pies and steaks) and everything. Roweena Taylor, who was Donald Loveridge's sister, was the dishwasher and helped in the cook shack. Joe Pullian and his wife had the little store in front of the Bowen Motel and had given Charlie sometimes for food. So Charlie bought all of his gas and all of his food from the Pullian's.

They hired Joe as a welder.

Anyway, the next day Bob Barrett and I went up, we drove up to Dewey Bridge, then turned around and stopped at the Boulden Ranch on the way back, and boy! There was my dream; an irrigated ranch where they were pumping water out of the river, beautiful green fields, and this little cabin that actually was made mostly out of driftwood that had come down the river. It was an old homestead and that was just what I wanted. We couldn't go to Fisher Valley. Bob had a lease, and had been farming the Fisher Valley farm for Lester Taylor. They grew feed up there for Lester and to sell. He was kind of a sharecropper. We couldn't go to Fisher Valley because the road crossed the creek a hundred and twelve times in 9 miles. It was all frozen. So we went up the Polar Mesa Road and walked out to where we could look down a couple thousand feet onto this Fisher Valley ranch. Bob offered to let me take over his lease up there and farm that until we got the homestead going. That looked better than what I was doing burning prickly pear and cutting brush for feeding sheep and cows in Texas, so I went back to Texas and sold out my interest, bought a four-wheel trailer wagon and we loaded up all of our stuff. The deep freezer was in the middle of it. It was full of meat and food and the bed springs were tied on the back. I borrowed \$1,000 for moving expenses and, with the four little girls, we moved to Moab. We drove all night and when we got here, I didn't even stop in town. I drove right through town up to the Boulden Ranch so my wife, Mary, could see that beautiful homestead like we planned to have.

Q: So you came to Moab. What was the date?

Pete: It was around the 4th of March 1953 that we got here.

Q: And you came to live out in Castle Valley?

Pete: No. Fisher Valley. Fisher Valley is very different from Castle Valley. You can get to Castle Valley. There's three of these big valleys. There's Moab Valley, then there's Castle Valley, and

then there's Fisher Valley and they kind of parallel each other.

Q: I see.

Pete: We stayed in the Bowen Motel the first night and then we moved down to the Red Rock Lodge where Lena Shields let us have a hot plate in our room. We ate most of our meals at Charlie's place. That was an experience that's beyond comparison. For Christmas, they bought these four boys tricycles. The oldest one was about eight, and mining boots. They were the most rambunctious kids I've ever seen. They had this Dalmation dog named Butch. He had bought a new red Lincoln sedan. It wasn't with money from the mine. Before he went to Texas, he went down to Cortez and traded a 50-foot strip through his mine for this red Lincoln. According to Alan Darby, that was the most expensive car anyone ever bought. It was bright red, had white leather cushions that were covered with melted chocolate and strawberry ice cream and dog hair. You'd try to eat at that place and, in the time that I knew him, I never heard Charlie or his wife discipline the kids in any way. M. L., his wife, might say "Well, you kids are driving me crazy. I wished you'd be quiet" but she'd never discipline them, not ever. The kids were going from one end of this three-room apartment to the other as fast as they could go on these tricycles, screaming, and the dog running alongside of them barking. When they got off of the tricycles they were running around jumping off a wardrobe trunk in the other room.

Q: Did you have your three or four girls there?

Pete: My four girls.

Q: So there were eight kids.

Pete: Eight kids, and then Charlie's sister-in-law and her husband had two kids and they were living in the other side of the duplex and they were usually there. One time as they ran down the

table, the dog went through stuff and grabbed a pound of butter. Charlie and M.L. thought that was the most wonderful thing, that they could afford to feed that dog butter. Another time it was a steak.

Q: So the dog wasn't disciplined, either?

Pete: The dog was totally undisciplined. Neither were the kids.

Q: I imagine your kids thought this was great fun.

Pete: Oh, my kids were raised too strict. Then somebody said if you want to rent a house in Moab, you find Sog Shafer. Sog has a lot of rentals. He bought up Sheriff's tax sales and things like that. The population of Moab was 1271 when we arrived and when we drove by the sign my wife says "Well, we're going to add six more to that number, 1271 will now be 1277. The only trouble was that wasn't right because there'd been an out-migration after the 1950 census, because people couldn't make a living in Moab. We were the first family, other than Charlie, that came as a result of his uranium discovery, that had kids in school. Ginnie and Elsie were in school. We found Sog and we rented a little house that was made out of a bedroom of an old trailer that was just big enough for a bed. I bought a horse, a milk cow and some calves from Texas. There was room enough beside the place we lived to put them. This house was along what is now Second South Street, just east about the third house. It would be about the third house east of Fourth East. There's a little house in there now, but the one that we lived in burned down later. Sog was quite a character but that's a whole other story. He was the guy that pioneered the Shafer Trail and took his cows down there by the river and then he would live long enough to come out and pay his debts during the Depression. He became a lifelong friend. I hadn't been here but a few weeks and my horse fell on me and broke my foot. He let us get behind in the rent. He was just a help to us and we became we became lifetime friends.

Q: Was this your horse that fell on you?

Pete: Yeah. He (*Sog*) was one of the first people born in Moab Valley. He was born in a shack, log cabin over here about two hundred yards from where we are now.

Q: About when was he born, do you think?

Pete: Lydia Skewes was born before him and I don't know what year it was. He was one of the early ones. I think he graduated in the first class of Junior High School. He had a phenomenal memory. I wished I had recorded what he told me. Then we rented a house from Mildred Young's daughter. I guess it's about Third East or Second East, someplace over there. It was a pretty nice house. On the 16th of May, Charlie decided to get an airplane. By that time, the idea of farming and homesteading had got suppressed by this mining thing that was getting so big. Before that Bob Barrett and I bought a Tri-Pacer airplane together, on his credit, not on mine. We'd bought it down in Cortez and flown it a little bit. I could even fly it with a broken foot. When people got rich, about one of the first things they did was buy an airplane. Charlie put out an announcement that he wanted to buy an airplane and the only airplane that was close to our airplane that was built that would hold two couples and a pilot was a Cessna 195. They brought in two, one came from a used airplane dealer in Denver and the other one was from Casper, Wyoming. A Dodge dealer up there had this plane fixed up special to fly back between Casper and Phoenix. It had a big engine and extra gas, extra equipment. So Charlie bought it. It was real nice, almost like a new airplane. So I went out when the guy brought it down here. I went out and rode with him and shot a few landings. I hadn't flown but a couple of times between the time I got my flight time in the Corsair in July 1950. This was '53 so I hadn't flown in that period of time. I guess we shot two or three landings in that 195 then the guy left. I figured the next morning I'd go out and fly around a little bit and get the feel of the airplane and try to learn how to fly it because it was totally different than anything I'd ever flown in my life. The next morning I had three people to take to Grand Junction! That was the beginning of it and, for nine months,

I seldom hit the ground.

Q: So Charlie hired you as a pilot of his plane?

Pete: Yeah. Not only was it a pilot job, it entailed being a traveling companion or, I wouldn't say a bodyguard, but it was a 24-hour "gofer job," too. Whenever that plane left Moab, it had four seats that could be used and invariably they'd all be filled up with some of the hanging-on people that showed up, the relatives and stuff like that, especially his mother. She was a real problem. When I flew out the third day, I flew that airplane up to Casper, Wyoming, and the wind was blowing too hard, so I wouldn't take off up there. I went to a show. It was the world premiere of the movie Shane. The banner across the street was just blown to ribbons. I flew all over the western part of the United States. I would sometimes make three trips to Grand Junction a day, a couple trips to Salt Lake in a day.

Q: Would you have to do the mechanical work?

Pete: What was done here, I had to do. I wasn't a mechanic but I did some and we'd get a little bit done in Grand Junction. The major work we'd get done. Some we had done in Phoenix, and we had an engine change at Midland, Texas, because that was the only place we could get a replacement engine in this Cessna. With this big engine, the airplane was very unstable. About one of those first trips I made was to take Joe Pulliam and Albert Arbek and Helen Pulliam and one of the, I can't think of his brother's name, anyway, to a Tulsa Oil Show and I'd never flown across the mountains. I didn't know the country. I wasn't really familiar with the airplane. I'd never flown it. Most of my flying had been as a junior officer in a formation when I was either in the tail end or I was in the middle of it. All I had to do to get someplace was to stay with the rest of them. So, before I took off for Tulsa I plotted my course and everything and this Joe

Pulliam says “I’ve hunted all over western Colorado. I know that country like the back of my hand. You don’t have to worry, we won’t get lost.” So we got over Delta, Colorado and I said “Is that Delta or Montrose?” He says “Pete, I don’t see anything I recognize.” I figured out where we were and I plotted my course across Monarch Pass and started climbing up the mountain there and we were just as high as the airplane would go. It was just very unstable at that altitude with that load. I got between two rocks and two layers of clouds, trying to climb across that mountain. I wasn’t sure where I was. I finally picked up a homer beacon and, of course, couldn’t look at the map because I was too busy keeping the airplane going. About that time, Helen Pulliam was sitting in the back seat and she reached over and she whispered to me “Pete, I just got to pee.” We had some quart ice cream cardboard containers back there. I don’t know how she managed.

I gave up going across that mountain. I turned toward that homer radio beacon. When I landed, I knew where I was because out on the front of the hanger it said Monte Vista. We took off from Monte Vista and we went to La Junta and from La Junta to Tulsa. I dropped them off at Tulsa and I went back to La Junta, Colorado, and spent the night. I slept in the airplane. I was too tired to even go to town. The next day I was back here and that was the way it went. I don’t remember the exact dates of things.

I’d never flown to Salt Lake. The first trip I went to through there I took the plane to Salt Lake. Charlie sent me up to get part of a band that was going to play for the first Moab Uranium Discovery party. Bob Barrett had by that time bought a yellow Bonanza and Ralph Goodrich was flying Bob’s plane. Ralph was from Richfield so he knew the country real well. So all I had to do was follow Ralph and we went down over the Needles and over Richfield and all over the world to get to Salt Lake. We picked these guys up and their instruments. Then we brought them in here and they had this party at the old Arches Ballroom which was between the Nifty Fashion Store, that big building. It was just a big open barn at that time. There wasn’t any second floor. It was just a big open hall.

Q: And that was the Arches Ballroom?

Pete: Yeah. They had a stage in the front of it. They had this dance that lasted all night. Across the street where the brands are burnt into the wall (*Overlook Gallery*), that was the Wagon Wheel Bar run by Keith Barker. Anyway, I was told that they gave away a truckload of beer over there that night. The next morning I was told that they had to take a road grader to grade the beer bottles out of the street. This party lasted all night and that was the first Uranium Discovery Party. The next morning, of course, I didn't get much sleep that night.....

Q: You went to the party?

Pete: Oh, yeah, I went to the party and I was a participant in the party. Well, the next morning I got up and I had to take these guys back to Salt Lake. That was my second trip to Salt Lake. When I got back to Moab, Charlie and his mother and the Blackburn brothers were at the airport with their bags. Momma Rose's husband, Mr. Shumaker, had died in Houston and she had to go to take care of Mr. Shumaker. We took off and got to Roswell, New Mexico, that night. The only place we could get to stay was in a "Y" where two highways came together and all these trucks were parked around there with their motors running all night. About 2 o'clock, Charlie said "I'm ready to go. Let's go." We got up, went out to the airport and I took off and it was as black as the inside of a cow. The only way we knew which way was up or down was we could see the oil wells burning in different directions. We went to Houston.

When I got to Houston, we landed and I was sick. Of course, the house was hot as could be, and all these people were there and they were all drinking. That whole year I was kept hauling a bunch of drunks from one place to another.

Q: And what year was this?

Pete: This was '53. From May of '53 to the first of '54.

Q: You hardly saw your family at all.

Pete: I didn't see them at all. Finally, along near the end of the year, Mary said "I'm not going to live like this." So it was decided that I set up and operate an airport operation. You haven't got enough tape to hear all this.

Q: We can come back.

Pete: No.

Anyway, I said "I'm not going to stay here. I'm going to go get me a motel where it's cooler and where I can get some rest." After a couple of days, we were ready to come home. Charlie and I left the rest of them down there and we took off. The clouds were low and I flew among the oil derricks and in under the clouds for awhile and we finally got back and landed. Eventually we got home. But that was kind of typical. I'd go to Las Vegas with a load of people and come back and there'd be another load to go. Go out there and sit for days. Well, I never liked to sit too many days.

Toward the end of the year we decided to go into the airport business. In the beginning, we were going to call it UTEX Aviation Company and Charlie wanted to be partners in it. I got an old guy that taught me to fly back in Texas to come up here and help us operate it. He'd spent most of his life working in the carnival- type atmosphere and he turned out to be one of the biggest crooks I ever ran into, although I'm probably alive because of what he taught me. He taught me to fly. The county had built a hangar out there at the old airport and they built a lean-to on it. We moved into the lean-to before the plumbing was in. We had to build an outhouse when we moved out there. We hauled water. We had to generate our own power. There were two electric lights. There wasn't an electric light between the airport and the one at Holyoak's house on Holyoak Lane. We had to generate our own power out there. We had to haul water.

We started the airport operation.

Q: And you had the four girls?

Pete: I had the four girls. The town of Moab was boomin' this year. When we moved here, it was at 1271 [*the population*]. When we went to the Post Office we would walk down the street you would see people, clusters of people pointing at you and talking about you because nobody ever moved to Moab. They couldn't figure out why and they didn't trust the Gentiles anyway. They didn't trust people from Texas because so many outlaws come up here during the outlaw days and they couldn't figure out why in the world we came to Moab. It took a long time. My son was born here and he's still not a native to some people.

I started to tell you about this airport operation in Moab. I gave you that copy of the True Magazine article about Charlie Steen. When that was published everybody in America saw it. See, after the war, there were thousands of young guys in our 30s. We had gone home and we were disappointed. We weren't satisfied. We were restless; we had families. We were looking for better opportunities. We read that article and then all the publicity that followed that. You name it... Fortune Magazine, Time Magazine, Life Magazine, Look Magazine... all had write-ups on this uranium boom and Charlie Steen's discovery and Vernon Pick's discovery. Everybody decided "if he can do it, we're going to Moab and we're going to get rich, too." Well, in a year's time I think the population was more than double. By 1954, if I'm not mistaken, there was about 7500 people here. The water system consisted of some pipes coming down from springs above Center Street there. There were no meters. There was always a shortage of water. There were irrigation ditches that went to almost all the houses in town. There wasn't a block in town that didn't have a corral, milk cow, chickens, and outhouses on them. The blocks were 10 acres the way they were originally set up so that there would be four 2-1/2 acre homesteads on a block. Moab was the headquarters, had always been the headquarters, for operations that were conducted on the Federal Land surrounding the town. Moab was settled, we soon discovered primarily from Sog Shafer, that the reason it was here was because of Mill Creek and the water that was available for irrigation so that they could raise something. There was a siren on top the

Midland Telephone Building that blew at noon and it blew whenever there was a fire. Whenever that siren went off and it wasn't noon, everybody turned off their water so there'd be more water to fight a fire. The sewage, Howard Shields told me that in 1946 or '47, he installed 256 toilets in Moab. There hadn't hardly been any toilets up until after World War II. The sewer pipes they had, if they didn't go into a septic tank or something, they went down and went through Holiday Haven. I think there's still a little concrete structure out behind in that direction, southwest of Holiday Haven. It would fit in a corner of this room and that was the sewer treatment plant. All the sewer drainage went through the plant and into the river and Cataract Canyon was Moab's sewer treatment plant until the early 1960s.

I was trying to tell you this airport thing took off because of all these prospectors and promoters coming out of Salt Lake City and from all over the world. They'd fly in and we had DC3's, a converted B26, and all kinds of airplanes landing at Moab

Q: A DC3 is a pretty good size airplane isn't it?

Pete: Yeah, it's like Frontier used to fly. We had big planes like that coming in bringing these mining company executives.

Q: Did you build the airport?

Pete: No. The runway was built before I came here. When we started flying out there, there wasn't anything except the runway. The only tie downs were some that Monte Mason put in for himself. We used to tie down on them. There weren't any improvements at all except for the little tar paper shack about 8 x 10 feet. There was an old crank-type telephone in it and a stile that went over the fence and a cattle guard. Then the County built that one hangar which was 60 x 80 feet. That was the main terminal. When I took over, I put a gas pump in, a second-hand gas pump. After six months or so, I decided I was giving away all my profit because the pump wasn't

any good.

Q: How did they get the gasoline here?

Pete: Hauled it in from Salt Lake. Ken McDougald was an oil distributor and his place of business was where Navtec is. In 1955-56, based on gallons of gas sold, we were the second busiest airport in the State of Utah.

Q: Did you have landing fees and pickup fees?

Pete: No. We had one toilet in our apartment and it was in the room nearest the front room and it was used by the public. A real sore spot was that when it was froze up, Rose Shumacher, Charlie's mother used it. She was a real pain and problem for me.

Q: Were you paid a salary or just selling gas?

Pete: No. Actually we paid to get it. We don't have time to go into that story. You don't have enough tape to tape all that story. But the airport business really took off in early 1954. Our business and our income doubled every month for about six months. I bought a new Cessna 180 when they first came out and I was flying night and day. We had those old crank telephones with about 12 families on the same line. (END OF SIDE 2, TAPE A)

Q: This is a continuation from Tape 1 for Dennis Byrd, Detta Dahl

Pete: When I came up here between Christmas and New Year's of '52, while I was out at the mine, I made a deal with Jimmy Johnson who was Virginia's son and who was running a hoist out there. He was going up and stake some claims for them so I gave him a check for \$1.00. That's

what it cost to record a claim. He went up and staked five claims for them and one for me up at the north end of where Charlie and Bob's strip of claims ended. My claim was called the Bow Legs Claim. He took the location notices. It was all snow out there. Took the location notices down to Monticello, recorded it and used my check. Later on, after I came up here but before I started flying, I went out with Bob Barrett and two guys named, one named Hudson, Tom Hudson, a relative of Bill Hudson, and another guy. I can't think of his name. Anyway, we staked some claims. The deal was that we would start at what we called the mushroom rock (it looked back toward UTEX) and stake alternating claims. We put up the location notices for two claims for me and one for Rowena Taylor. Then every other one was for these guys. The deal was that they would go to Monticello and record these claim notices. I gave them the money to record my claims. The only thing was the next day they come out and, knowing what had been done before, in effect jumped the claims, our claims and the ones they'd staked, too.

Q: Their own claims?

Pete: Yeah. Staked over them and then they recorded the notices.

Q: Off the new ones?

Pete: Well, mine was the Dissipation and the Wig, that was the name Bob puts on my location notices.

Q: And they had recorded those before they overstaked them?

Pete: Yeah. We only put up the notices on the corners of Bob's and Charlie's claims, see, so the back, or the west corners, were not put up that day. They went out and they just ignored our agreement and re-staked all the claims. They were supposed to come back as part of the deal for

taking them up there and showing them where to stake. They were to put up all the west corners. Well, eventually, while I was working for Charlie flying the plane, Johnson and myself made a deal with E. L. Cord, who was this guy that built the Cord automobile, to pay \$5,000 down and \$100,000 a claim for my Bow Legs and the Johnson claims. The other deal with Bow Legs and the Wig and the Dissipation, I gave Bob and his pilot a 2/3 interest in what I owned. Of course we had to get lawyers in Salt Lake to resolve that mess. That's another long story.

Eventually, we got this thing settled with these guys and Homestake bought the claim or leased the claims that they had and those that we'd staked. They were holding out for this Bow Legs claim that Cord had. I wound up with 6-1/4% interest, royalty interest, on this Dissipation and Wig claim and I gave Bob and Ralph 2/3 interest of my interest. I had 2% overriding royalty. That alone paid me as much as \$3,000 a month. I regularly was paid \$400 or \$500 a month, lots of months, but one time it paid \$3,000 for one month.

Q: This was based on production?

Pete: Yeah. With that I bought an airplane, with the down payment on that, I bought a new Cessna 180 airplane. The UTEX Aviation Company wound up in a lawsuit and I had to fire Berle Tibbs. My old flight instructor came here from Texas because he'd take flights. Mary ran the office and he wouldn't turn in the money; he'd pocket it. Finally I fired him and he said "Aren't you going to give me any severance pay?" I said "No, you've been stealing from me all along." He said "Okay." He said "Now, I want to tell you something, Dennis." "You think that guy, Steen, is your friend." He says "He's not your friend. One of these days he'll pull your strings and you won't jump high enough and that will be the end of you." Well, he was exactly right. Charlie and his mother got so overbearing. The business got so big that I couldn't satisfy them. It wound up in a lawsuit, a partnership lawsuit that was as nasty as any divorce you've ever seen. Unfortunately, Charlie had one of his employees call up out there. We'd each put in equal amounts of money. My money from the claims and he put cash into the business and then he'd loaned the business some money.

Q: This is the airport business?

Pete: Yeah. When he decided I was no longer his servant, he abandoned the whole thing including a \$20,000 debt for the loan that he got without my consent. I had to pay it for him. Unfortunately, they called Mary one time when we had some money, and demanded it and she gave them \$2,000. As a result of that, the judge had to rule that when you make a payment on an alleged obligation, the obligation becomes valid. So we lost the lawsuit. It cost us all the money we had in savings for our kids and a year later the judge told me, he said “You didn’t have to pay that guy that money.” He says “He wasn’t entitled to that but there wasn’t any way you could prove it. I couldn’t rule against him because you had given him money. I thought you’d take out bankruptcy.” I told him “I took it all out of savings and paid him off.”

Well, during that time when we changed the name to Byrd Aviation and I operated the airport until the middle of 1956. We had been growing by leaps and bounds. We were buying more airplanes, hired pilots, and one morning I looked around and I had about three pilots sitting there with nothing to do and the airplanes sitting out there not running. That quick the prospecting and promoting phase of the uranium industry had changed. It was over.

Q: Like overnight?

Pete: Overnight. In the meantime, I had made a deal with Mr. Floyd Odlum, who was the president and founder of Atlas Corporation who had bought the Pick Mine which was north of Hanksville near the Muddy River and paid \$9 million dollars, supposedly \$9.2 million dollars cash, for it. As a result of that, him and Atlas Corporation had sold Consolidated Aircraft Company to General Dynamics. They had also sold Sun Ray DX Oil Company, or something, and he was sitting on about \$30 million in cash. So he decided to invest in the uranium industry. The Pick Mine was the first thing. He had two pilots. Odlum’s wife was Jacqueline Cochran, a famous woman aviator, a race pilot. He had a Lodestar put in. The Lodestar was very much

like Charlie's first plane. He had a pilot and co-pilot that worked for him and they became real good friends. Through them, he learned that I had this interest in these mining claims. In the meantime, the E. L. Cord outfit had paid the down payment, giving me \$5,000 down payment but then they wouldn't pay any more. We let them drill holes and they found ore. They wouldn't pay any more because they were having boundary disputes. Almost a year later, I found out that they were making their own boundaries just because they were trying to make their claim bigger. So I wound up selling some of my interests to Odlum. When he found out about it, he decided he wanted to buy it, he was up at the Utah Hotel and he sent that Lodestar down here to pick me up and take me to him. Here was a guy that had borrowed \$1,000 to move and was now being flown to Salt Lake to make a deal. I got acquainted with him. Later on, I went to the ranch at Indio.

He hired me, basically because of the knowledge I had of what was gone on. Because I'd flown all over the country and knew a lot of these miners and what they were doing and what they were claiming they found and everything. He merged a whole slew of companies together, Federal Uranium, Radorock, Hecla, and all these things. He had a little company that he called the Davidson Syndicate. The Davidson Syndicate was a group of investors that he put together to go to Yemen and drill for oil. Before they got over there, the King's brother had the King beheaded and the deal fell through. So they were sitting on this money that they'd raised to go over there. So they decided to invest it in the uranium industry. As such, this Davidson Syndicate, they had a little office down in Monticello and a guy named Davidson running the thing. Odlum had an idea he wanted to get rid of Davidson, so he hired me to take over that little operation.

Then he had a son named Bruce Odlum. He had two sons, Bruce and Stanley, and his first wife was Hortense. She was the manager of the Bonwit Teller Store in New York. Bruce was mixed up in the movie industry. He produced a movie. Odlum had already bought RKO or Atlas had, and had a lot of other things like that. Anyway, he hired me and merged this company. First, he incorporated and then he merged it into five other companies. By the end of 1956, it was

a full time job for me.

I lived here by the old airport. I flew Fred Stoye and Kenny Erb's brother to Salt Lake with a plat rolled up to talk to the bankers about financing their subdivision. The plat was for out in the new subdivision. On that plat I picked out a lot. I said "I want this lot." When the house was built, that was our house. We lived there for a year or two. By that time, we had enough money that, when the house was ready, Mary and I went up to Salt Lake. We flew up to Salt Lake and went in to the furniture store up there and bought all of the furniture and furnished that new house. Like I say, the Odlum job became more and more time consuming. Part of my deal was that I had bought a new Cessna 180 equipped the way they wanted it equipped. They guaranteed me so many hours a month that they paid me whether I flew it or not. We had a little mine up above Rangeley, Colorado. As a result of this, the publicity came from these big deals, everybody that had a prospect was trying to get to and from somewhere. Odlum wanted a uranium mine in California so he made deals, leased them, I guess you'd say. Claims around Blythe and Brawley and down in that area. Then their practice was to live in New York. Odlum had an apartment on Riverside Drive in New York and then in the wintertime they had a ranch at Indio.

Q: California?

Pete: That was where they spent the winters. Part of my job, we had a little crew to do assessment and development which was to try to find uranium on these claims he had out there. I'd fly out there. My instructions were that whenever I was on company business in California I was to go to the ranch by plane, and I was to spend the night there because they charged each company for nights that people stayed there. There were more ways to deal than you can imagine. I got my checks for the airplane from Albuquerque from an outfit called Air Fleet, Inc., which was set up to lease airplanes to airlines. Randy Loveless was a good friend of theirs. So when I was at the ranch, or when I was around Blythe working with the guys on the mine, when

it got late in the afternoon, I flew to Indio and spent the night at the ranch.

When they were there, there was just no telling who would show up for dinner. I got well acquainted with the housekeeper. Odlum had a nurse that was with him all the time, and his secretary. It was an experience that was incomparable. I mean, you talk about living high on the hog. Well, Jackie had these trophies about this high with Harman trophy, the Bendix trophy for airplane racing. She bought this rug at the World's Fair and it had been in storage up until then. This was '55, '56, '57, somewhere in there. So they built a room for this rug and the rug was about the size of this house, I mean the main part of this house, with a huge fireplace in the end of it. The room was so big they had to have special-made furniture for it. That's where these trophies were displayed and they had a grand piano in one corner and the other corner was set up with a bunch of tables where they served meals. When I was there I was treated just like I belonged there. Bruce Odlum, when he merged these companies together, the promoters had a guy named Rudolph Larsman and five other companies. They had oil wells up at Newcastle Wyoming, mines in North Carolina, they had beach sand at Jacksonville, Florida, then, and they merged all those things into what eventually became the Chesapeake-Colorado Mining Company and I was made the director and vice president of it. Bruce, his son, was the president. Our directors' meeting was held in the office of Simpson, Thatcher, and Bartlett in New York at 125 Broadway. Bruce and his mother lived in the Drake Hotel so he always stayed with her and I stayed in the hotel.

One time, when I was there at the ranch, we got some claims down by Cameron, Arizona, from a Dr. Lincoln. He told Mr. Odlum about seeing some Navajo rugs at Copper Mountain trading post and Odlum asked me to go look at them. So Lincoln took us out there and I don't know where it was. I probably couldn't take you to Copper Mountain Trading Post but it was some place on the south side of Lake Powell at the time. I'd say about halfway down, way out there in the middle of no place. We went out there and this old guy who ran the trading post had these Navajo rugs hanging in his warehouse on wire. He pulled them down and unrolled them. I would imagine that one of them was so large and big that I couldn't get it in the back of the

airplane folded up but it was probably like the one over there.

Q: 12 x 10?

Pete: Something like that. The other one was smaller than that but it was still about the biggest rug I've ever seen. He quoted us a price on it. I just can't make a decision like this so I told him that I thought Odlum would like them we would go ahead and buy them. Finally, I made a deal with that guy. I said "I'll take the rugs and give you a check."

Q: Can you remember how much they were?

Pete: Oh, maybe \$1500, something like that. I said "If I'm not back with these rugs by a certain date, you run the check through." That was all I remember. So I took the rugs out to California and in this new room they spread them out on the floor, like throw rugs on the floor, like that rug. They laid there for two or three days. They got word that Mr. Odlum's son, Stanley, had committed suicide by jumping out of a building in New York. All of sudden everybody was getting all wound up with getting ready to fly back on the airline to New York. I got hold of the secretary and said "I've got to have a decision on these rugs. They haven't said whether they want them or not and I've got to get them back and I can't afford to own them." So she got it taken care of. She said "They'll take them. Go ahead and you don't have to worry about it." They flew back to New York. That was the big room they got condemned after it got built. They had to rebuild it. Out there the houses sat on mainly the hill. It was all desert and they graded up sand and so the hill was maybe 10 feet high or so. They put a house on it.

Q: Where is this?

Pete: Indio.

Q: California?

Pete: Yeah. It was surrounded by citrus groves and dates. On that ranch they'd put up, during one deal they put up I forget how many people. Right on the ranch. Bruce had a house, Mr. Odlum had a house, and I think Stanley or somebody else had a house. There were three big houses on there plus like a motel and a nine-hole golf course. There was a little two story building just across the road from the main house where they had the four rooms. There were two upstairs and two downstairs with baths and it was a guest house. I stayed in a room that Eisenhower stayed in when he came to the ranch.

Q: And your job was still basically flying? Pilot?

Pete: Well, it was helping to manage this company and supervising the work. I went to Casper. I went to North Carolina, South Carolina, Washington D.C. and New York.

Q: So you were administrator, too?

Pete: Yes. This went on and it got to where I was running so much we decided to move to Salt Lake. We moved up there, I think it must have been before school started in '58, because the kids went to school up there two years. I bought a nice house. I had my income. I don't remember what it was, but I know it was about \$700 plus so much an hour for my airplane. We were still getting so much royalty off the mining claims. I think it was \$1500 a month plus I wrote checks on the bank account covering my expenses.

Q: So this was about '58?

Pete: Between '58 and '60. Say '57 to '59.

Q: So we've covered about ten years this morning. I think we'll have to stop now and we'll just have to continue this.

2nd interview -

Q: Part of these subjects we have covered in detail: the specific reason for your being in Moab, what brought you here, what your job consisted of, and how long you did it. You talked a little bit of what your housing was like when you first moved here. You were kind of camped in a trailer?

Pete: For our first house, we were told that John "Sog" Shafer was the person to see because he had rentals. We rented a little house from him on what is now Second South, (except it wasn't Second South, it was an irrigation ditch). We went into this little house from the backside. It was a trailer with a lean-to on it. The bedroom was like a trailer; you couldn't get between the walls and the bed. We stayed there awhile, and then we got a nice house that belonged to Mildred _____'s daughter.

Q: What was the housing market like?

Pete: There wasn't any housing market.

Q: How did that change in the time you were here?

Pete: Moab, so far as I know, was the first town, boomtown, that utilized house trailers to the extent that it did here. I spent some time up in Rangely, Colorado. Rangely boomed a few years

earlier when the oil development took place. People lived in shacks and dugouts and everything else. But Moab started growing from a population of about a thousand when I got here. Right away; whenever there was a uranium story in the paper, we got a few more people in. I think that by the middle of '56 it was estimated that there were about 7500 people here. There had only been about 3 houses built after World War II until 1953. New houses were such a rarity that H. B. Evans, the shop instructor took his class to watch Marvin Cleaver build a house. It was such an unusual thing to have a contractor built house. Most of the newer houses were made out of logs up until that time. It wasn't until about 1956 that this subdivision, Palisade, was platted. About the same time the Mountain View Subdivision and the Walker Subdivision were platted. There wasn't any money here. It was a very poor place. The bank didn't have any money to loan for houses. The people could get good trailer houses financed through the finance companies. The first houses built here were in Mountain View and Walker and they were financed, I think through Colorado State Bank or someplace over in Colorado. They were FHA houses. My first new house was one on Mountain View Drive. I had a VA loan on it; I think it was \$12,750 and 4 % interest. I picked the first lot in Mountain View Subdivision. About the same time they started building the first Palisade houses and the Walker houses. They were all built as cheap as you could build a house. But there was no local financing at all. In fact, when I came back after I got my Real Estate License, and moved back to Moab in 1960, I went to First Security Bank and the manager sent me to Spanish Fork to talk to Max Thomas who was in charge of First Security Loans. He told me four times in a very short time that First Security wasn't interested in putting any investment money in southeastern Utah. When the boom started in 1953, I doubt if there was a block in town that didn't have an outhouse, and a corral and a milk cow and horses. Moab was the headquarters for the ranching operations that were conducted on the BLM land. It's always been the headquarters for the businesses that existed outside of the city or outside of the valley. At that time, in order to hold BLM permits a person had to have what they called "base land" which was to raise hay on to take care of their livestock when the grass was not growing on the BLM land.

These little farms here were base land for operations that were conducted mostly outside of the area. It was also the headquarters for the uranium miners that lived in Moab and worked in the mines. They spent most of their time outside of the city limits. Places where there were water lines were very limited. Water lines usually went to water troughs in these corrals. The corrals became trailerparks because you could park a trailer everywhere where you could get water. They didn't have sewer connections so they just dug cesspools or septic tanks. As a result we had trailers all over town. Compared to what we would have had if we hadn't had the trailers, that was great. We had trailer sales at the corner of Main Street and First North, others on the land where the Moab Diner is, on the land next to Klepsic's place, and where Royce's is. One guy was from Las Vegas and he wore a diamond ring about as big as your watch and had a trailer sales lot. Lots of money in trailer lots. To my knowledge, no houses were built as a result of the uranium boom between the years of 1953 and 1956. Between WWII and 1953, Dr. Temple and Jack Riley, the druggist, and Marvin Cleaver were the three houses that were built in Moab. Cleaver was the contractor.

Q: That answers the questions well. How would you describe the town's infrastructure and its changes during the boom years? Schools, grocery, retail stores, and utilities and restaurants?

Pete: When we got here in March of 1953, Miller's Market, which was called by the local people "The Co-op" because it had been Zion's Co-op at one time and went broke, was at the corner of Center and Main Streets. They sold everything; you could buy a needle or a dressed chicken, or a casket or a saddle. Anything you wanted, you could buy at Miller's. We bought most of our groceries at Joe Pullian's. He was a welder out at Utex and his wife, Helen, ran the store in what is now, approximately, the office of Bowen's Motel. They had a couple of gas pumps out in front. They had helped Charlie when he was down and out so we bought most of our groceries there. There was an Eastside Grocery and Burke's had one but I didn't know where that was.

That was just a little bitty place. One of the first things that Charlie did when the money started coming in was build a store for Bill McCormick. It was located where the parking lot is for the Visitors' Center. He put up a big round-top Butler Building. Bill had been at Dove Creek, and had let Charlie have a drill rig when he was drilling for uranium. So Charlie set him up in business here.

Q: Was that a grocery store?

Pete: It was a grocery-hardware store. We bought a GE refrigerator there when we lived at the airport. Paul Mayberry sent somebody up there one time during an operation when he was putting a pin in a guy's leg. He had to buy a hammer because the head came off of the hammer he was using to drive the pin into the guy's leg.

Q: Wonderful story.

Pete: The hospital was there close to the corner of Center and Main. It was pretty primitive, everything was.

Q: You have talked about the water and sewer.

Pete: Let me tell you about the water. Moab City had water piped to the houses. It came from a collection of springs above Center Street on the hill. The springs were channeled into concrete boxes and the boxes fed into a waterline. No treatment of the water at all. Then it flowed on down into town. A few people had their own springs and water pipes. The sewer system was a little thing you could fit in half the size of this room. It was down at the southwest corner of Holiday Haven, just off of the Holiday Haven land. I don't know if it's still there. It was a very small thing. Howard Shields was the first plumber to move to Moab. He and his wife ran the Red Rock Lodge. Howard told me he had put in 246 toilets in 1946, just after the war. Most of them were

in motels, the courthouse and places like that. When we paid for our first water, we went into the building next to the T-Shirt Shop where Ed Kerby had a kind of a general store with a pot-bellied stove back there. You took your check in there and paid for your water. It wasn't metered. Everybody knew when the siren went off to turn off your water and your sprinklers so they'd have more water to fight the fire with. The fire signal was a siren on the Midland Telephone Office.

Q: Did they have fire hydrants to hook on to?

Pete: I guess they had some up in that part of town. The town wasn't very big. It wasn't long until the sewage ran through that little sewer treatment they had into the river. Up until the Sixties, Cataract Canyon was our sewer treatment system.

Q: They weren't doing a lot of river running then?

Pete: No. I can remember when Mitch Williams started. I remember the first people who deliberately went through Cataract Canyon but I don't know who was the leader on it. They had the first Friendship Cruise when Mercury Motors came out with enough power in the boats to come down the Green River to the Confluence and up to Moab on the Colorado. They had the Friendship Cruise and the Marathon. One was a fast race and the other was just everybody. On that first Friendship Cruise one or two boats turned the wrong way at the Confluence and went down through Cataract Canyon. So far as I know, the people who went down there to try to rescue them were the first people who deliberately went through Cataract Canyon. Dr. Mayberry volunteered to go with them. Mary told me that after Paul left, people came by to offer their condolences just like he had died. Nobody expected him to come back.

Q: When was this?

Pete: It was probably about 1960 or 1961.

Q: The Friendship Cruise was one of the social things?

Pete: It was to get tourists here. The marathon ran for a number of years. They had Mercury and Evinrude Teams. It's approximately 200 miles and the speed that they made around there was just phenomenal. I have pictures of it.

Q: How did you interact with the town's social structure such as politics, social clubs, church gatherings and entertainment? Were you part of a church group?

Pete: They had the Mormon Church, which is now city property, and they had a Community Baptist Church, which was the Protestant Church in the little building where the Seekhaven or something is now at corner of Third and First North. It was used by the Protestants on Sunday mornings, by the Seventh Day Adventists on Saturday and by the Catholics on Saturday night. My wife, Mary, was always active in church work. She got involved in that and in the building of the new Community Church when it was built. Later on, she was involved in the building of the Episcopal Church.

Q: The social clubs?

Pete: We had the Alibi Club, which is that old wooden building between the Volkswagen museum and the highway. You notice it off to the left; I think it's a video store. That was the Alibi Club.

Q: Why was it called the Alibi Club?

Pete: I imagine for good reason. I only knew of two people who went in there. One was Dr. Mayberry who went in to see some of his patients, and Sam Sears and his wife and somebody else that was with them. Then they had the Silver Dollar Bar, which was about where the Rock Climbing Building is on North Main Street behind the La Hacienda. About that time the city limits sign was in front of the old visitors center about where Southeast School is. Nifty Fashions was the Arches Ballroom. It didn't have an upstairs; it was just like a gymnasium. It had a stage on the south end of it. That's where Charlie held his first Utex Discovery Party. They had dances there, the Mormon Church had their Gold and Green Ball, I think they called it. We were accepted right in because Mitch Milich was Moab's lawyer and the Representative from this district. His house was the house right behind the courthouse. Nice little house there, one of the better houses in town. That's where I met Sam Taylor's grandfather, Lester Taylor's father, D.L.'s grandfather, and a geologist who was here long before the uranium. They had a druggist and the lawyer and the Taylors, I would say that was the clique of town. When I looked at the county ordinances, they were in a box in the clerk's office, and they had about 4 or 5 ordinances there and they all had to do with dancehalls and selling beer.

Q: Were you involved in Politics?

Pete: Not in those days. Later on, Mary was a state delegate to the State Republican Convention. She worked to get Orrin Hatch and Jake Garn elected. She was very active. I ran for office and was Justice of the Peace. Can't say that the marriages I did lasted too well.

(The tape ran out and some of the conversation was missed)

Q: What were the conditions like when you moved here?

Pete: The mosquitoes were terrible. Nobody had made any effort to control the mosquitoes until an etymologist was sent here by the government to control the budworms that ruined the fruit

industry. L.B. Perry made the first effort to control the mosquitoes by dropping the old oil filters in the stagnant ponds. The mosquitoes were so bad it was hard for people to breathe. They would get on your arms and you'd rub them off and smear blood down your arms. And the dust! The only street I remember being paved was the highway that went through town. It went to the First Security Bank corner (Center Street), then turned up to 4th East and out. The dust was as bad as you've ever seen it, but it was that way every time the wind blew. It wasn't unusual that you couldn't see across any street in town. In 1950 I read in the paper where they drove 3500 head of cattle down Main Street from the ranches south of here to the railroad.

Q: That was certainly the worst about Moab; can you think of any good thing about living in Moab then?

Pete: I borrowed \$1000 to move here, and I staked 2 mining claims that sold for about \$25,000 so I like getting the money.

Q: That was a good thing.

Pete: That took care of a lot of the problems.

Q: In interacting with the neighboring communities: Monticello, Green River, and Blanding, you mentioned Monticello's disasters?

Pete: When they put the gas pipeline through, they had a trailer park and a restaurant that were hooked up to propane. It was after you make the corner down towards Dove Creek. They had hooked up the natural gas and forgotten to plug off the propane. Some guy came in from work to the trailer park and his water was cold so he lit the water heater and turned on the propane. He filled up the crawlspace under the restaurant with propane and it blew up. It had been standing

room only; they were just crammed in there waiting to eat. I don't know how many they killed, but it laid the walls down and the whole thing collapsed. They had people lying on the grass at the hospital. Charlie Steen told his pilot, Dick Kaiser, to go and I went as co-pilot. We went down there about 10 o'clock at night. They had just built the runway at Monticello. They put cars at the end of the runway and to mark the boundaries, so we could land. We took all the seats out of the airplane so they could lay the patients on the floor of the airplane. Barbara Robinson was one of the nurses there. I have no idea how many people we had in that airplane, but we took off from there and flew to Grand Junction to St Mary's Hospital. There was another case where they had a load of Boy Scouts on the back of a flatbed truck coming up Comb Wash. They were sideswiped or run off the cliff or something. A lot of the kids were killed or injured. I flew several of them in my 180. I could put in a stretcher and haul patients. We didn't have helicopters, of course, then. All the ambulance cases that went out of here, I had flown.

Q: That's how you interacted with communities?

Pete: Another way we interacted with Monticello was that the Big Indian Mining District was in San Juan County. Every time we had to file a mining claim or assessment notice, we had to file it in the San Juan courthouse. I knew the recorder down there better than I knew the one in Grand County. Some of the lawsuits, and there were lots of lawsuits, were held in San Juan County. As for Green River, it was just a wide place in the road that you had to go through to get to Salt Lake.

Q: Did you interact with the governmental agencies such as the parks, the Forest Service and the BLM in flying?

Pete: Not with flying, but Bates Wilson was the superintendent of the Arches Monument and I think Goudelock was the main man out there. I partied some with Bates and his wife. They were in the group that we ran around with. I can't remember much about the BLM and the Forest

Service, but the first thing I heard about the Forest Service was that they sent somebody down here as Ranger and some of the local people or ranchers beat him up and ran him off. There weren't more than 2 or 3 people employed by Bates. The Forest Service office was that little bitty building next to the Court House. I don't know where the BLM office was unless it was in the same place.

Q: We have covered our questions pretty well; so let's talk a little bit about when you came back to Moab after living in Salt Lake. You got a Real Estate License?

Pete: I went up there employed by Mr. Floyd Odlum who was the founder of Atlas Corporation. We moved the office I had here to Salt Lake. It was the best paying job I ever had. A contract to fly a Cessna, could go where I wanted to, do what I wanted to, had an expense account, paid a good salary, and a lease on my airplane. Our little company went through a five-company merger as I told you.

Q: Yes you did, but I didn't get the names of all those companies.

Pete: It started out as the Davidson Syndicate when he hired me. Davidson was from Albuquerque. I don't know what church he belonged to, but his contract provided that he could go home and teach his Sunday School Class from wherever he was. I kind of took his place, because they kind of fired him. We set up a little office of the Davidson Syndicate in Moab. The reason for its existence was that Odlum and his friends had put together some money to go to Yemen to drill for oil, but that didn't happen. They had the money when the uranium boom came along and they started investing in that. The company that I was with was the Jacob's Chair Mining Company down in White Canyon, and then it became Chesapeake and Colorado Mining Company. Chesapeake and Colorado had the oil wells up near Newcastle Wyoming, and a little uranium mine close to Baggs, Wyoming, another one near Macedona, Colorado. (That's where

Jane hung her baby diapers.) Odlum leased and did exploratory work on several properties around Indio, California, and Cameron, Arizona, (trading post down there doesn't look like it used to) And there was some feldspar and mica mines in North Carolina, and black beach sand in Florida where Cape Canaveral is now. Our main asset and the money came from a royalty interest in the Hecla Mine in Big Indian, which was one of the good producers. Hecla subdivision was built as housing for its employees. This company mined a lot of uranium but then the AEC changed their buying policy. When they did, the reason for having this company that I was in couldn't be used any more. It was to spend the royalty money on prospecting. The AEC wouldn't buy any new discovery ore. They merged that company into another company called RadiRock. The people who were running that company didn't have a use for me so I got out and got into real estate business. I discovered when I got into the real estate business that what I had been doing for this other company was largely real estate work - leases and contracts and stuff like that. So I came back to Moab.

I wanted to tell you about the old two-story adobe house where they are talking about building the new Library. It belonged to Mr. Shook. He lived in Texas and he came through here about once a year, tuning pianos. His house had its own private water system. It was a spring that was piped down from the hill up there. He had us rent that for him, which we did. It turned real cold that winter and the water froze and the people moved out. When it thawed out in the spring, the water kept running and it dissolved the house.

Q: What a story. Thank you, Pete.

Addendum

January 8, 2004

Q: How did the local government handle the influx?

Pete: Of course, nobody had any idea what was going to happen. Earlier I told you that I think we were the first people that, as a result of his discovery, other than the Steens, came to Moab with children in school. He was a publicity hound and he really got it. He was written up in Time, Life, Newsweek, and in the Denver Post, repeatedly. He appeared on radio programs back in Chicago. Every time one of those stories went out, it seemed like another bunch of people came to Moab.

It's impossible to describe actually what happened. Nobody really knows what all happened. When we moved here the population sign showed 1271 at the city limits. We joked about how much our family would increase that number. There wasn't any housing in Moab to amount to anything. As I told you, there were only about four houses that had been built after World War II. The four or five rentals that John "Sog" Shafer had were for "working people," he said. They could be generally classified as "shacks". They were old adobe houses.

Everyplace that was a corral became a trailer park; they were all over town. At that time there were irrigation ditches that ran to every lot in town - open irrigation ditches. About a month after we got here we saw people going up and down the irrigation ditches picking asparagus, which was a new thing to us.

It wasn't until about 1956 that they started building subdivisions. The chairman of the County Commissioners was a guy named Winferd Bunce who was a very unusual person. I didn't consider him a very moral person. He was likeable and I never knew a person who was a better politician. He was head of the Draft Board, and he was Secretary of the Moab Irrigation Company, he was chairman of the County Commissioners, and eventually he had a little butcher shop in town. Later on, he became mayor of Moab.

The mayor when we first came here was George Burke. Barbara Burke is his daughter and she clerked at the Food Town for years. She also stood in for one of the movie actresses in one of the films here. It wasn't long until he was killed in a car accident. Everybody was involved in uranium in one way or another. People don't realize now that the primary source of income before

Charlie Steen found his mine was uranium. Nearly everyone had a Geiger counter or scintillator. Burke was involved in mining claims and prospecting.

I dealt with Bunce when we leased the airport from the county, and I got to know him early in the game. Burke was replaced by Jack Corbin, who had the telephone company. His wife was Ila Corbin who was big in the Republican Party here, a delegate to the State Convention. We got to know them really well.

I don't know how those people who were running things coped with the situation, but they did and I'm amazed at how well they did it.

The Old Highway was the only road into Moab; there was no power line into Moab. They generated the power here with a diesel generator. There was no gas line. Heating was by wood and coal and most of the winter the valley was filled with coal smoke. There were only about a half dozen streetlights in town. To my knowledge, the only paved road in the township, it wasn't a city, it was a township, was the 2-lane highway going through town. I know the post office was close to the 2-story building on the west side of Main Street towards First North, just a little building in there. The CCC boys had built rock troughs down both sides of Main Street for the irrigation water to run in and if you got your wheel in one of those you were in trouble.

The bank was locally owned. Moab was a very primitive and a very poor place. I don't know how they managed to get the money to build the water system and the sewer treatment plant. The sewer treatment plant was overloaded all the way into the sixties. The only school they had was the one that the city is planning on converting to office building. It wasn't long until the schools went on double sessions, and then they went on triple sessions, so that 2/3 of the kids were running around town at any one time. Nobody knew who was supposed to be in school.

Before 1952, I was told that you couldn't get elected to a county office unless you carried Cisco and Segó.

Charlie contributed a whole lot to Moab. The logical thing for him to have done was to have sold out and left. But because it was Charlie, he stayed here. He built Utex subdivision for his employees; Hecla built Hecla Subdivision for their employees.

The three-man County Commission were natives until fairly recently. It is just amazing how they coped with the situation. Sometimes the members also served on the School Board and they built the schools and the water system. One by one the streets got paved.

Charlie gave land for the churches when he subdivided MiVida. Of course, it was a corporate thing. Utex was actually the owner of the land, the builder of the houses and the subdivider. As president of Utex, Charlie gave the land for the Helen M Knight School and all of the churches there. It was not generosity; it was a tax write-off for the corporation. The money was flowing like a gusher of an oil well when Utex really got into production.

They had a meeting at the old Community Baptist Church that I told you about, talking about where to build a church. They were also offered a lot over where the Episcopal Church is. One woman says, "We don't want to go over there as we haven't had a bridge over Mill Creek that hasn't washed out and we never will. We want to build on this side of the creek." And they did. About the same time, the Catholics got their lot and started building where they are.

Charlie got elected to the school board and was instrumental in getting the Helen M Knight School built. The High School (what is now the Junior High School) was built in the early sixties. Some of the mining people were opposed to it because they said that all of the people would leave when the mining phase was over. What nobody anticipated was that the tourist industry would reach the state that it is now. When I had the airport, I advertised and tried to sell scenic flights for \$15. I think I had one or two.

We thought the original houses in Mountain View and Walker subdivisions with their flat roof and cement construction were wonderful. We couldn't get financing here, even though you could finance trailers. There were five trailer parks along Holyoke Lane. They had septic tanks and the septic tanks would run over, water running down the ditches. They had that problem all over town where there were trailer houses.

Bunce and the others in charge finally borrowed money from the government and put the irrigation ditches into culverts. That helped the mosquito problem a lot. About 1956, they started hiring Jim Hurst (who now lives out in the valley) that ran the Green River Airport, to come over

here and spray the whole area with DDT. The whole valley was sprayed and especially the sloughs.

For thirty years, about every 15 minutes there was a truckload, mostly 25-ton truckloads, of uranium ore that went down Main Street to the mill or to the AEC buying station. The loads were uncovered so all that dust for thirty years of hauling ore is here in town yet.

A lot of people that mined a small mine would bring in the ore and put it in their back yard until they got enough to haul to Thompson. Somebody said the other day that “probably all the men over ninety are sterile and all the women over 65 are infertile.” Nobody ever thought about uranium being a hazard. In fact, when Ester Peterson was secretary of Health and they forced the mines to put in ventilation systems and put a much higher flow of air through them, the miners complained they were going to get pneumonia from all this cold air going through.

Utex was the first of the big mines. But there were a lot of other big mines: Hecla, Hidden Splendor, Jen, which was E L Cord’s operation, the guy that built the car. Homestake Mining company was one of the first to sink a shaft and go into production from a deep mine.

Within a short time, I would say in the middle of 1955-56 the population was estimated in the Moab Valley, including the area outside of the city limits, to be 7500 people. We were talking about 15,000 because the Utah University had economic projections that would go to 15,000 in just a short time. No one ever anticipated that the tourist industry would take off like it did and be sustained for this period of time.

When Mitch and Mary Williams came up to see us when we lived in Salt Lake, Mitch was talking about starting Tag-a-long Tours. He had this old Jeep and he said he would let people follow him out into the boondocks because he knew the country pretty well. Mitch flew for me when I had the airport. I didn’t think it was a very good idea. I think his outfit was the first one to start running a trip through Cataract Canyon.

We had bus service into Moab; the bus came through about 2:30 in the morning going each way.

A lot of people in Moab drove to Grand Junction to get their groceries from City Market

over there. It wasn't until the early sixties that we had a City Market here. Charlie didn't like the Miller family so he brought Bill McCormick up here and built a grocery store. Emma McCormick ran the grocery part and Bill ran the hardware. Bill drank a lot. He kept his bottle of whiskey in a coil of rope. If he wanted a Coke, he had to go over to Emma's side and buy it from her. Eventually he built the Moab National Bank that is now Zions. He built that building. Standard Metals became a big producer. Bill was the president of Standard.

It's interesting to speculate what would have happened to Moab if Charlie had sold out like Vernon Pick did. (to Atlas, or Odlum) and moved away. You wouldn't have had the mill here and the hauling was one of the main things that made Moab; the people who had their own trucks and hauled to the mill.

Q: I've heard someone say that he could have built his mill in San Juan County which would have been more advantageous to him, but he chose to build in Grand county.

Pete: Charlie did whatever his emotions directed him to do. When Charlie decided to build a mill, Bob Barrett told me that they could build a mill right on the side of the mountain where the Utex mine was. It wouldn't require pumping because it could be gravity-flow downhill. The mills in Nucla and Naturita were that way. It wouldn't require hauling; the ore could have been moved by conveyor belts right out of the mine into the mill. Charlie wanted to be King. That's why he built his house up on the hill, so everybody would have to look up to him. He ran for State Senator and got elected. When his mood caused him to want to leave, he resigned his seat in the Senate and sold out his operation here to Mr. Odlum.

Everybody thinks of the mill and the uranium as Atlas, but Odlum founded Atlas when the first depression started in New York. It was a closed-end investment company. Over the years he would buy up controlling interests in companies and reorganize them, inject them with capital, build them up and sell them. His first venture in uranium was when he bought out Vernon Pick's mine out on the Muddy River near Hanksville. They set that up as Hidden Splendor

Mining Company. Then as he got involved in it, he controlled Federal Uranium, and Radirock Uranium, and Jacobs Chair Uranium besides Hidden Splendor and a lot of things that people didn't know he had his fingers in. He was a financier and he had 30 million dollars to work with. It wasn't until he retired, the company changed and became Atlas Minerals . When the mill was built, Atlas had an investment in it from the very beginning. According to one friend, when Charlie sold out to Odlum, anyone could look at the financial statements and see that Charlie had a greater net worth than Atlas did.

Q: When you were running the airport you said that Mitch Williams flew for you?

Pete: I had about 5 pilots working for me. When Mitch got out of the Air Force he was one of them.

Q: Did you try to do scenic flights?

Pete: We tried to do scenic flights. Our main business was mine support. We'd fly people to these little outlying strips. In 30 minutes you could go to places that you couldn't drive to in a half a day. I rescued a guy that got blown up in Cane Creek. Just down the river here, but there wasn't any road in there yet. I went down there and landed in my Super Cub and they put this guy in the back seat of my plane. I brought him out. They said it would take 4 hours just to get him to pavement from there, but he was in the ambulance in 15 minutes. I went up on the Muddy River to the Pick Mine; I took in 2 or 3 doctors to do the first physical exams regarding the dangers of uranium mining. All the ambulance cases that couldn't be brought out by car, I took. The first one was a guy that got hit in the head by a mucking machine and it scalped him. I had one that hit the bridge out by Hole in the Rock.

Q: Would you land on the road?

Pete: There were airstrips all over the country, but sometimes I'd land on the road. One time when Bev Spencer was editor of the paper here, he called me up. He said, "Ruby has drilled in a gusher out at the Dead Horse turnoff, where you turn off the road to go to Island in the Sky. We jumped into the Super Cub with his speed graphix camera and I went out and landed on the ruts where trucks had been driving. He made pictures of this oil well. There was a big trailer there that Rubys lived in. This well had blown in and blown oil all over the area. When it started, he went in the trailer and turned off all the gas. There was yellow oil dripping off the trailer and over about an acre of land was covered with oil. The thing plugged itself off and it never did produce any oil. That was before they knew how to handle that kind of situation. It was comparable to the one on the south side of the river, the Shafer No. 1. It blew itself in. Old Sog was there when it did it. He was the night watchman.

Q: This had been just great. Thank you.





