

Transcription: Grand Canyon Oral History

Interviewee: Andy McLeroy (AM)

Interviewer: Tom Martin (TM)

Subject: Building the second half of the second Navajo Bridge Part 3 of 3

Date of Interview: December 22, 2022

Method of Interview: Telephone

Transcriber: Susan Seibel

Date of Transcription: January 21, 2023

Transcription Reviewers: Tom Martin

Keys: 1994 Navajo Bridge construction, crane operation, crane platform, Page, Arizona, Ed Kent, Ed the good old guy—last name unknown, David Meche, trout fishing, Goat Trail, Dick Clark, river runners, work stoppage, Lake Powell, temporary housing, headache ball as a hammer, televised dog racing, Glen Canyon Dam, balance rocks, Bugs Bunny and Roadrunner, Wile E. Coyote, Lees Ferry, Dale Hollow Lake, Tennessee barge crane operation, topping-out party, news crew, Navajo connectors, American Crane, Traylor Brothers, on-board computers for cranes

TM: Today is Thursday, December 22, 2022. This is Part 3 of a Grand Canyon oral history with Andy McLeroy. My name is Tom Martin. Good afternoon, Andy. How are you today?

AM: I'm doing lovely.

TM: Super! Glad to hear it. Andy, may we have your permission to record this oral history over the telephone?

AM: Yes.

TM: Thank you. We left off in Part 2 with the completion of the first half of the second Navajo Bridge. This is in 1994. And I was curious to know while you were running the crane, building the first half there, where did you live?

AM: When I first moved there, at the very first, I stayed just by myself. I stayed in a bed and breakfast place. I can't remember their names, but they operated a boat marina down there at Lake Powell. I guess I stayed there for a month, and then I found a little mobile home, single-wide mobile home, for rent, and I moved into it. It already had furniture, so I just moved into it.

TM: So the bed and breakfast, was that there at Marble Canyon in that area, or was it farther away?

AM: It was in Page, Arizona.

TM: In Page. So to get to the job site every day, you'd have to drive south out of Page on Hwy 89, and then go through what they call The Cut, and down through real scenic hillside there where you could see out across Marble Canyon and—

AM: Yeah.

TM: —and then drive on over to the job.

AM: Was it 27 or something? I don't remember. And then I drove that for about a week, and then I started catching a ride with— I think it was with David or— We had an older gentleman; he was an ironworker, too, but I can't remember his name. I started riding with him, and he was there the whole job site at the beginning and the end. Ed something. It wasn't Ed Kent, but it was Ed— What was his name? I started riding with him.

TM: Yeah, there was another Ed. He was older. I want to say Reese, but I don't think that's it. I should know his name.

AM: No, no. It's not Reese, but I can't remember. But good old, good old guy.

TM: What do you remember about him?

AM: He was just really comical. He was always cutting up. He was always in a good mood. I don't think I ever saw him in a bad mood.

TM: Do you remember where he was from?

AM: No, I don't. I didn't really— When I sit up in the crane, I don't really get to talk to nobody, except right at the beginning of the job or right at the very end. During the day, I don't really get to talk to them, except for my ironworkers there.

TM: Okay. Can you describe him? Was he short and stocky? Was he tall and thin?

AM: Yeah, he was short. I'd say 5' 4" or 5' 6". And, uh, he didn't have a beard or nothing. I'm thinking he had a clean-shaved face. But I'm surprised any of the other guys didn't say nothing about him.

TM: Was he bolt up or was he erection? Where was he—

AM: I think he, kind of, was over the bolt up.

TM: Okay, so he'd be working with David Meche. Okay.

AM: Yes. Good, old guy. I think I might have rode with David some, David Meche, sometimes to the job. I mean, no sense of all of us driving for an hour to get to work, so we started doing some ride sharing.

TM: Carpooling makes sense there.

AM: Yeah.

TM: You're working on the same job. You're starting in the same town.

AM: Yeah, because they all lived up there somewhere. I never did— I guess I never did go over nobody's house. Well, I think I went over David Meche's once. We had a cookout after we went trout fishing down there in the canyon.

TM: Oh, did you go down to Lees Ferry and go fishing down there?

AM: No, we climbed. David had the idea to climb down the canyon to go down there to go fishing, and I said, "Yeah, I'll go." That was a wrong mistake!

[Laughter]

AM: My legs hurt.

TM: Was this— So where you guys were working on the bridge, just upstream from there on the Navajo side, on the Flagstaff side, there's a route. It's not a trail. It's more of a route or a scramble down to the river.

AM: Yeah, like a goat trail.

TM: Yeah, like a goat trail. Is that where you went?

AM: I think that's where we went, yep.

TM: And then Dick Clark had a boat down there to patrol for any river runners who were coming along to get them to stop if they needed to. I don't know if you remember him down there or his boat down there.

AM: I don't remember his name, but I do remember there was an officer down there that would sit around the corner, which is close to Lees Ferry, and he would radio me. I don't even know how— I think David or somebody gave me the radio. I really never met the guy. And he would talk— He would holler at me when we had rafters coming down to keep an eye out for them.

TM: And then what would you do?

AM: I would just hang my pieces of iron, whatever we was doing, and I'd, kind of, look down and watch them. And then I'd holler at David down there because he's usually down there with them at that time and tell him or tell somebody down there if he wasn't there. I'd tell somebody that we had rafters coming. They would tell us to stop work whenever they got close to us.

TM: Okay. So you guys would simply just stop your bolting, stop your placing of steel, and just wait.

AM: Yeah, we'd stop everything until they got under us. Then we could go back to work. It didn't work out at first. At first, we just kept working. But then something happened and [they] told us that we had to quit working when they went up under us, because there was, like, 10 people in a raft coming down up under us. So they told us that we had to quit— I think it was the state told us we had to quit working. Somebody, I don't remember who it was.

TM: And that makes sense. I mean, just a simple washer or any kind of tiny, little something that would get down through the—

AM: Well, we had those two nets up under us to catch all that, which I understand. I mean, I think we could have kept working, but on the safety side, best not.

TM: Yeah. Yeah.

AM: You don't wanna hurt nobody.

TM: Let's go back to your stay there at Page. Besides fishing that time to get the trout, did you get up on the lake at all up there? Up on Lake Powell?

AM: Yeah, the people I was renting the bed and breakfast place, I went and saw them after we done— When I went back— By the time we transferred over to the other side, tore my crane down and move it to the side, that was the time I left to go back to Texas and pick up my wife and son and brought them back. And, I don't know, one weekend we wasn't working I went over there and rented a boat from them people. We got on Lake Powell and rowed around on the lake. It's a beautiful lake. Beautiful. Clean. You could see the rocks below, 10 feet down, in the water. It was a beautiful lake. Done a little fishing.

TM: Was this the summer? How old was your son?

AM: Yeah. He was probably—gee, I don't know—probably twelve? Nine, ten, eleven, somewhere in there. No, he wasn't nine. He had to be least ten to twelve.

TM: So he would have been out of school, so that would have made sense. It was summertime. Nice.

AM: Yeah. It was summer when we was down there, when I was down there.

TM: And do you remember much about hauling everything from the Navajo or the Flagstaff side over to the lodge or the Fredonia side?

AM: Uh, I don't really remember much about that at all. I remember starting to tear the crane down from the Navajo side, but I don't really remember much about transferring everything over and putting it back together. I don't remember much at all about that. It's a blank.

TM: Okay. Well, you'd mentioned before we started the interview that maybe that was the time you went to get your son and wife.

AM: That's kind of what I'm thinking. It had to have been.

TM: That would make sense, make perfect sense, because you couldn't do your job. Your crane was all broken down in pieces. So it would be a good time to go get your family.

AM: Yeah, that would have been about the only time. I wasn't there but— I think my total time there was around six months I was there. It took, like, three months the first half, and then go back to the second half. It was two-and-a-half months, almost three months on the second side. We was only there about six months.

TM: Let's talk about the second side then. Now your crane, again, is sitting on a platform, a pretty big platform on rollers. And it seems like—

AM: Yeah. Pedestal platform, whatever you want to call it.

TM: Yeah. Okay, and then what would have been the first thing you'd have done on the lodge side to start that build out that way?

AM: I'm thinking that we brought the crane that was on the ground that would load stuff up for me on the traveler, little traveler thing platform. I think he, kind of, built it up what he could to set the crane up there. And then when I got on it, we started— That side was a little different from the first side. They built this big ladder that went all the way to the ground and come all the way to the top, and it had a platform, oh, probably about halfway up, had a little platform I guess I could check out stuff underneath. I'm not sure. But that was the first thing we started building, that ladder, and then, uh—

TM: So this is a ladder to get you up to your house, up to the crane? Or was this a ladder from the skewback up to, kind of, the road level?

AM: Well, this ladder went all the way from the bottom up, but it was built on to the frame of the bridge from the bottom chord up to the top chord. I'm thinking we might have had some beams or something that went over to the land, up to the top elevation over there, and I think I walked out on it. I don't really remember climbing that ladder. I might have once or twice till we built that top chord out to the land.

TM: Oh, so basically, there's a steep slope there, and so the level where your crane is going to be on its platform is, kind of, way up in the air there. And so you would have to go up the ladder to get up there, up to where your crane was.

AM: Yeah, till we built the top chord. Then I could walk across it. But I'd have to go back and look at some pictures and see what we did there. I'm not sure, but I know I only climbed that ladder once or twice because I'm not too happy about climbing ladders. [Chuckles] So it wasn't much. But I know it finally did come off of land somehow, and we went straight across. And that's the way I used to get back on the crane from that side.

TM: And then just like the other side, did you lower down the foundation plates, the skewback parts, and the bottom chords?

AM: Well, no. By the time I got back, I think all that was done, and the crane was setting up there. I mean, because you had to have that done before you could put the crane up there. Well, not necessarily. Maybe not. I don't remember setting them base plates down there. I think that other crane on land did that. I don't remember doing that. I do remember the first side, but I don't remember the second side, doing that. I think it was already done.

TM: Okay. And then I'm imagining it was just a repeat of, you know, bottom chords, bottom members, and then building up to the road deck, and then moving forward again. Is that how that would have worked?

AM: Yeah, yeah. It worked just the same way.

TM: As soon as you started moving out, did you get a sense, yeah, it looks like we're going to line up? Or were you thinking, well, maybe we're not gonna line up here?

AM: [Laughs] I was hoping we'd line up. I left that all up to the engineers and stuff, you know. I just did what I was supposed to do and see what happens when we got there and then deal with that problem then. But, yeah, we lined up really good. I was really surprised. I'm kind of jumping ahead, but once we got out to the end, we still had to put those two big pins in the bottom chord. And the top chords, they were box beamed, and one side fit into the other side, inside it, so they could flex up and down, you know, and still stay together. But the bottom chord took those pins so that it could move. So as we stuck the pins in, it was real tight. We'd done it as early as we could do it because it's supposed to be kind of cool.

TM: Yep.

AM: So the iron, kind of, shrinks a little bit when it's cold. So we stuck one pin in one side, and then it got it started, and then they cut me loose. And I dropped my ball down a little bit down where it would hit out in the center of it, and they tied a rope to it and would push my ball out—and my ball probably weighs about 1,000 pounds—pushed it out. And then they'd take the rope and pull it back real hard to start beating that pin in.

TM: Oh, wow.

AM: That took a couple hours to get one side pin in, and then we done the same thing on the other side. Got it in there, started, and then they'd cut me loose, tied rope to it, pushed my ball out and pull it in, banging pins in. I remember them doing that. I couldn't really see them, but I could see the line from the cable. I could see my cable. It would, kind of, swing out a little bit, and then it would come back, and then it would shake. And I would know that's what they're doing. They're beating that pin in with my ball, headache ball.

TM: Okay, I'm gonna review this to make sure I understand it in layman's terms. When I think of a crane with a big tower, what keeps that cable taut is a—

AM: The ball.

TM: —a metal or lead or— What's it—iron—what's it made of?

AM: It's made out of steel, I guess, or cast iron.

TM: And is it, like, the size of a basketball? How big is this thing?

AM: Yeah, that's size there's probably a little bit bigger than a basketball.

TM: Okay, like a beach ball.

AM: They're probably around— Yeah, a beachball baseball. They're around 800 pounds, maybe, for that size. Six hundred to 800 pounds.

TM: So the pin is like a cylinder.

AM: It's a big pin.

TM: Yep.

AM: Yeah, it was. I'm thinking it was like 2,500 pounds, something like that.

TM: And so you would have had a handle on that, and you would have dropped it down. And then they would have tried to get it in and get it started in the circular kind of area it was supposed to go in. And that circular area, half of it is one half of the bridge, and the other half is the other half of the bridge.

AM: Yeah, the bottom chord.

TM: Bottom chord, yeah. And they're trying to get this thing in there. And to beat it in place, they used the ball hanging off the cable from your crane.

AM: [Chuckles] Yeah.

TM: Man, they had to work really hard to make sure that thing hits where they want it to hit.

AM: Well, yeah, they would drop me down, swing me a little bit, drop me down, get me lined up right there. And then they would push on it, push it out, pull it back in to hit it.

TM: And maybe they're only going, like what, maybe 20 feet in the swing of the thing?

AM: Yeah, probably something like that. It'd be hard to push out from the bridge. Yeah, I'd say at least 20 feet. Maybe 10.

TM: Right, because all they could do was pull it hard to you, or pull it hard to them, and then let it just go on out by gravity, and then pull it back in again.

AM: Yeah.

TM: Wow! What a great hammer!

AM: It worked good. It got it in there.

TM: It's hard to think because, you know, it's gonna have an arc to it, so they would have had to work that out so the arc, when it came by, it had a up— Because it's kind of hanging from that cable, it would be defining the arc of a circle. Wow. That's pretty clever.

AM: I'm sure a few times they didn't hit it exactly right. But most of the time, I'm sure they did.

TM: If it was working and it was driving it in, boy, they'd be happy to keep doing that.

AM: That's kind of what I was thinking. That's kind of the only way they could get it in, the pin.

TM: Huh. Let's back up a bit. Between you first start moving the crane out over the foundation, the base plate and then out over the—

AM: It's basically the same as we did the first half. You just build your bottom chords up and tie everything in. And you build your top out, and then I'd pull myself up another bay. And you always stayed a bay behind, the crane did. And you always build the second bay out there. And then once you got it right, then we'd just take that cable and hook it up and pull me up one bay. Then you build that second bay up. And then the same thing over— It's just a repeat of the first side, really.

TM: Did anything different happen or anything unusual happen? Were you feeling way more comfortable about the whole job by then?

AM: Yeah, I was really comfortable. I kind of enjoyed that little swing I would get, little movement there. Heck, it didn't bother me a bit.

TM: You mean when you were swinging steel into place?

AM: Yeah, swinging steel around or stopping real quick once, you know, they'd come around. They'd say, "Cable down" and "Okay, stop." Well, I'd stop. You could feel the bridge kind of drop a little bit and then go back up. Just little small moments. Not much at all.

TM: And while you were doing that, were people stopping on the bridge, on the old bridge? Are they driving along, they'd stop and get out and take pictures and look at what you were doing?

AM: Yeah, I don't really remember many on the second side, but on the Navajo side there was a place you could pull off, and there would be two or three people, at least, every day—

TM: Oh, wow.

AM: —would stop and sit there and watch for a little bit. I'd wave at them and stuff because you're pretty close to the first bridge.

TM: Would they, like, walk out on the first bridge and just stand there at the railing and watch you guys?

AM: Yeah, there were probably a few that would. I believe so. Yeah, with their little kids, you know, little kids out there. I had fun in Page, Arizona. There's not much there, but I enjoyed being there. It was really fun to me. I had a good time. It had a little bar down there I would go to, and they had dog racing on TV. I wasn't sure where the dog racing was, but you could bet on them dogs while you're in there, and that was really strange to me. I never done that, never seen that before.

TM: Did you give it a go?

AM: I don't think I ever did. I don't know nothing. I don't know one dog from another.

TM: I don't either.

AM: But they had dog racing. You remember? You know, did they have any dog racing around Arizona?

TM: Yeah, down in Tucson and in Phoenix, in the two big cities. I didn't know they were streaming it. I knew you could bet on that here in Arizona. I knew it was a big deal. They'd have lots of people go to that, you know, because it was gambling, and people like that. When I was a kid, that was all happening. I didn't realize they had it on TV for the remote communities.

AM: Yeah, they had it on TV there. It was unreal. That was new to me.

TM: What else would you do on your days off?

AM: Oh, the first few times I was there, I would just drive around, get out, go eat breakfast somewhere if I didn't eat at home. Get out and then just drive around and look. I was mainly interested in the dam. What is that? Powell Dam?

TM: Glen Canyon Dam.

AM: Glen Canyon Dam. I was interested in that. I took a tour through it and rode around, went to— If you go, let's see, if you go down by Marble Canyon and go across, go to Lees Ferry—

TM: Right.

AM: Well, before you get to that, in one area there's some things called balance rocks.

TM: Yes.

AM: They're big rocks on little, bitty pedestal. Well, I went and looked at them because I like cartoons and I like my Bugs Bunny and Roadrunner. Or no, yeah, the road-running coyote.

TM: Coyote, yeah. Wile E.

AM: That's what it was. And they would show balance rocks during the cartoon, and I thought that was all fake stuff. You know, they just draw it up. It's fake. But that stuff is real, what I seen.

TM: Right, right. That's cool.

AM: We'd just ride around and go look at stuff. I was really interested in them balance rocks. I went down to Lees Ferry, checked it out, and I thought that was a cool area because of the history of it.

TM: Yes.

AM: Drove around a little bit around Lake Powell. It wasn't much. I wish it would be now where I had, like, them Side by Side 4Runners where you could just really get out there and go. But I

mainly just— I like going seeing different stuff and learning. I really enjoyed that Glenn Canyon Dam. Just outdoor stuff.

TM: Nice. Did you get a chance to take a look at the arch bridge right in front of the dam?

AM: Arch bridge?

TM: Yeah. Just in front of the dam, the road goes over across Glen Canyon there. You don't drive over the top of the dam. You drive over a bridge.

AM: Yeah, but I don't remember it being an arch bridge. I thought it was just flat across there.

TM: Yeah, no. It's got this arch underneath it, and then it's got these long uprights that come up to the roadbed. It was built in '59 or '58, somewhere right in there, when they were starting to build Glen Canyon Dam.

AM: Well, I'm sure I went over it.

TM: Yeah, yeah, yeah. You would have looked at it along the way.

AM: But I don't remember no arch bridge there, but that ain't nothing.

TM: No worries. No worries. I'll e-mail you a picture.

AM: I burned up a lot of brain cells since then.

TM: It's only been 30 years, almost.

AM: [Chuckles] Yeah, yeah.

TM: When you finally got close on the lodge side to the diving board coming out from the Navajo side to that side of the bridge, were you getting a little excited? I mean, what was that like?

AM: Oh, well, this is the first time I'd worked for this company, so when we was getting close to the end, I got to asking— I'm not nervous, but I got to asking, you know, we got any more work? Can I go with y'all? Where we going next? I didn't know. And after a couple of weeks and so, I just, you know, trying to listen. And they had another job in Tennessee building a bridge across a lake, which was just your typical iron bridge. It's just a big iron beam that goes across. It's, like, three of them that go across on piers and stuff, across the lake. And that's where they was headed to next, so I was comfortable then because I knew had another job to go to. I didn't know if I was gonna be laid off. You know, with no work.

TM: And did they tell you, yeah, we'd like to move you out to Tennessee, take you up for that job when this one's done?

AM: Yeah, it was supposed to start up just almost right after this one, the Navajo Bridge. It was supposed to start right after that. So I had time to take my family back to Texas, and then we

rented a U-Haul and put all our furniture and stuff in it, and then we took off for Tennessee. It was over the Dale Hollow Lake, which is— It started out in Tennessee, and it goes into Kentucky.

TM: Let's go back for a minute to the Navajo Bridge. Did you guys have a little topping out— Sorry?

AM: I said, yeah, you don't need none of that up in Tennessee.

TM: Well, no, it's good to know that you're, like, oh, we're going to finish this job and now what am I going to do? Right?

AM: Yeah.

TM: Because this was your first time for Traylor.

AM: Yeah, a little nervous.

TM: And you're completely disconnected from any other work for any other company out there.

AM: Yeah, I didn't know nobody out there, really.

TM: Right. So it would make sense that you would be a little worried about, you know, where's my next paycheck coming from.

AM: Hopefully I was doing a good enough job for the company that they would take me with them. That's what I always tried to do. But the topping-out party—

TM: Yeah?

AM: After we made them pins, them bottom pins in the bottom chord, after we made that one pin on one side, one on the other, I think the next day or might be in that evening we had that topping out party, I think it was. I'm pretty sure it was. Then we had a news crew. I think they was from Phoenix maybe or— What are some of them towns down there?

TM: Yeah, it could have been Phoenix. It would have made sense.

AM: You got Flagstaff.

TM: Yep.

AM: Is Phoenix one of your big cities? I guess it is.

TM: Yes, yeah.

AM: Okay. Well, I guess they flew up there, and I talked to the—while we was having our topping-out party—I talked to their director or news lady, whatever it was, said we'd like for me to go out on the crane and, kind of, swing it around a little bit to look like we're working while they fly over in the—

TM: Oh, wow.

AM: —helicopter and filming. I said, “Okay, I’ll do that.” I done had a drink or two. We had cable hung up on the side to walk out there where you could be tied off, but I didn’t have one on me when I went out there. So I was kind of jogging along out there on top, and I kind of stumbled a little bit. I went, “Ooh!” I almost fell. I said, “Dang, I hope they didn’t get that on film.” But I didn’t fall, so I made it onto the crane. I climbed up there and swung it around, I don’t know, 15, 20 minutes, swinging it around, booming it up and down. Nobody was talking to me. I didn’t have no radio or nothing. So I just done that for a little bit and then quit, climbed back down, and went back over to land and started enjoying myself again at the topping-out party. And I didn’t hear nothing about it. I mean, I didn’t talk to nobody else once I went back to land that I know of. I didn’t talk to the newspaper that said that’s fine or anything. I didn’t hear from nobody. I guess they might have been talking to Ed Kent or David, maybe, about the bridge at that time, you know, giving a little story about it or whatever.

TM: Yeah, yeah. That would make sense. There’s a picture I saw of the last piece of steel on the top chord there had an American flag on it and had a Navajo flag on it.

AM: Oh, did it?

TM: Do you remember that?

AM: Shoot, I forgot about that. I’m sure we did. I know we had one beam that I remember, I think, an American flag. But they also, the ironworkers, wrote on it, like, Local 487. I’m not sure if that’s the right number, but they wrote whatever their local out of was. I think I’ve got that picture of that beam when I was swinging it around. Somebody took a picture of it, and I’ve got that picture, but you’d have to zoom in to be able to—

TM: See it.

AM: —read it, what it said on it. And I’m thinking we might have put the operators’ local on it too. I’m pretty sure. I’m sure they did. That’s what you usually do.

TM: Cool. And then to make sure I get this figured out, so the bottom chord is where the pin was.

AM: Yeah.

TM: So once the pins were in place, then you built the rest of it up to the top chord and finished that off.

AM: Yeah, because that connected the two bridges. You put those— How did that go? You put the pins in, and I think you put the plates on. And I think the plates went around— No, they couldn’t have. If you put the plates on and you stuck bolts in it, it wouldn’t be able to move.

TM: Well, for this bridge that’s what they did. They actually pinned the two halves together. Once they put the pin in, then they bolted it all together, so it was one solid unit just moving on

the base plates at the bottom on either side instead of being a true multiple hinge with the hinge pins being alive, like on the old bridge. This one they bolted— Once it was done with the pins in there, then they put on these side plates and bolted it all together.

AM: Yeah, I don't see how that would move if they did that. But I think they might— No, I don't know. But I do remember the top chords had a square box. Because I do remember when we would make one of them, when we was building it out, the Navajo Indians, the Navajo connectors or bolt-up guys, they had this big—well, it wasn't a very big hole but it was a long hole, not real wide, but they would climb inside to be able to put the nuts on the bolts.

TM: Oh, that makes sense.

AM: And then I guess they would take an impact from the outside and rattle them bolts till they got tight. And then somehow or another they had to torque it to make sure they got it up to torque, but I know the top chord in the middle, one went inside. I'm not sure. I'm thinking maybe the Navajo side or the American side was smaller, and it went in to the Navajo side that square top chord beam. I think it went in like that, and that's what gives the movement up and down up there. I guess they got some kind of neoprene pads or something inside there, because it's not metal to metal. I'm guessing, but I know it did then. I remember them telling me that's for the flex when it goes down and up, that that top chord, kind of, goes in and out. Maybe not an about an inch. About an inch, probably, I'd say. It's not much.

TM: Right. That would make sense. And then did you stay there with the job to go ahead and and walk the crane back and—

AM: Yeah, walked it back and tore it apart, and they shipped it off. We didn't use that crane for the job we had in Tennessee. We used a different crane on it.

TM: How long did you stay with Traylor Brothers?

AM: Well, that was six months there, and then I don't know, it was probably a month before we started the second job in Tennessee. And then I was probably there six to eight months. That job in Tennessee was when Ed Kent, he retired again about halfway through that job.

TM: Oh, did he come out to Tennessee and work on that bridge too?

AM: Yeah, he started it, and then he retired. They had somebody else from Virginia or another superintendent come down to finish that job. He started it, but I don't think he stayed there maybe two or three months and then retired again. Well, no. It had to be longer than two or three months. Maybe it was about six months or so he retired, because the other superintendent—he's a little, short guy. He probably wasn't five foot tall, come in there, and we was almost at the end. I think I had six beams left to set. And me and that other little superintendent, me and him got into a little pissing match, and I drug up on him right there. I didn't want no more of it. And Ed Kent was there, and I was kind of upset with Kent because he didn't really stick up for me at that time. What it was I called in that morning because I bought a boat, a used boat, and I had to take it to the shop. We weren't doing much. I mean, ironworkers had bolting up to do and stuff, but I didn't have much to do, so I picked that morning out to go drop my boat off to get a floor redone. I went back straight to work. It was probably ten o'clock

when I got there. Well, that little, short superintendent, he got upset. And I even called in. I mean, I called in and told them. But he got a little upset, and then we got into a little pissing match. I told him, "You can take this job and shove it up where the sun don't shine" and I left. But Ed was there, and he never took up for me or nothing. I was kind of upset over that, but I guess that's the way it works. And then I never worked for him again. But out the Arizona, I had a fun time. It was a blast. Enjoyed it. I've never done that before, and it was really new to me. I was young, and it was exciting to me every day. I just wanted to do my best. Didn't even really know about Navajo Indians till I was there, and then I got to learning about them and their culture, how they're living, and how their things do. And then I heard about— What's that Indian tribe that's kind of in the center of them? It starts with a P.

TM: Yeah, the Hopi.

AM: Hopi. Yeah, it starts with an H.

TM: Yeah, that's okay.

AM: Yeah, Hopi. And then I found out how you could tell a Hopi from a Navajo. I don't know if that matters, but I'm thinking they was telling me that the Hopis have bigger cheekbones or their cheekbones stick out farther than Navajos, what makes them different. Something like that. I said okay. I learned a lot. I mean, I enjoyed it. I had a great time.

TM: Is there anything else about that build, that job that you haven't mentioned that we should talk about?

AM: Well, I just would like to see that—I know you don't know where it is—but the quick film that they took pictures of—the state had that, I guess—of building the bridge.

TM: Yeah.

AM: I mean, I would like to see that. I guess they made it into a movie, but I don't know.

TM: It's on my list of things to find, yeah.

AM: And that was interesting, too, looking at my load charts and stuff that you sent me.

TM: Oh, cool.

AM: But I didn't get the second, the enhancements or whatever.

TM: You didn't?

AM: I didn't get nothing of that. You said, "I'm fixing to send you the high resolution."

TM: That's right.

AM: But I didn't get nothing on my texting, and I didn't see nothing on Facebook

TM: I think I tried to send those to you on the phone, or was I emailing those?

AM: Yeah, you sent them on my phone to text, to my text, and I could read them some. I could blow them up and read them, and that was really interesting, because I don't ever remember seeing none of that, which I don't think I asked. That was really interesting.

TM: I could mail those to you. Well, I don't have the big charts. I only have one. I don't have a copy machine that will copy that big.

AM: Well, even the frame, you know, the frame. You sent me the pictures of the frame and all that stuff. I never saw none of that. I didn't even know it existed. Nobody said nothing about it. I didn't ask. I should I have.

TM: But I get confused—

AM: I was wondering how they come up with that. I didn't know.

TM: Yeah, they got some engineers in there from American Crane, it sounds like, to help them.

AM: Yeah, that's what I seen on there.

TM: And it sounded like, if I got this right, the house sitting on its platform, that platform was really big. It was bigger than a normal tracks.

AM: It was tall. It was, what, 12 foot high or something?

TM: It had some height to it, yeah.

AM: But the actual iron and stuff, it was just T-iron. And to me, it didn't look all that big or thickness, you know, the thickness part it. It didn't look all that thick. So that's what I was really— When I first got there, I was checking all this out, and I thought, "You all sitting on this?"

TM: Huh. Well, it's funny because I'm confused. It sounds like 15 tons was the maximum the crane needed to move, but that stuff from Traylor makes it sound like the crane had a 60-ton rating or something like that, and I got very confused so I'm still kind of puzzled about that, but that's my problem.

AM: Well, you'd have the house— I remember the turntable was, like, solid. You had your gear, your bull gear, on top for it to swing around on. And then everything below that was just like a big solid pipe that went from the top of the frame to the bottom of the frame so everything could hook into it. But I don't know how thick that stuff was. The pipe that would come down, I don't know if it was solid. I wouldn't think it was solid. That big too heavy.

TM: Right. You'd think it would be a cylinder.

AM: Yeah, I'd say it would be pretty thick, though. Like I said long time ago, when I made my first pick, they put a plumb bob up underneath and put it, I don't know, a couple inches off the

ground to see how much it would flex. You know, and they said, oh, it didn't move a bit. Well, okay. I believe you. That's all I had to go by.

TM: Right. So let me make sure I understand this. The house, it's got a counterweight. It's got the big drum with the cable on it and the engine, and it's got your cab in it. That house is bolted to a cylinder going straight down.

AM: Well, yeah. Something like that.

TM: And then you mentioned the bull gear on the outside.

AM: Bull gear is up at the top.

TM: Right, and your house has a little cog wheel that would tie into the bull gear so you could turn the house around.

AM: Swing it around. Yeah.

TM: Right. Swing it around. That makes sense. And then as you swung around the bull gear, the center cylinder going straight down from the house would turn.

AM: No, that part stayed solid. It didn't turn. The only thing that turned was the house.

TM: On the bull gear.

AM: Yeah, all that stayed connected and it didn't move. Just the house turned around. All that was solid. It didn't move.

TM: Alright, because I was thinking what would keep the house from flipping off the platform then.

AM: Right. No, it was all connected with that iron, T-iron, uh, yeah, and just the house. I'd heard that— I remember they took a— That house come off a truck crane that you drive down the road.

TM: That's right. That's right, yes.

AM: I heard that they took that center piece out that the house sits on on the truck crane with the bull gear, I heard they took that out and put it in that frame—

TM: Well, that would make perfect sense. That would make perfect sense.

AM: —to make everything match up.

TM: Right.

AM: And then I guess they built a pipe around it and connect it to it. The iron could connect to that pipe so you could have a good, solid frame. That's what I heard. You know, it was already built when I got there. So I didn't get to see none of that.

TM: Well, it clearly worked just fine.

AM: It did, didn't it? Yeah, I'm still here to tell about it.

TM: That's exactly right. That's exactly right. I've got some questions for you once we wrap this up, and I'm just thinking is there anything else you remember about that?

AM: No, I just had a good time. I enjoyed Arizona. I enjoyed building the bridge and the Navajos, watching them Indians get drunk and holler and hoot. That was a funny thing after we had our topping-out party, I remember. There was always a couple of Indians I would talk to that was mainly my connectors. And they come back next day, and they're all bruised up, black eyes and stuff. I said, "What in the heck happened to y'all?" "Well, I rolled my truck up the road up there. I rolled it."

TM: Oh, no.

AM: And one of them—I think it was my main connector—he had a little, old, green, maybe a little Ford truck, one the smaller ones back then, had a bed. And that thing was almost full of beer cans in it. I remember him driving down the road all the time and beer cans everywhere back there. He said when they got drunk after the topping-out party, he rolled his truck, and beer cans went everywhere.

TM: I bet they did. Oh, gosh.

AM: And I said, "What'd you do with all those beer cans?" He said, "I had to pick them back up. I couldn't leave them."

TM: Oh, wow. Right.

AM: I wasn't sure if that was on the Navajo land or the state or US side. I don't know, but I remember him saying, "I had to pick all them cans up."

TM: Well, yeah. He was probably getting ready to turn them all in. Back then, you know, aluminum was fetching a good price. If you had a lot of them, you'd wanna hang on to them and turn them.

AM: I had a good laugh over that. I said, "Y'all not too good with that fire whiskey, are you? Yeah, it was fun talking to the Navajos. I enjoyed it.

TM: I think it sounds like they enjoyed it as well.

AM: Yeah, I'm sure they did. It was a fun group. Everybody for Traylor Brothers there, we all got along. It was really a fun job. You don't get too many of them like that, but this one was a fun job. I was more excited about doing the job because it's something I've never done, and it was

interesting how we were doing it. Probably back then, well, back then I needed the money, but now I'd probably done it for free because it would just be so interesting to do.

TM: Yeah, absolutely.

AM: I like new things because I learn. And like the bridge we done right after that in Tennessee, I was on a barge in the lake.

TM: Oh, wow.

AM: And I've never done that before and that's quite different, a lot different. It was a lot different. I mean, you can actually— When I'd pick a bridge beam up, beside me on another barge, uh, I don't remember what they weigh—it was 100,000 or so—the water would come up over the barge that I'm sitting on. It would come over about a foot, and as you swing around to go to the other side, you can see that water. It would just kind of drift down. It just followed me all the way around. That was fun. I'd never done nothing like, and so that was really interesting to me.

TM: And that barge you were on must have been anchored into the ground or anchored into something to keep it from floating away.

AM: Yeah, they're called spuds. You had four spuds, and you'd pick them up, and then they would screw something in or something to hold them up while you do your other spuds, and then a barge would push me to where I needed to go. And then when you got there, then I'd pick that spud up, hold it, and then when they cut it loose down at the bottom, I would just freefall it and let it drop till it hit and stopped.

TM: Oh, so it would go into the mud in the bottom of the lake and, kind of, hold you there.

AM: Yeah, when I first did that, I remember David Meche was flagging me. I started easing that spud down, just kind of easing it down. He would look up at me and give me a signal, like, cut it loose, and I'm thinking, "Does he really want me to cut this loose? Well, okay. I'll try it." So I cut it loose. It was *ting-a-ting-a-ting-ting*, banging around going down. And it'd hit, and I'd slam on the brakes. He'd give me thumbs up. Oh, okay. So that's what we're supposed to do. I didn't know.

TM: So you had the spud on your cable?

AM: Yeah, on my block.

TM: On your block. And so—

AM: It was, like, a four or— No, this block I had, I think it was an eight-part picks for the heavy beams. It had eight parts in the block. It didn't go real fast, but it would go a little bit.

TM: It would be just taking off, and then you'd have to hit the brakes. Otherwise, the drum would just keep spewing out cable.

AM: Well, yeah, that and my block would hit the top of the spud, and then that's where all the cable would come off the drum. That'd be an ugly mess.

TM: And then somebody would have to disconnect the block from the spud.

AM: We had a little manlift on the barge, and he would go up there and cut me loose.

TM: Okay. And then you'd go do it again on the other side?

AM: Yeah.

TM: Wow.

AM: That was really strange too, but it's all a learning experience. I mean, I can go back and know what to do now if I had to do it. But there's a first time for everything.

TM: Boy, it sounds like there's a lot of on-the-job training in this kind of business and—

AM: There is.

TM: — it's just what it is.

AM: Yeah, but I had fun at it. I enjoyed it, but I love learning. I love learning new things and being in different cranes. I like to learn the cranes when I get in them. You got to learn the computer because all of them got different computers nowadays. I could run the crane. I mean, all cranes run the same, but mainly you got to learn the computer now in them to go to work. It's all a learning experience—

TM: Got it. Yeah. Different times now.

AM: — till you get your routine down.

TM: When did the computers come into the house?

AM: 1997, '98. Somewhere in there.

TM: Okay, not long after Navajo then.

AM: Right. But I mean, there's still a bunch of old cranes out there that don't have computers, and they're still working. It just depends on whatever you get in. I'm working for All Crane now in Knoxville, and I run everything they got from a little 15-ton up to 1,000-ton. And everything, all your computers, no matter what you get in, something's always different in them. You got to sit there and go through it, or if you can't go through it, then you get the mechanic come over there and say, "Help me out here."

TM: Right. How do you figure this out?

AM: I'm missing something here. What am I missing? And they'd set it up. Okay, I got it now. Let's go.

TM: Nice, nice.

AM: That crane in Navajo over there, it didn't have no computer in it. All it had was a boom angle on the boom that you had to go by.

TM: How does that work?

AM: Well, that's what your load charts are based off of. You just had a little rod that would stick down on the side of the boom pretty close to about where your head is on the butt section of the boom, and it free swings. And then below it is a half a degree wheel, you'd say, and it's stationary. It goes from zero up to 90. So wherever that needle, that arm, wherever you bloom at, that arm, it would always point what degree you're at, like, 52 degrees, 56 degrees, 70, whatever.

TM: And the closer toward horizontal you're going, the more you have to be concerned—

AM: Of the higher number.

TM: Yeah, the higher number. I mean, you start moving on your load chart. You have to have less and less metal out there.

AM: You could only go to 82 degrees—it's high boom—and then you can go all the way to zero.

TM: Because when you were way out near zero, if you had too much weight on there, it could jack in, pull up your—

AM: Tear that frame up.

TM: Exactly.

AM: On a regular crane, it would just lift an outrigger or something.

TM: Right. It'd pick the cab up or rubber tires would come off the ground or something.

AM: Yeah, but on that one you'd take the possibility of tearing the frame up.

TM: And chasing it to the river, which would not be a lot of fun.

AM: No, that would be a scary ride all the way down.

TM: Yes, it would.

AM: Luckily, it would never come close to that.

TM: Yeah, yeah. No kidding.

AM: But what else I remember, I just remember it being fun. I remember seeing the balance rocks and enjoyed the Glen Canyon Dam.

TM: Did you ever run into any of those other Navajo ironworkers out there in your later career?

AM: No, I never have. I mean, I've never been back since I left there.

TM: Well, if you come out this way, we need to visit and go on out to that bridge. I'd love to walk around there and have you look at it and recollect.

AM: Yes, I do want to go back out there. I've seen the bridge on a couple of movies of them driving across, but I want to do it myself, though. Yeah, I want to go back out there and look at it myself, just walk and stand on it or something and say, "I built this."

TM: The fun thing is you can walk the old bridge and look right out at the new bridge and just see it right there. Of course, they don't let— You know, you're not supposed to walk across the new one, but you can certainly drive across it easy.

AM: But I can be a big dog and just walk across the new one. "I built this bridge. Leave me alone."

TM: That's right! That's right!

AM: "Get out of my way! You wouldn't be here if it wasn't for me."

[Laughter]

TM: Well, they probably won't figure that out until they run you over, so I don't think that's a good idea.

AM: [Laughs] Yeah!

TM: Oh my gosh. Well, Andy, this has been lovely. Thank you so very, very much for taking the time to walk me through this job and your career as a crane operator up to that point. It's been very fascinating, and I think with that we'll go ahead and conclude this Part 3 interview. Today is Thursday, December 22, 2022. My name is Tom Martin. And Andy, thank you so very, very much for this.

AM: You're very welcome. I'm glad I could share what I had, what I could remember of everything.