

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Crucible Steel Project

Personal Experiences

O.H. 1150

CHARLES TWYFORD

Interviewed on

December 17, 1987

By

Mark Twyford

Charles Twyford

Charles “Pete” Twyford, the son of Curtis and Grace Twyford, was born May 1, 1935 in East Liverpool, Ohio. The youngest of four children, Twyford attended city schools and eventually graduated from East Liverpool High School in 1953.

Twyford served two stints in the United States Army, from 1955 to 1958 and 1961 to 1964. In the interim, he worked for Western Union. After leaving the Army for the second time, Twyford found employment at the Crucible Steel Company in Midland, Pennsylvania. For nineteen years Twyford worked at Crucible Steel, and the plant was closed in 1983 or 1984.

Twyford and his wife Marina now live in Vermillion, Ohio. They have two children and one grandchild. Since 1984, Twyford has been employed as a dispatcher for the A.T.S. in Vermillion.

Mark F. Twyford

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Interviewee: Charles Twyford
Interviewer: Mark Twyford
Subject: Crucible Steel Project
Date: September 5, 1987

MT: This is an interview with Charles E. Twyford for the Youngstown State University Crucible Steel project by Mark Twyford in East Liverpool Ohio on December 17, 1987 at 1pm. I appreciate you taking the time to speak to me today. I wonder if we can start out with a little background as a child. You grew up during the Depression. What was life like for you back then?

CT: Not fun.

MT: The Depression didn't bother you too much then?

CT: I can't remember too much about it.

MT: Whereabouts in East Liverpool did you grow up?

CT: Grant Street. Went to Washington Grade school.

MT: What did you enjoy most about school?

CT: Nothing.

MT: You didn't have a favorite subject or anything?

CT: History and Geography.

MT: You graduated from high school in what year?

CT: 1954.

MT: And you went right into the Army?

CT: Right into the Army.

MT: Were you drafted in? What made you decide to go into the Army?

CT: No. I had the inclination. I really enjoyed it. I wish I would have stayed in the Army.

MT: What was your job there?

CT: Teletype operator.

MT: How long were you in? I see you were in for 3 years?

CT: Three years, almost 4 years the first time. I was in two different times.

MT: What made you re-enlist the second time?

CT: I lost my job with Western Union the second time.

MT: Were you a teletype operator again when you went in?

CT: Teletype both times.

MT: When you left the Army for the second time, did you know a job was available at Crucible?

CT: No, I just went out and applied for jobs. They called me the next day.

MT: Did you have relatives that already worked there?

CT: Yes, my brother Fred worked there.

MT: Did that have any pull in getting you your job?

CT: I have no idea.

MT: When you were at Western Union, what did your job entail there?

CT: I was in telegram receiving.

MT: Did that use your experience from the Army?

CT: Yes.

MT: What made you look to Crucible for work then? Just because your brother worked there?

CT: It was a logical place in this area to find a job.

MT: It was good money.

CT: Yes. Besides that, I didn't want to go out to Vietnam. Everybody who reenlisted in 1964 was being shipped to Vietnam and I said no thanks.

MT: Where have you been stationed?

CT: Alaska, Fort Wayne, Germany, and all over the place.

MT: What was it like up in Alaska?

CT: Beautiful up there. I liked it. Summers in Alaska are hot. When I was there, it wasn't too bad except I'd go down underground and it would be cold.

MT: What city were you in?

CT: Anchorage. I made it home right before the big earthquake in 1964.

MT: So you left just in time?

CT: Just in time.

MT: You applied at Crucible and how long after that until you started?

CT: The next day.

MT: Had you heard they were hiring?

CT: No, I hadn't heard anything. I just went up there and put in my application.

MT: So it was a welcome surprise?

CT: Very welcome surprise.

MT: What was your first job at Crucible?

CT: Sweeping the floor, the shipping floor.

MT: How long did you stay at that job?

CT: About a month.

MT: What did you move on to?

CT: Sweeping the floor. Then the job opened at the cold draw line.

MT: The cold draw line- what exactly is that?

CT: It where you cut all the steel down to size. You take the [?] torsion bar and start out an inch or 32 wide and drop down to 990. That's what they use the torsion bar for. They have straighteners too up there. Saws, all that stuff.

MT: Straightener- is that do exactly what it sounds like?

CT: Yes, it will straighten the bars.

MT: Was it a dangerous job?

CT: A very dangerous job. I saw a guy when I was working night turn, a guy was running one of the bigger straighteners and got his hand pad caught and the machine just hooked him right into the rolls. He lost his arm.

MT: Were injuries common then on the line?

CT: No, not. As long as you watched yourself, you didn't have to worry about injuries. But you should never, in my opinion, from what I've seen, they give you little hand pads with a little piece of metal with a strap on them. And that's what you use on the straighteners. And these

guys use big heavy gloves. And if you got a spur or something on there, you're going to get stuck and it will take you right over. But the hand pads they had, they would just fit in the track.

MT: What made you decide to try to get into that job? Did you have a choice?

CT: Yes, we had a lot of choice. We looked at how many people was in line, how old they were, when they were going to get out. More or less, we wanted to get in line and move up.

MT: Did it pay more because of the danger involved?

CT: It was a hazard so you get paid hazard wage.

MT: Do you remember what kind of money that was at the time?

CT: We got paid every two weeks, so I got a check for about \$800, \$900 every two weeks.

MT: So that's not too bad money then. Of the jobs you performed along the line of progression, which one did you like the most?

CT: I liked doing the drawbridge the most. Basically, you just stand still and there's an automatic machine up there. As long as you had straight steel. The straighteners, actually they called them the yard [?]. You get in there and if you get straight steel you could play around all day long, doing the straightening work. And they had to be straight.

MT: So that sounds like the least difficult job.

CT: The least difficult in the line was to draw line. That's where we cleaned the pellets. When the puddle machine and they had pellets that came down to clean. That was least complicated machine on the line. But as far as the most complicated, I'd say that the drawer was the most complicated because you had to set it.

MT: Each one of these jobs was a step up in the line?

CT: Yes, a step up.

MT: And how did that line go exactly?

CT: It was the whip-last and straightener first. Then the bottom of the line, then the draw bridge. Then you got up to the finishing line, which where you stayed the steel and sheered the length.

MT: So, did you eventually make it up to the finishing line?

CT: Yes.

MT: About what year was that?

CT: 1976.

MT: So did you just stay at that job then?

CT: I went back and forth, depending on the orders. People go on vacations. If I remember right, I was fifth in line. So I was out on the drawbridge most of the time.

MT: You mentioned a fellow that lost his arm in the accident. Most of the accidents you saw, would you say that were the fault of the employees or of the employers?

CT: The employees being careless. That guy, if he would have had a pair of hand pads on, he would have been fine. And also these machines, ...They made a bonus or incentive. So, it's human nature, trying to make money. So he was trying to make a bonus. And in his case, he had no business being on that machine in the first place. Because he wasn't even scheduled on that. He was scheduled on another job. And the other guy got tired, so he started on the slip- and he ended up...

MT: I don't know what parts of the mill you're familiar with, but would you say for the most part then that Crucible or Colt Industries did a good job making things safe for the workers?

CT: After a while they did. You had to know what the safe habits were.

MT: And when you told them that...

CT: Most of the time they complied. In my department, and I spent most of my time in the pinching, I don't know what went on in the other parts.

MT: Who would you take the complaint to? To the union?

CT: I never took anything to the union. I thought they were the worst.

MT: And you thought that all along?

CT: Well at first. But it seemed like the more money you paid to them, the less representation you got. At the beginning, their union was fairly good. But at the end, they could care less. The only ones they were worried about were the people who had 20 years or more. If you didn't have 20 years, they couldn't care less what happened to you.

MT: Did the union have a role in the assignment of job or what you did?

CT: Well, let's put it this way- I was scheduled on one machine and the foreman came over and instead of asking me to me to work a double, he had called a guy out who wasn't even scheduled on the machine. And the union said I was entitled to get paid for that day, but that's as far as the union would go.

MT: Was that opinion you have of the union, did the other people you worked with on a daily basis, did they share that?

CT: There was a quite a few of them that shared that. They had little use for the union. The only people who had any use for the union was the ones that had 20 years. Because they knew that could get what they wanted. But the younger people had very little opinion.

MT: Crucible became Colt Industries. Was that in the '60s?

CT: I started in 1964. I think it was in the 70s when Colt took over. [*Wikipedia: From 1968 to 1984, Crucible was owned by Colt Industries. In 1985, its salaried employees bought it back. By then, the company was known as Crucible Materials Corporation.*]

MT: Did you notice some difference?

CT: No, not really. Towards the end, before they shut it down, the union wanted Colt Industries out. They were out to leave the steel mill dry and get what they needed out of it. That was it. That's what Colt Industries wanted.

MT: Did you notice the mill deteriorating?

CT: They made sure the machines were runnable. But as far as bringing in new machines, they never brought in new machines. They just rebuilt the old things as they were falling apart.

MT: What was your view of the management? The White hats? Did you have a good relationship with them?

CT: Well, some of them. We had one up there nobody liked. He expected you to do eight hours of work and if you didn't, he wrote you. But I never had any trouble with him. I'd go in, do my job, get done. And never say anything to him. Most though, half of them, didn't even know what they were doing. They'd come down and tell you how to run the machines. They didn't even look at the machines. Most of them didn't.

MT: I've talked to several people now and they all told me about different amounts they'd work in an 8-hour day. The mill got a bad image that people thought the men weren't working 8 hours a day there.

CT: The company is the one that set the day. If it took you two hours to do it, why stay there to work for 8 hours? The machines I ran, they had the day set. And as long as you did... and not just the day- you ran say one more bottle than what was necessary, we never said a word to you. Because a lot of people weren't there. A lot of the plate covering guys went to sleep. They never worked. And that's one of the reasons they didn't like us anymore. The good guy was out. I mean he expected you to do the work- at least for a little while. I mean, he didn't stand over you with a club but if he found out you weren't working, he was right there on you.

MT: So there was a set amount you were supposed to do and if you did that, they left you alone for the most part?

CT: Yeah. If they wanted 3 bottles of still, you did three bottles of still. And that was that. We could go sit down or do anything you wanted.

MT: What do you think about that?

CT: Hey, the company is the one who set the day.

MT: But you personally, what do you think about that?

CT: I think that had a lot to do with them shutting down. Because the people just weren't doing the work. But like I said, it was the company's fault.

MT: If you think that had to do with the mill shutting down, what other factors do you think contributed?

CT: Foreign imports. And with the government not wanting to correct that. When you can go overseas and buy steel for less, and bring it back here and still make money on it.

MT: Anything else up at the mill that you think might have led to the decline?

CT: I think about 80% of it was foreign imports. Because they could go overseas get it for a lot less and [?]. And then the union always wanted to say give us more, give us more. But then again, it was the company's fault. And the government for not having enough sense to realize what was going to happen- or not caring what was going to happen.

MT: You blame the federal government?

CT: Definitely.

MT: And Jimmy Carter in particular?

CT: Jimmy Carter in particular. I listened to Jimmy Carter when he came to Aliquippa. "I will definitely get a quota on foreign imports." He went back to Washington and that's the last we ever heard of it.

MT: Throughout the 60's and 70's the unions were getting progressively higher wages.

CT: Yes, they were getting more demand.

MT: You thought maybe they shouldn't have done that?

CT: Now that its over, you tend to look back, but it was nice when it was going on. But I still think if they would've put some kind of an import quota on this, we steel mills would be working. You look around the country, there's no steel mills working. If this country would ever get into a war and need steel, they're in a bad way. They'd have to get it all from Japan.

MT: Did you ever notice any violations of the law, like the environmental laws?

CT: No. I never paid much attention.

MT: I talked to one fellow who said the mill had been responsible for building a sewage plant in the mill.

CT: I don't know. I know I worked out by the coke's mill and you could see when they were pickling the steel. You could see acid, yellow acid, just going up the smoke stack.

MT: Did you develop any physical problems from working at the mill? Do you know of any physical hazards that plagued mill people?

CT: I think a lot of it was just carelessness. That had a lot to do with it. I think that was more. I can't tell you about other departments. I can only tell you about the finishing unit. I only worked in maybe two or three other departments and that was only for a week at a time.

MT: When the mill was starting to decline, did you go to the union meetings then? Did you always go? Or did you just stay away from it?

CT: I went to a union meeting three times. One time, it concerned overtime in my department. They came up with the- if you worked the job five days you were entitled to the sixth day and pay. So no people showed up. They went along with the vote and decided that if you worked five days you'd get the sixth day. Then old guys went to the union and complained. Now this was after you had a free election and everything. The old people said we don't agree with that. So the union organized another meeting and held another election. This time the old guys won. So that's when most of the young people I know just quit. Just stick it you, we won. That first weekend, the first Saturday after the second ballot, they asked for people to come out and work. They could only get one more guy. They couldn't work that weekend because none of the young guys would work. The union was for the older person. The only thing they want from the younger person was his money.

MT: What about toward the end, when there was a good chance they were going to close the mill down?

CT: I went to one meeting. At this meeting, they said if your time and service, and you were 65 you could retire. So in my department alone there were about 40 people who fell into this category. So they came down to the final closing, the union- the union!- went to the company and said you ought to change this. There were too many people retiring. I don't know what it was, but there was about 40 in my department alone at that with time with service and were 65 had to go find other jobs. I had six months to retire.

MT: I remember at the time, there was some talk of Cyclops or other companies going to come in there. And as I understand it, some of the older guys who were already going to get the pension or whatever they were against taking any cuts. How did you feel about that?

CT: I don't know. I heard that Cyclops wanted to buy it. And Cyclops was paying people and would keep it open as long as it was feasible. The way I understand it, the day they were supposed to sign the holding back. Then they sold to Jones and Laughlin a month later or something. And Jones and Laughlin owns/closed the whole place. I heard that Cyclops was going to run it as long as possible. As long as they were making a profit, they would do it.

MT: How did you feel about the union toward the end there?

CT: I thought very little of the union. About the last five, six years I was working. Like I said, the union was out for your money. That's the only thing. We had no representation. In fact, we had one union guy, he was on his death bed until they gave him a white hat and then he made a miraculous recovery. There was nothing wrong with him. So that's what that white hat means. I mean, when you get that close where the one day you can be a shop steward and the next day you can be a foreman, now there's something wrong.

MT: Were you ever offered the opportunity to be in the union?

CT: No. I never wanted to be in anything. They're right in the middle. Instead, he gets it from the men and the big company. No matter what they do, they're always in the middle. Those are the people I feel sorry for.

MT: In one respect, if you had had the power to make changes during your time here, what changes would have you have made? In the way they worked or the commission there, or with the union ...

CT: One thing, I think I would have done away with the incentives. The bonus incentive, that's what broke the mill. When you can make \$800 in salary and \$1200 in bonuses, something's wrong. The balance is off. And then somebody else down on this machine makes a \$1200 bonus for shipping the steel out and you get \$1.65. If you're going to have bonus, let them have a fair bonus, not what they had.

MT: You think they would have had a bonus throughout the mill it would have been better then?

CT: You would have had men staying. I think it would have been a lot better.

MT: People would have working 7 or 8 hours.

CT: Sure, you would have had people working then. The only ones you ever actually saw working then were the ones who could make the bonus. Because why should you go up there and work 8 hours and not make anything, and here's this guy working over here works 8 hours and gets \$200, \$300 a day bonus. It was just completely ridiculous.

MT: Were there very many jobs at the mill that had the bonus?

CT: In my department, all of the straighteners were on bonus. The draw bench was on bonus. But you had to run so much steel on the draw bench, you could do a week's worth of steel for \$15 in one day. It just wasn't worth the trouble.

MT: What about anything else you saw that would have made the mill run more efficiently?

CT: I honestly think if we had better foreman, we'd be booming. And then you had the people their self, they have to want to work. You had Weirton Steel. [*In the 1980s, it was the largest Employee Stock Ownership Plan steel mill in the world.*] It's their company, they want to make it work. You had the people up there, they're going to get their 40 hours a week. As long as you did so much work, they'd say eh. There was no initiative. You had nothing to work for. Because it's not your company. If they would have let those employees buy that company, that company would still be going.

MT: Where did most of the foreman come from? Did they come from the ranks of the people who performed the job?

CT: Well one of them, he had done the job before. You had two departments go together. You had Heat Treat and Finishing make one department. And most of them foremen were there when I got there, except maybe Ed Hunter. I wouldn't say they worked their way up the ranks, because that one was a shop steward and the next day, he was a foreman. And then you had a couple. And the ones that worked their way up were the ones you wanted to work for, because they knew what they were doing. These other people...

MT: So politics had a lot do with the foreman too. Who you knew...

CT: I'd say so.

MT: Was that ever discussed at the meetings about Crucible and Colt Industries purchasing the mill?

CT: I think they brought it up maybe two or three times to Colt and Colt wouldn't sell it to them. If I remember right. I went once or twice. The employees wanted to buy it and the Colt investors said no. I don't know if Colt was afraid the employees could make it work or what.

MT: That sounds strange.

CT: Like I said, I was never at the meetings, but I'm almost positive that's what was in the newspaper. The employees wanted to buy it and Colt investors were the ones who said no.

MT: What were your thoughts as it was apparent the mill was going to close down? You were still a young man, how did you feel about that?

CT: Well, I thought I was going to retire until about a month before it did. I said I can sit at home making \$1000 a month just by sitting there. And then they said, you guys want to retire? I just went and found another job. It took a little while to find it, but I found another job.

MT: When you had started at Crucible, did you have this vision that you were going to work there?

CT: When you started at Crucible, you think you're going to die there. Because that thing was there 65, 70 years. Nobody could ever visualize that whole place closing down.

MT: So missed the pension entirely then?

CT: No, I get one at 62. That's in 10 years.

MT: I wonder if you could backtrack a little bit. You can pick any one of the jobs you worked on the line of progression or the most. Could you just describe a typical day? What you would do that day at the mill?

CT: If I was on daylight I'd generally get up at 5, 5:30. Have a cup of coffee. Jump in the car. Drive my 26 miles to work. Get a few cups of coffee. And then if I'm on the draw bench, I'd go down at 7:00, turn the machine one. Then find out what the steel was that I was going to run for the day. And start straightening. If its straight enough, you can just put the machine in automatic

and just stand there. But if you get crooked stuff- say two-inch bars and they're 26 feet long and they were crooked- then you had a busy one. You could work all day long and get half as much done.

MT: Was the foreman knowledgeable about that?

CT: Oh, yeah.

MT: Did people realize that when wasn't straight, it was going to take you longer and you weren't going to get as much done?

CT: I think we complained enough so they should have known.

MT: Did you get breaks?

CT: We worked from seven until about ten to nine [o'clock]. Then a coffee break. It was supposed to be from ten to nine [8:50] until ten after nine [9:10]. (You're talking nine-thirty.) And then you went to lunch at eleven-thirty. It was supposed to be eleven-thirty to twelve [o'clock]... Eleven-thirty to twelve thirty, one o'clock, you went back to work if you felt like it. That's the reason I say you had no bosses that cared! I mean half of them were afraid they were going to shut down. And then, say you did go back to work at an honest time. Then you worked until about two-thirty. Cleaned up around your area. Get ready to go home.

MT: Did some people just used to leave that you know of?

CT: You mean just punch out early?

MT: Or have someone else punch them out and they were long gone.

CT: Oh yeah. I saw that a lot of times. Let's say you were working night turn and you knew a guy on day light. You could have it all arranged. You could leave at 6:00 in the morning. Yeah, that was common.

MT: Did you know anyone who got in trouble for that?

CT: A couple of guys were caught and got docked an hour.

MT: That's the only penalty they got?

CT: That's the only penalty I ever heard of. Hey, the foreman was sleeping all night. Those guys were going to leave in an hour. I've seen a couple foreman sleep all night when they're supposed to be working. I mean, an employee at work sees that and says the foreman doesn't care, why should I? There was a lot of that down there. You saw a lot of that attitude. Because each foreman didn't know what they were doing. So, you put someone in charge of something who doesn't want anything and the employees are complacent. Well, I don't know. You sure don't know. Why would I be worried about it?

MT: What would you do from there? If you didn't know and your foreman didn't know?

CT: Well, I generally didn't run into that. After you a run a machine for five, ten years, you generally know what's going on. But say you were a young guy, and somebody else isn't going to tell you how to do it. And this woman doesn't know. I sure ain't going to tell you how to do it. Because most of the time, you'd get in trouble. There was a foreman we had out there who said "There's a right way, a wrong way, and my way." So hey...

MT: Doesn't seem like you had a lot of respect for the foreman. Did the men treat them with respect?

CT: Some of them. Like this one, one of the nasty ones. Nobody like him but you worked. You didn't cross him. And you had a couple that were very easy and guys would just run him over.

MT: Did the union back you up in disputes against the white hats? Did that happen very often?

CT: I never took anything to them after that one time concerning that six days of that overtime. They didn't do nothing. I just didn't bother. If I had anything, I just wrote it off as a loss. You know, you gotta have respect for somebody or something, and I had no respect for this union. The only thing they wanted from me was my money. Like I said, unless you had your twenty years. If you had your twenty years, they'd fight for you. They might.

MT: What were the sanitary conditions like at the mill? Did they provide clean facilities for you?

CT: Oh, yeah. I generally ate at my machine. That was about as clean as anything. I don't know about everybody, but most people ate where they worked. It was just as clean there as anywhere else. They had a little place with a couple table and chairs and some guys would eat there. But most of the time, the guys just ate by their machines.

MT: What did it take to get fired at the mill? Did you know anyone?

CT: I can't remember anyone getting fired at the mill. I remember some guys came in there drunk. They'd send them home. I can't remember anybody being let go for anything. I saw them come in drunk before, leave work early...

MT: Do you think the union prevented that? Or did people overlook everything?

CT: I think the company just overlooked it. If the guy came in drunk again, bothering anybody... A lot of times, somebody would go over and do his work for him. Just to keep it going.

MT: If I was doing a dangerous job, I wouldn't want somebody helping me who was drunk.

CT: This one crane man came in one night, he was drunk. He said he'd call the police. They just called security and just marched him off.

MT: There was no penalty for that?

CT: No.

MT: We talked earlier about what factors might have led to the closing of the mill. Is there anything you'd like to add?

CT: I think it was employees not caring. Workers not putting out enough work. Employers not caring and not knowing. And they should have put the employees in charge. The only industry they ever protected was the Carter Administration. Not protected anything else.

MT: Did you notice flaws in the way the federal government did things before the Carter Administration? Or to just mainly blame him?

CT: I don't think the Carter Administration did anything.

MT: What about Gerald Ford before that? Or do you think it begin with Carter?

CT: I've been told you go back eight years to the Administration before you. And the good or the bad. You go back eight years and that's generally what you're going to have eight years from now.

MT: So that was Nixon.

CT: Yeah, you go back to Nixon. But we worked good when Nixon was President. We worked six, seven days a week. I'm just telling you, these are what political scientists will tell you. You go back eight years. I don't agree with that. Most of the trouble started with the steel mills goes back to Carter. Because he saw and didn't do anything to it.

MT: What year did the mill close down?

CT: I worked up until May of 1982. I don't know when the mill closed down because I was only there until 1982.

MT: What about President Regan? He was in office by then. Do you think there was something he could have done? Some last-ditch effort?

CT: Unless there was steel mills, because none of them was working by then. He liked free enterprise, or whatever he called it. You better start discounting from this country.

MT: Is there anything else that you'd like to talk about?

CT: I think that sums it up.

MT: I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me.

End 41:15