

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Railroading History

Railroading Experience

O. H. 331

THOMAS R. RHOADES

Interviewed

by

Lillian Eminhizer

on

August 8, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

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INTERVIEWEE: THOMAS R. RHOADES
INTERVIEWER: Lillian Eminhizer
SUBJECT: P&N Railroad, Electric Railroads, Employees
DATE: August 8, 1975

E: This is an interview with Thomas R. Rhoades of 101 Sylvania Avenue in Greenville, South Carolina. The interview is being done for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program. The interviewer is Lillian Eminhizer and this is August 8, 1974, and it is about 3:00 p.m.

First, let's talk a little bit about the progression you made in your railroad career. Where did you work first?

R: I was employed a car man for the Southern Railroad from 1918 until February of 1921, serving the last year and a half as car inspector. In February I was laid off with the force reduction. I never stood for anymore work for the Southern until 1927. In 1927 I had been at work for the Piedmont & Northern since January of 1924. And by choice I stayed with the P&N as car inspector located in Greenwood, South Carolina. In 1933 I transferred from the mechanical department to the transportation department and ran an engine as locomotive engineer and passenger engineer until June 14, 1941. In 1941 I was promoted to train master for the South Carolina Division, which operated between Greenwood and Spartanburg, South Carolina, via Anderson. It was an eleven mile range between Belton and Anderson. I continued as train master from June 1941 until June 1946. In June of 1946 I was made division superintendent with headquarters in Greenville. In this capacity I continued until June of 1942. In June of 1952 I had additional duties attached to my present duties as superintendent of motor power on both the North and South Carolina Divisions in addition to division superintendent. This position was held until the merger between the Piedmont & Northern and the Seaboard Coastline Railway on July 1, 1969. At that time I retired from active duty.

E: You went to work with the Piedmont in 1924?

R: In 1924.

E: What does a car inspector do?

R: In those days we were operating with electric locomotives and electric passenger trains. It was the duty of car inspectors to inspect cars, freight cars, that is all types of equipment received through interchange from the Seaboard Railroad to the Piedmont & Northern. Car inspector's duties can get right complicated inasmuch as we were responsible for the mechanical and operating condition of all equipment that we received, any of it that might be abused in a wreck where boxcars, tank cars, or what have you have been sideswiped or derailed. They have been damaged. It might have several thousand dollars worth of damage to the piece of equipment, yet they are able to continue on in their movement without any likelihood of derailment. Well, it's the inspector's duty to note and secure what we called a defect card, making the Seaboard responsible for that damage that exists at the time it's offered to you for interchange. The defect card is attached to the car and rides there until the car is on its home road or repaired. They'll bill the road who issued the car for repairs that were actually made on the damage that was done. That's the number one duty.

The number two duty is to look after the rolling equipment of your own, such as engines and passenger coaches. There was a layover in Greenwood and during your assignment you repaired the engines, or the passenger cars, or whatever needed repaired in addition to your duties as an inspector.

Going from there to the transportation department, of course, we had passenger train assignments out of Greenwood. We had freight train assignments out of Greenwood that operated between Greenwood and Spartanburg. All employees were on a seniority roster, and being the youngest engineer in 1933, why, I just had to take what was left when the older boys stopped off. We had some jobs that made a round trip to Spartanburg and back to Greenwood. You would go up one day and back the next. But on passenger assignments, you would make the round trip in eight hours. Well, I continued at that, as I said, until 1941. At this time I made train master.

Of course, the duties of train master cover twenty-four hours a day from one end of the road to the other. Also,

looking after the crew, seeing that they were properly lined up, or seeing if they were in shape to work when they did report. I had to cover quite a bit of territory. As I said, you were on twenty-four hour call. You might get home one night and you might not. You might be gone a couple or three days at a time, but you were always on the division somewhere during that time.

On a smaller railroad, your duties exceeded some of those on a larger railroad because you just couldn't afford to have a man for every long screwdriver, or even short screwdriver either. You have to be able to use the both of them, so to speak. Take, for instance, derailments, it was necessary that the train master be at or close to the derailments and see that everything was carried out as quickly as possible and expedite the clearing of the main line or the industrial track, or whatever it was where the derailment was.

Of course, the superintendent's position included more responsibility. You looked after the train master and the rest of the railroad, hiring employees, looking over, passing, or rejecting the applicants. It was also imperative for the small railroad to see that all the receivers, the customers of ours, got the best service that could be had, and to see that they were all satisfied, and that all the crews were doing the work that they were assigned to do without shortcutting the customer. There again, you assumed more responsibility and operation of the motor power. The master mechanic reported to you as well as the train master. We always had a good working team so that we had no great big problems, except it was just quite an interesting thing to follow all the strings that you had leading through your fingers to see that everybody concerned had gotten what he had paid for or what he was paying for.

E: When you went out to hire a crew or hire a person to work on the railroad, did you have exams you gave them?

R: Yes, we had a pretty rigid written examination, as well as an oral examination for trainmen. That was not literally true with the majority of the clerks, but all trainmen, engineers, conductors, and brakemen stood a rigid examination, as well as a written examination on train rules, on operating rules. For a good many years we pulled our engineers out of the mechanical department because they knew so much more about the equipment. You have a written examination on train rules for that mechanical man when he enters the service of the transportation department.

In 1951 we transferred from all electric to diesel operation. And after we started our diesel operation, we

started promoting our brakemen or flagmen to engineers. Those who showed an interest in going to what we called the head end or the rear--the rear end was a conductor, the head end was an engineer--we gave him a permit that allowed him to operate for about two years under the supervision of the old engineer. He had to get five engineers to sign his permit that he was able and capable of operating a locomotive himself.

E: Did he hold the position of fireman or something like that?

R: No, he was either a head brakeman or a rear brakeman. As I said, operating electrically, we never had any firemen. After we dieselized, we continued operating without what we called a fireman.

E: On most of the railroads, the fireman was part of the crew as such. Did you just have a different set of people that made up the crew on the diesel?

R: That's right, instead of the fireman we used the head brakeman to ride on that side of the engine.

E: Did these men have to go in periodically and be reexamined during their lifetime on the railroad?

R: At a certain age. It varied, but under my regime unless we observed something that looked like it was necessary for him to be reexamined, we didn't have another examination until he reached 65.

E: Were you working for the railroad at the time they had that big wreck up on the Enoree River?

R: No, I was on the Southern Railroad when that car went over. I helped pick it up while working. I was with the derrick at that time when we picked that up.

E: When was that?

R: In 1919, I believe.

E: Going back to car inspector, you worked within the yard with everything that came into the yard from another foreign railroad?

R: That's correct.

E: Now, on your home railroad, you also inspected your home equipment?

R: Yes.

E: I wanted to ask you, what would cause a car to get side-swiped on the road?

R: Well, it's carelessness on somebody's part. You either didn't push a car in the clear with a passing train or you shoved one out too far with another passing train. There is a fouling point on adjacent tracks and if you don't clear that fouling point, you will have a side-swipe.

In getting back to the defect part, not only would you have damage from a sideswipe, you could also get damage from impacts, and also where they hit too hard in coupling. you could also have damage from derailments. Where the cars are completely turned over on their sides you would get a tremendous amount of damage, and that is the carrier's liability.

E: On this electric road, what would cause a car to derail?

R: Various things; you could have a bad track. I mean that's true whether it's electric or whether it's diesel or what have you. But most of the derailments occur from bad tracks. Then you've got various other things like a draw-head falling out, falling down and striking . . . actually picking the car up. Take a boxcar, it only has an inch and an eighth of steel planes that holds it right on the rails, so it doesn't have to come up high before it leaves the track. Now, a track can spread and your cars can fall in and that will cause it to derail. A flange can break, and when a piece comes out of the flange, maybe twelve, fifteen, or eighteen inches, on a curve, there's nothing to hold it on. It just climbs right over the rail and goes to the woods. Various things can cause derailments.

I remember many years ago the Atlantic Coastline was in high competition with the Seaboard, particularly on the passenger trains between Richmond and Miami. The Seaboard was running rings around the Coastline, who was operating with steam. They were operating with diesel. So the president of the Coastline elected to have built some high-speed steam engines that were supposed to go 110 miles per hour. Well, he did. They got there fast, but they liked to break up the railroad, bending rails. They had Baldwin build these engines for the Coastline. Now, before they ever found out what was bending rails, they mounted cameras on each side of the tender, focused on the driving wheels in the locomotive. And they found from the film alone that that driving wheel, which the crank pin was anchored to, at that high speed was leaving the rail that high and when it came back down, it would just pop, bending that rail and breaking it in some cases. It just shows you how freakish

things can happen.

E: Were they able to make any adjustments in them or did they have to discontinue the use?

R: They just had to discontinue that high speed. They found out that they couldn't compete with the diesel speed. I think it's somewhere around seventy miles per hour that this drivewheel began to pick up and the faster it got the higher it would pick up, so they just reduced the speed to discontinue that damaging of the rail. That, of course, left the competitor with the same competition of diesel power.

E: Is it my understanding that passenger steam engines had higher wheels?

R: Oh yes, your passenger steam engines, your drivers ranged anywhere from 72 to 96 inches, where all of your diesel power wheels are standard at 42 inches.

E: Now on freight steam engines, what size were the drivers?

R: Well, the freight engines were much more. They ranged somewhere around five feet in diameter.

E: When you go out to clean up a wreck, first of all you had certain forms you made out on your observations of the wreck, is that right, the reports or something?

R: Oh yes, yes. The first thing you would do, if you could, was to ascertain what caused the derailment. From there on, if you were satisfied or the committee who was doing the investigation agreed on what caused the derailment, the next thing was to immediately clear the wreck as soon as possible.

Our worst wrecks that we ever encountered were caused by people tampering with switches and leaving the switches cocked or open, whichever the case might be. A fourteen year old youngster over here at Greer knocked a lock off of a switch late in the afternoon, around four o'clock. And at that particular point, the sun was shining right in the front of the locomotive. It was hard to pick up colors that far back. It was a dead end track with a trestle on the back of it. Well, this train went into that siding and the siding was only about three hundred feet long from switch point to the bottom of the chute, maybe three hundred and fifty feet. I've forgotten exactly because it has been a long time. But anyway, the engine and four or five cars went over the chute completely. It just came right on top of the cab and it pressed the cab right down on the engineer and conductor and killed them both. I had to stand by and see that they

were cut out over there. That was one of the worst experiences I ever had so far as a derailment is concerned.

E: What type of equipment did they use to clear up the various wrecks?

R: You had a big derrick for a bad wreck. If the derailment wasn't really bad, they would have air jacks with fifty or sixty ton jacks. We would couple those air jacks to the reservoir on one of the locomotives and get air there and then we would jack it harder and skid it on. But air jacks, rerailers, and derricks were three things that were a necessity to rerailing cars after derailment.

E: When you worked as an engineer, did you handle freight or passenger?

R: Both.

E: What is there to being an electric engineer or engineering the train? It's different from the steam?

R: Well, as far as your operation is concerned, it's identical except for the equipment. The equipment, of course, is entirely different, electric from steam, also electric from diesel. Now, diesel electric, there's not a great deal of difference in equipment. You make your own power as you go with the diesel. There's quite a difference in the voltage of diesel and all-electric. Our all-electric engine operated on 16 hundred volts DC and the diesel equipment, the highest voltages you would get were 600 volts.

Now, on the electric, we picked up our current from the Catenary System. On an average of about every ten miles we had an automatic substation that converted 44 hundred volts AC to 16 hundred volts. It was necessary to have at least twenty gallons of water per minute in those mercuric rectifiers in order to keep the rectifier cool under heavy load.

The Catenary System was awfully expensive to operate. It was particularly bad in the winter time right through this area because of ice, wires freezing. You couldn't make good contact with the pantograph or trolley poles with that ice on there. It would, invariably, burn the overhead down if you still tried to operate in ice. If you operate in there and draw an arch that far, that 16 hundred volts will cut that wire off just like putting an acetylene torch to it. Then you were slowed up. You would get the overhead crowd in to put the overhead back up before you could move again.

Now, the operation as far as the engineers themselves were

concerned, the air brake equipment on one is identical to the other. All of your locomotives are equipped, by and large, with the same type air brake. Of course, Westinghouse developed and played a big part in railway braking systems. The brake valve was practically the same thing on electric as it was on steam and practically the same thing as it was on diesel.

E: Where did the P&N get its equipment? Who made it?

R: General Electric built six of our engines back in 1912 and 1913. Westinghouse built four or five at that same time. Later on, starting about the time I went to the railroad in 1924, we began to buy the motors either from G.E. or Westinghouse on trucks and put the two engines together. We called them an articulated engine built right here in our own shop in Greenville. We built several. As a matter of fact, we built one as late as 1949 before dieselizing in 1951. That was my pride and joy because I played such a big part in it. It was a master, we just didn't have enough power. It would pull the substation off of the floor. It was a beautiful piece of equipment. I've got a big picture of it over there in my den. I hated to see it go to the scrap pile.

E: I was just going to ask you, did they preserve any of those engines?

R: We have one down in Atlanta in the museum that they refurbished in our shop here in 1964, I believe, 1964 or 1965, and then they moved it down to Atlanta.

E: One of the early engines?

R: Yes, one that was built by G.E. in 1914.

E: Who built the passenger cars for you?

R: The majority of them were built by Bud & Hyden or Westinghouse. They were multiple cars. You could operate five units and you could do the same thing with those small freight engines. We would run two and three of those together; one engineer, but operate three of them. And on the passenger equipment, passenger cars, we never operated over three, I don't believe. They would usually deadhead the fourth one, or they say, drag the fourth one. If we had a four car train or five car train, although you would operate three of them, you would drag the other two or one, whichever the case might be. We found that even though you could operate five of them, you got a little better service out of them--apparently you lost some voltage somewhere in the control, for the fifth unit in

particular. So, we found we could operate much better just by using three units.

E: Now, when you put several units together of the passenger, did each one have its own trolley pole?

R: You could use it either way. We later on did away with the trolley poles altogether and used the pantograph system, but with the pantograph we just used one pantograph and used a jumper from each coach. They carried the 16 hundred volts from one motor to the other.

E: You never did use any of the Brille cars?

R: Some of the early cars, I believe, were built by Brille.

E: Did they get some early ones from the Pennsylvania or something like that in the beginning?

R: We never did buy any electric stuff from Pennsylvania, but we bought some trailers from the Pennsylvania that were used on the Long Island, the commuter system. I drove them with freight engines. We operated some special trains, particularly on weekends, and we would use one of these little freight engines they built in 1914 by G.E. We would take that engine and pull as many as five of those Pennsylvania trailers that were loaded with passengers. I operated on those trains when we would handle as many as 1500 passengers in one day.

E: I understand they used to run those passenger trains about every two hours? How long did this type of commuter service continue?

R: It had its ups and downs, but I would say that the passenger business held up really well until 1949. It began to dwindle away after World War II, it ended slowly. The last two years that we operated any passenger service we lost about \$14,000 in 1950 in the twelve months, and then in 1951, the last year we operated, we had lost \$10,000 in eight months. So, you can see how it was just gradually dropping off there.

E: You never did run any food service on the Piedmont, did you?

R: No. I assume you're speaking of passenger car service?

E: Yes.

R: No, we never did do that. Your mileage didn't warrant it. The only thing that we had in the way of food service was the president had a private car and in making his sight-seeing tours over the road we operated it as a director's special or something of that nature. We always had some

mighty good eating on it.

E: Whatever happened to the equipment they had on that president's car?

R: It was given to a railroad historical society in Greenwood, South Carolina, and the car is now stored in Greenwood along with an old Seaboard steam engine. I haven't looked at it myself since it was donated. The Seaboard Coast donated it to them after the merger. Late in 1969 or early 1970 they donated that car to this historical society in Greenwood. Mr. Adams, who was vice president of Greenwood Mills, played a big hand in security for this society in Greenwood. Someone just told me that they let it go down awfully bad. There had been a lot of vandalism on it. Some of the equipment was broken. I would kind of hate to go down and look at it after all those years of riding it and enjoying good food on it and then to go by and see it torn up.

E: Did they have special china and silver that they had made for it?

R: I guess.

E: They used to.

R: Everything was engraved, Carolina, on it, the silverware.

E: That's the name of the car?

R: Carolina, yes.

E: What type of industry did the Piedmont service?

R: Primarily textile. That's the way the Piedmont & Northern was originally started, through the directors of the mills. I say the directors, through the presidents of the mills who were later made directors on the railroad. The Southern Railroad was serving them at that time, but they were getting the service that they thought they ought to have. So, when they were approached by Mr. E. Thomason to build this railroad and sign up for it, they agreed that they would give, if it were possible, an equal fifty percent of their business to the Piedmont & Northern as well as to the Southern Railroad.

Now, later on in years, it got to be quite a bit more diversified, so to speak. And we weren't altogether dependent then on textile plants for the incoming and outgoing materials. The last few years of our operation, I guess coal was our biggest net revenue source. We were handling, at the time I was hired, on the two divisions we had three steam plants that were burning right then a

hundred and fifty cars of coal a day. Of course, that was a pretty nice, little, chunk of revenue.

Now, in addition to that, we had located on both divisions A&P Companies, both meat and groceries in North Carolina and South Carolina, which was a good twenty-five or thirty cars of freight a day. I would say fifty cars a day in both places including the meat and the groceries and vegetables. Both in North Carolina and South Carolina we had cotton warehouses that served practically all of the mills. They used the transit rate when they wanted to let cotton flow into the warehouses during the heavy season of picking; and then during the rest of the year, as they needed it, they would move it on out at the normal charge. It was nothing unusual to have fifty to seventy-five cars of cotton a day ride over to the local warehouses here.

E: Your heaviest tonnage though, came from coal probably, didn't it?

R: In the latter years. A great many years we had Wynn-Dixie's warehouses located on our track, which are now located on the Southern. That was a really nice revenue. Sometimes we would switch them three times a day and have seventy-five to a hundred cars of groceries hanging out at one time. That was a nice account.

E: What proportion of the cars that went over your railroad were owned by your railroad? Do you have any idea?

R: A very small portion was our own equipment. We were kind of up and down in the equipment deal back in the mid-1920's. Right after World War I we bought 175 boxcars to protect what we called the C.F.P. movement, that's Counter Factory Products, from the mills to the bleacheries or to the finishing plants, wherever they might be. Well, we kept that equipment for a good many years, and for some reason or other, I don't know, the management decided it wasn't paying off, so we let the cars just kind of deteriorate and then finally cut them up. Then in the late 1950's we had an automobile movement of interior equipment, such as rugs and upholstery. A plant located here in Greenville required what we call D.F. loaders, which is a special type of equipment for loading these rugs and things in. So, we built fifty of those cars to move between here and Lords-town, between here and Detroit or wherever they would be, Atlanta, and north of New York City. Wherever the automobile is manufactured, why, these rugs went to these plants. And those cars are still in good shape and operating today. Of course, the name has been changed from Piedmont & Northern to the Seaboard Coastline. And they're still handling them. Of course, as you well know, they're not handling as many rugs for new cars today as they were before the economy went, but that was a really nice movement to

the automobile industry. That was about the way our equipment went.

E: I wanted to ask you if you had more problems with the wooden structured freight cars of earlier years than in the metal structured ones that came along?

R: Oh yes, yes. We had a lot of problems with the wooden structured cars. The draft seal was a big problem on the old wooden cars. You had wooden draft seals. You had wooden fender seals and they were bolted together. You could readily understand a certain snatch of the power on the head end, why, something had to give, and it was usually a drawhead that did the giving.

E: The drawhead is what holds the cars together?

R: Yes. That's what couples together and then pulls.

E: Did you ever telescope . . .

R: Do you mean the cars?

E: Yes.

R: We never had any telescope, unless it was a derailment. If they ever came uncoupled, which they would, they went to telescope and then that's what they would couple with. But under normal operations, we never had to get telescope in.

E: On the wreck equipment, where you cleared up your wrecks and your derailments, whose equipment did you use?

R: Depending on where the derailment was, in North Carolina we would use Seaboard's derrick, which was stationed at Hamlet, North Carolina. In South Carolina we would usually get the service of the Southern Railway derrick, which was stationed here in Greenville. We didn't have our own derrick, but were very fortunate in having a working relationship with both the Seaboard and the Southern and they always came to our rescue. Of course, one of the reasons for that, we did a lot of work for the Southern Railroad, such as detouring their trains. Say for instance, they would block a main line between here and Spartanburg for twenty-four hours, we would operate as high as twelve to fourteen passenger trains a day that went over our railroad between here and Spartanburg just to help them out as a favor.

E: Now, would they have to have a pilot on your railroad?

R: We would use a pilot.

- E: Yes.
- R: Yes, that's right. We would use an engineer and a conductor.
- E: Did you have anything to do with the making up of the trains?
- R: No, that is done by the yardmaster or the conductor himself under my supervision.
- E: What railroads did you interchange cars with mostly?
- R: Well, our main interchange was with the Seaboard and the Clinchfield. And of course, we did interchange a lot of equipment with the Southern Railway. We interchanged equipment with the C&NW.
- E: The C&NW, what's that?
- R: The Carolina & Northwestern. Also with the ACL. ACL was a direct competitor in Anderson, Spartanburg, and Greenville with us. At these points we were very competitive.
- E: The ACL being the Atlantic Coastline?
- R: That is correct.
- E: Did you get most of the coal off the Clinchfield?
- R: I'd say ninety percent of it came from the Clinchfield and ten percent from the L&N and that was via Seaboard.
- E: Okay, L&N is Louisville and Nashville?
- R: Yes, which is now part of the Seaboard Coast.
- E: When you had to run the Southern around over your road and put a pilot on, did that short you on your crews or what did you do?
- R: Yes, occasionally it would work a hardship on us, I'll put it that way. But being such a short run--you had only 45 minutes to an hour from here to Spartanburg at the most--we could use an automobile and double that man back here if we needed him for a northbound train. We would just bring him back here in a car and he doubled right back with another train, or if another train was coming south, we would just leave him there and let him take that southbound train. It necessitated using an automobile in order to take care of your manpower.

- E: On the P&N, they had a different type of signal system from some of the other railroads, didn't they?
- R: Yes. We didn't have a block system. The only thing we had was a telephone semi-four system. The dispatcher had control of semi-four boards at all sidings and if he wanted to contact a train, he would throw this board ahead of him and then he would stop and answer the board to see what instructions were coming up.
- E: By throwing it, he would drop the . . .
- R: The board, to a red position. The board stood up for a clearance position and dropped down to a horizontal level for a stop. Then a clearance card and then a train order system was in affect also.
- E: Now, when the conductor would call the dispatcher, was the telephone system such that he could carry on a conversation with the dispatcher?
- R: Oh, yes. It was a good, clear telephone system. He might copy a train order, change in the meet, or he might tell him what to do, any information that was desirable for train movement, so that's what he would get. Then he would record that right on the train sheet the dispatcher would copy. If there was a train order given, this conductor copied that order and then repeated it, then they had a perfect record of him understanding this. This conductor repeated what he gave him and then he had to have that on paper in order to repeat it, I think. There couldn't be any mix-up or cross-up between the operator and the conductor or the dispatcher and the conductor, whichever the case might be.

We've had very few problems originating on our train order system. There are two types of train orders: One is called a 19 order, which is a hand up order, put them on a hook and tie them. Now the 31 order has got to be signed for.

- E: When they merged with the Seaboard, did the Seaboard put in a block system up through there or did they maintain that sound system?
- R: They didn't do either. They were strictly operating by radio, only that way. They tore out the old system, tore down the telephone system and operated strictly by radio. However, they could do that and save money because they didn't have any through trains like we had. They were handling their through trains from Augusta, through Spartanburg, and Greenwood. So, they just set off what they wanted us to have and one train out of Spartanburg would bring stuff over here, and a train out of Greenwood would bring stuff to Greenville and they'll turn around

and go back. All you do is operate a switcher out here. A switcher goes to work here and he'll go down as far as Simpsonville, or he'll go as far as Greer, or he'll go down as far as Piedmont or Pendleton and turn around and come back here and finish up his day, not meeting the trains like we had in our day because they didn't have any through trains. Even when we merged, we had six through trains a day that all had to meet somewhere.

E: Sort of an extension of the yard service in some areas on that track?

R: No, they didn't widen yard service. What they did was to just put on yard switchers that light the switch so far. Say, work in limits between--we don't say Greenville, we say River Junction--River Junction and Piedmont, or between River Junction and Greer and return. So, that gives him a right then to work anywhere between Greer and River Junction or between Piedmont and River Junction. Even though he's out of yard limits, he still has operating rights in that territory.

E: Okay, now on the Southern, as I understand it, the main line men are not allowed to work the yard? The seniority is built up?

R: That's right.

E: Now, on the Seaboard do they have the same rule?

R: They do over on their main line, but it doesn't work here on the old C&WC or either on the Piedmont & Northern because they all have road seniority. We never had any, what we call, strictly yard service. We had yard switches, and as long as you called them road switches, you could use them in the yard or you could use them on the road. It all boils down to whatever kind of contract you've got with labor.

E: Were you ever in on any negotiations with labor?

R: Oh, yes.

E: What would they be like?

R: It's strictly a bargaining meeting with your labor heads asking for all they can get and management denying all they can get away with. So, it's just a question of getting your heads together. It can get really interesting at times as well as at investigations where discipline is implied. That can get really interesting if labor represents his man who had been disciplined and management standing pat that the man has to be disciplined because you can't put up with what he did. So, that

can get really interesting, too.

E: On the P&N what would a man be disciplined for?

R: Various things, getting drunk, being late, fighting on the job, disobeying special instructions, or for any rule violation pertaining to train operation.

I remember I had a case that was very bitter. Many years ago we had in our contract with the trainmen that he would be allowed twenty minutes for lunch provided it didn't interfere with the schedule of the train. In this particular instance, we had some perishables that we were trying to make a connection at Spartanburg with one of their perishable trains, and we were running so close on it until I issued instructions to the conductor, engineer, not to take their minutes until they got to Spartanburg because I wanted to make a connection with these perishables. So, they just deliberately violated my instructions, which were special instructions, and stopped to eat at Greer and as a result, we missed the connection of these perishables. So, I took them off service. We had some really hot, interesting words at that investigation with the engineer's representative and with the conductor's representative. I kept them out of service until I got ready to put them back to work and I didn't have to pay them, so I think we did pretty well with it anyway.

E: How long would you keep a man out of service?

R: Oh, usually a week for something like that, just a violation of special instructions, just to let him know you meant what you said. He wanted to run your job and his too.

E: Did you ever lose a case where you had taken them out?

R: No, no I never did do that. I have lost a case or two on working conditions and such as that. Say for instance, we had what we called getting back to the road switches. We had a job where we would operate here in the River Junction yard and go as far as Taylors and then come back here and then work him again. Well, I lost that case, that I couldn't work him after he came back into the yard. That's the only actual case that I ever lost about working conditions.

E: What about injuries on the P&N? What type of injuries would you have?

R: We were right fortunate, by and large, over the many years in not having too many personal injuries, although we had our share of them. They would range from a turned ankle to a broken arm. I remember the time that I was

still in the supervisory capacity. I had some bad things. I had three men killed in collisions and a broken arm, but I did have three fatal injuries during that time.

E: From derailments?

R: Well, they were just like the one I'm referring to that drove over the end of this chute over here at Greer, and then we had a rear end collision out here at Belton where two trains were following one another too close. The incoming engineer failed to have his train under proper control within yard limits and hit the rear of another freight train, and killed the engineer that hit it. The personal injuries would be turned ankles and back trouble.

I had two broken arms during my time. One of them was caused by a man walking into a flatcar. He thought the train had gone by, but there were two flatcars in the train that didn't have anything on them, and he just walked into the side of these flatcars moving at night and it knocked him down and broke his arm. And the other one was hanging-- which was contrary to all rules--and reached up on the short side of the ladder and had one arm wrapped around the top grab iron just to pull himself up and his foot slipped out of the bottom step and then all that weight was right on that arm. As you know, something had to pop.

E: You had some very large trestles. Were they wooden trestles?

R: No, we didn't have any wooden trestles. No, we did, over on the Anderson branch, have one wooden trestle. The rest of our trestles were the equivalent of a D-55, which is an all steel trestle setting on steel piling or concrete footing with steel on the concrete.

E: Did you have any trouble with the upkeep of these trestles?

R: No. Nothing, only the usual decking. When the crossties and the such rot out, you've got to put in new decking, then of course, keep the steel painted. You take this Enoree trestle that you referred to earlier when the passenger coach went off of it, that was the longest trestle we had. It's twelve hundred feet. I think it took about two thousand gallons of paint to paint it.
(Laughter)

E: Since it was an electrical railroad, what type of electrical problems would be encountered on that?

R: Primarily lightning. It is obvious that high voltage on transmission lines, in my mind, has a tendency to pull lightning to it. When it hits the transmission lines it has got to go to the first ground that it can get to. It's

nothing unusual to see lightning strike the transmission lines and then see it take off, streaking off. You've probably been in the air on airplanes and have seen lightning below you where you'll see it originate and then head to the earth. Well, that lightning on those transmission lines was the same way, just a ball of fire moving. If you happen to be close enough to it, about nine times out of ten it will go to ground through your engine. When it does, it all depends on how strong or how much voltage is in the actual strike as to how much damage it's actually going to do. Usually what would happen when lightning would strike your engine, primarily the lightning would end up in your traction motors and shoot to ground in the traction motor. In some cases it burned the motor completely up, in some cases it didn't. When it completely burned it up, it was damaged so bad that you couldn't use it. Then you would have to cut out that set of motors before you could move again. In many cases you would have to reduce tonnage. Maybe you were pulling right up to full tonnage with all motors. You have eight motors there and then lightning strikes one, well of course, you've got to give up two because they run in parallel twos. Then you've got to give a fourth of your power so then you're going to have to reduce a fourth of your tonnage before you can move again.

We had substations fairly well protected with lightning arresters, but even at that a lot of times you would get some damage from lightning. Then I have seen lightning strike with such force that it would even burn the overhead down. That would probably be close to a ground where it would arch and cause that.

E: I understand they used nearly all copper wire.

R: Almost all of your catenary system was copper. Aluminum or other sources had a tendency, with extreme heat that's on them, there was too much contraction. You take aluminum when it gets real, real hot, it expands awfully fast. Then sometimes on the contraction, you could get in trouble, particularly if there was a weak place in it, why, it would pop.

I recall we had a burn-down one night many years ago down here at Norris that was caused by an ice storm just a few days before. The train coming along, arching very heavily on the pantograph, burned the trolley right about in half. On this Saturday afternoon it started turning cold about five o'clock in the afternoon and then about six-thirty that wire just popped right over the train. When it did, it set two cars on fire and one of them happened to be a car of cotton with 125 bales of cotton in it. It was a Pennsylvania steel car and, of course, I immediately left here to go to the fire. It was sitting right next to a

- carload of propane gas and I was scared to death. We were fortunate in getting the car segregated from this propane gas before it ignited this gas and blew up the whole town of Norris.
- E: That propane gas car, was it in the train right next to it?
- R: Next to the car of cotton.
- E: Boy, you were lucky.
- R: Sure was.
- E: We had the main line of the Piedmont & Northern from Greenwood to Spartanburg. Now, there were some other branches or lines, where were they?
- R: One branch on Anderson, from Belmont over to Anderson, which was eleven, almost twelve miles, eleven and seven-eighths.
- E: Was there a section in the Charlotte area where the P&N had not completed its track?
- R: No, that's between Spartanburg and Gastonia that was never completed. No, we operated all these years between Charlotte and Gastonia, plus a four mile branch over to Belmont, or all between Charlotte and Gastonia. Then later on, even as late as 1960, we built what we call the terrible branch, primarily for handling coal up to Plant Marshall, which is twenty-five miles from the main line. It is seven miles up to River Bend, which was one steam plant. Plant Marshall, at that time, was one of the Duke's larger plants. They burned 150 cars of coal a day there at that time.
- E: Duke had a lot to do with the building on this P&N Railroad, didn't he?
- R: Oh, yes.
- E: He had the Duke Power Plant, and was the P&N, supposedly, originally, to serve the power plant?
- R: No, that was even before the day of steam plants. Now, that might have been in the back of some of the larger men's thinking, but the original idea was to handle the bulk of tobacco out of South Georgia and Florida, the Piedmont & Northern. They operated plants both in Durham and Winston-Salem. He wanted to build in both places, Winston-Salem and Durham, too. Then, of course, in the back of his mind, he wanted to sell all these companies and then he would have an outlet for the excess power that

they developed. All of this would be surplus, money coming in, and he would operate the railroad and sell the power to operate the railroad.

Our power bill, for years and years, ran \$20,000 to \$25,000 a month just from power that we bought from the power plant. I don't believe at that time he ever thought much about the revenue from coal. He might have. He might have been able to see that much further in the millstone than I could, but I do know that he had in mind cotton factory products, in and outbound tobacco; and back in those days it was nothing unusual to have regular watermelon trains out of South Georgia to this area. So, he probably figured on some watermelons, too.

We sold two of our substations after we dieselized to the South Shore Railroad. It operates out of Chicago. It is one of the few electric roads that's left and they're still operating good, stable business. We sold the Taylor's mercuric substation and also the Piedmont mercuric substation to the Chicago South Shore.

E: Did they just come in and completely dismantle it and move it up there?

R: Yes.

E: I think you indicated earlier that the C&NW, Carolina & Northwestern, was a direct competitor?

R: Well, to some extent, yes. The C&NW, of course, operated between Carolina and Northwestern from Chester, South Carolina, up to Lenoir, I believe, and crossed us at Gastonia. And then the Blue Ridge Railroad, which operated between Belton and Walhalla, was taken over by the C&NW. The Southern Railroad was actually engineering this thing and I think maybe they were making some money between Chester and Lenoir and they weren't doing too well on the Blue Ridge, so they named it C&NW. After a few year's operation as C&NW, they changed it to the Southern Railway and operate it now as the Southern Railway instead of the C&NW or Blue Ridge; and they did the C&NW the same way in North Carolina.

E: Now, what about this Georgia and Florida, whatever happened to it?

R: The Southern Railroad took them over, I'd say around 1967. But they were one of our better connections for many years after they started operating into Greenwood in the early 1930's. I believe it was 1932 that the Georgia and the Florida came into Greenwood. Of course, they split their business between the Seaboard, the Southern, and us. But we had a fast cut-off in there, a time from the Florida

territory for freight going to the midwest, such as your country, and we handled, for many years, trainloads of phosphate rock out of Florida into CFA territory, that is Chicago, Ohio, and even as far west as Nebraska, and that area in there for fertilizer. Of course, Chicago got that. And lumber, we handled a lot of lumber from down in that country for many years.

E: Mostly pulpwood?

R: No, we didn't handle any pulp, this was finished lumber. The pulp all went the other way, Savannah, Charleston, and Jacksonville got most of it. Georgetown has a big operating paper plant, too. I remember they used to refer to it as Georgetown bananas, the pulpwood. (Laughter) But this was a finished product. Now, we handled a lot of the paper from the pulpwood mills through the overhead movement containing the majority of the Florida and the Clinchfield. That's where all that business went. It went to the Clinchfield at Spartanburg, then they gave it to the C&O or N&W at Elkhorn or St. Paul. We had practically a train a day of that Georgia and Florida traffic, like I say, phosphate rock, pulp paper, and lumber. I have wondered many times why, as much phosphate rock as has come out of the state of Florida, the East Coast won't meet the West Coast without having to cut a channel across there. So, they've been running trainloads of phosphate ore out of Florida since I can remember.

E: On the Piedmont, how many cars, or what was the average road tonnage, or how do you figure the number of cars over the road?

R: We had a system of counting the revenue loads that we handled per day, and that runs on a general average of around 250 loads a day. We took what we call a 5:00 p.m. report and each agent would report what he received that day. And we considered that a good day, very good day. That was on the South Carolina Division. Now, the North Carolina Division, with the coal that they were handling, would run easily about the same thing, about 250, sometimes as much as 300.

E: How many trains would that be?

R: Generally speaking, we operated ten and eleven crews in South Carolina and then ran about the same number of crews in North Carolina, which is an average of twenty crews a day. Now that would include your switchers and all that.

E: What is the roadbed like? Does it have steep grades?

R: No, we had a pretty nice grade. We didn't have anything on the main line above one and one-tenth percent. On

some of our branch lines we had some pretty steep grades, particularly between Belmont and River Bend Steam Plant; at one time we had as much as four percent on that line. In later years, particularly after Plant Marshall was built, we had to relocate the track and cut that down to handle what we called trainload units with 75 cars of coal in a train. So, in order to get enough power to handle 75 cars, we had to reduce that grade from four percent to two percent.

E: Did you use helpers or pushers on any of those grades?

R: No. See, by being able to have enough power to couple to the head end, we were always able to handle it all from the front end units.

E: Would you usually run about two units on the front on those freight trains?

R: No, we would run four units on that 75-car train, four, 1600 horsepower engines.

E: Can you think of anything else that you would like to tell us?

R: Well, I can probably sit here and talk till midnight and still say I enjoyed talking, but I don't know if it would amount to much. (Laughter)

E: Did you ever have any other interesting experiences with the railroad?

R: Well, it was an interesting experience every day from the time you went to work till the time you got back home. I recall during World War II, we were handling a bunch of road-builder's material for building what we called then the superhighway between here and Spartanburg, a dual-lane road. We had two setups, a setup at Duncan, South Carolina, and another setup at Greer, South Carolina, two different contractors. We were handling about one hundred cars a day of stone, cement, and sand, and we were rushed with more goods, too. Then the Seaboard dumped 25 hundred cars of company fuel on us through Spartanburg to Greenwood. Well, I had these two contractors set up in there. We had a very small yard to start with in Spartanburg and it was narrow. It wasn't built to handle anything like that amount of business. The Clinchfield was running one coal train after another right into Spartanburg. The Southern Railroad, at that time, was the intermediate carrier between the Clinchfield and ourselves. Later, of course, the tunnel was built and we did our own delivering to them and they did their own delivering to us.

E: Yes, but I'm talking about up there at the Gastonia section.

R: We did very little interchanging with traffic from here to there. Now, all that business would go to what we called Tomopa, which is a connection there, and then we would handle it to Gastonia. Yes, we did very little interchange between the South Carolina Division and the North Carolina Division via Southern Railroad.

E: Did they charge you for what they did?

R: Oh, yes.

E: Four dollars a car?

R: Well, no, more than that. They would get the middleman's haul on that. In other words, if it originated on our line and terminated on our line, then they would get the intermediate carriers, prorate share, whatever it might be depending on what commodity it was. Of course, as to how much money they made out of it, we'll say that they made about a third of the cost by being the intermediate carrier.

E: I wondered about that.

When was this tunnel started?

R: I believe it was 1964.

E: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW