

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Crucible Steel Project

Personal Experience

O.H. 1145

CHARLES A. NORTRUP

Interviewed

by

Mark F. Twyford

on

December 1, 1987

"CHUCK" NORTRUP

Charles "Chuck" Nortrup, the son of Joseph and Anna Nortrup, was born September 3, 1911, in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. He quit school at age fifteen to go to work and help support his family.

In 1928, Nortrup went to work for the Pennsylvania Railroad Company. That particular job lasted only until 1929 when, like most of the nation, Nortrup was laid-off. The great Depression hit Nortrup's family hard and for the next seven years they struggled to get by.

Nortrup's economic luck changed for the better in 1936 when he was hired by the Crucible Steel Company located in Midland, Pennsylvania. Over the next 38 years, Nortrup worked primarily as a heater-helper and a heater, before retiring in 1974.

Nortrup currently resides in East Liverpool with his wife Naomi. He is actively involved in the affairs of both The First Church of Christ and the Loyal Order of Moose.

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INTERVIEWEE: CHARLES A. NORTRUP

INTERVIEWER: Mark F. Twyford

SUBJECT: All aspects of work at the Crucible Steel
Company in Midland, Pa.

DATE: December 1, 1987

T: This is an interview with Charles A. Nortrup for the Youngstown State Oral History Program, on The Crucible Steel Project, by Mark F. Twyford, in East Liverpool, Ohio, on December 1, 1987, at 7:00 p.m.

Mr. Nortrup, I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me, and I wonder if we could start out with a little bit of information about your childhood. What memories do you have about your early childhood?

N: Well, my memories. . . Since I'm doing this interview, I think it would be best for me to tell you that I had very little schooling and more or less am self educated. As we go along you'll see why I'm telling you this in the beginning. At the age of two years old, it was way back in time. In those days they did their washing by hand, and when they were done washing, they used to put lye water into the old wash water so as to scrub the board walks. In those days the person that had the whitest board walk was the cleanest of the neighbors. Well anyhow, maybe two years old and my mother set the bucket on a chair, and I accidentally went over and pulled it over my head. To make a long story short, I was very lucky that it didn't get into my eyes, but it did get up my nose. It burned all the membranes, and it caused me for the rest of my childhood to get the lacking of an education. This is. . . I'm telling you

from what I've been told, naturally as a baby. I remembered going to school at seven years old. On the first day of school I had to come back home because my nose bled. Well, that was the story. At the age of fifteen I quit school and went to work which was a necessity in a way, too, because things were very bad. I don't relish this, telling you this part, but since what you tell me it's for, that's why I'll go ahead and tell it. It was rough in school because not going to school and being back in school and then the smaller kids coming. When I did quit school, I was sitting in desks that my knees stuck up over. That will take care of up until I was fifteen when I quit school.

T: You were born in Pittsburgh, right?

N: Yes, I was born in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. When I quit school, I took a job with some people that were selling soap door to door. In those days that was called huckstering, and that was quite common. I worked for the fruit store and sold on what you call sidewalk huckstering and other things. In other words, you got a lot of "street smarts" as you call it today.

T: Now, you were a huckster?

N: No, the huckster was really the man that came around in the wagons selling his wares and fruits and that. If you were working for somebody and used to pile stuff on the sidewalk, they called that huckstering. It was a slang word, huckstering. He was a hucksterer.

T: What was. . . I know you had to quit school because times were rough. In your early childhood years was you family well off? Or what was their...

N: Very poor.

T: Very poor.

N: Of course, we didn't know we were poor as Dolly Parton and them tell you. When you're kids you don't know you're poor because everybody around us was poor. Well, the first World War had a lot to do with it. I remember it very well. I was around six years old. I remember we lived in East Liberty, Pittsburgh. The East Liberty station was where the soldiers and sailors and marines were going to get on the trains to go to New York or wherever. I remember it well. I very well remember when it was over because I was trying to learn to roller skate, and the bells started ringing and everybody started to holler and I fell on my rear end and I never forgot it.

T: Did you have any older brothers or older sisters?

N: No, I have a sister ten years younger than me.

T: Your father, what did he do for a living?

N: It was in lumber. He was a lumberer. After the war, he worked for a hardware store driving a truck that had hard wheels. Over in France he had to learn to drive a truck, so when he came out, he was one of the first ones to get a job. Then he. . .When the lumber company found out that he could drive a truck, and they had just bought a brand new great big truck that had these big hard wheels on, they hired him, and that is where he stayed until he retired. It was the Debolt company when he went to work with them, but they changed hands to different companies, but he still stayed with them until he retired.

T: After you quit working for the huckster, what other jobs did you have in between that time and the time you went to work for Crucible?

N: Oh, well, I went to work, when I was sixteen I could go work. I had to have a permit to work when I was fifteen and then when I was sixteen I could work, it didn't make any difference. So, I went to work for a man named Welfer, Welfer Produce Store. I worked with him for delivering orders and selling and doing things out there. Well, then as I was growing older, I got a chance to go to work on the Pennsylvania Railroad. I was seventeen, but I did lie about my age and told them I went through high school and everything. That didn't matter in those days just as long as they could put it down, because you went to work in steel mills when you were fourteen. Anyhow, I went to work on the railroad, and I went as an office boy. I knew you didn't have to need to type, but it didn't take long for the Superintendent to realize that. . .He asked me, "You didn't finish high school?", and I told him the truth then. He said, "Well, why did you lie?", and I said, "Well, if I would have told them I didn't go to high school, would they have hired me?" He said, "No, you're right." He said, "I like your honesty." He took the time to teach me. In time I was making the time cards out without even. . .I did develop a good memory. In those days I had a very good memory.

T: What kind of money did you make?

N: When I started up, I made \$2.98 a day. Then about after seven months, I put in for a job what they call icing cars. You see, I worked in the Pennsylvania depot in Pittsburgh, and that is what they did. The cars came in, they had the broad pavement and all and the cars had to be iced. The Pullman cars, and the

coach cars, and everybody had to be there with their ice and buckets and that because they didn't have the electric like they do today. You had to go in there and get that ice into the coolers. In the diners you had to have them all ready on a big flat truck, and when you jump on the top of the diner, they threw it up to you and you pulled them up. Sometimes you only had ten, twelve minutes. The Broadway Limited, you had ten minutes. That was it because that was the fastest train in the United States at that time. Whenever that train came in, everybody dropped everything else because that was the idea.

T: What kind of money did that job pay?

N: That went up, got a big raise. That went up to \$3.20. No, \$3.25 a day.

T: So, would working at the railroad be viewed as a good job as compared to other jobs?

N: Well, for a kid it was. . .When the crash, the 1929 crash came, I was getting extra steam fitter jobs, as an oiler. If the things went on, why I probably in another six months I would have had to get in on a regular job. That paid around close to \$4.57 an hour. That was as far as you could go in there because then you had to belong to the union, the railroad union, and the railroad union would have nothing to do with people. They figured we were under them, the motorman and the engineers, they figured we were under them. They made better money because of the union. Whenever it came time for later in life for you, I was right out in the streets knowing what I went through with the railroad. The crash came, 1929. Like everybody else, you just tried to help each other out. My parents lost their home. We lost everything. We had a double home and were renting the one side, my dad and mother were renting the one side, which was helping to pay off the house sooner. The person that bought the house was a real estate person that was going around taking advantage of. . .

T: Buying everything cheap?

N: Yes. He bought the house off my dad, and then rented half back to us and rented the other half out. We stayed there until we started to get back on our feet a little bit. My dad did get called back in about eleven months, he got called back to work.

T: How did you keep afloat for the eleven months? How were you able to earn money at all?

N: Well, we lived near the railroad, and the railroad

would shake off coal, coal they piled up. The trains were always swaying. We would go along the railroad, gather up coal, and keep storing it for the winter. Get wood in whatever way. We would have hobo dinners with the neighbors. Some would bring the potatoes, some would bring in...Hamburger was \$0.15 a pound and two pounds for a quarter, ate a lot of hamburger soup. A lot of grease. If I eat a hamburger today, I want it well done. It had its fun days. Believe it or not there was a lot of fun during the Depression. A movie was \$.10 or \$.15, and the movies is what kept you going because you would go to the movies. . .You saw the "Grapes of Wrath," you saw that there, you figured you were rich. You know what I mean?

T: Yes.

N: In those kinds of movies, the movies helped a lot. What they could do today, instead today, instead of showing you movies to bring you up, they show you how to go out and steal, how pick locks, how to kill, how to shoot somebody. It is a sad thing, but it is true.

T: Yes, the nature of the industry had changed a little bit. Now your father, he went back to work after about eleven months. Was he able to maintain his job then for the rest of the time?

N: Oh yes, for the rest of his working life. He retired when he was sixty-five.

T: Now, what about you. When were you able to gain some employment again?

N: Well, in 1936. No, 1935 I went to work for May Sterns. No, I have to retrack, excuse me. 1935, work was picking up, but the older people were getting the jobs, you know. I went to work for Fuller Brush. Well, in those days. Fuller Brush was when you knocked on the door and you were Fuller Brush, you were invited in. It wasn't. . .They were a well known company and well respected. I didn't like contact, that kind of work, but I did it.

T: Not a lot of other choices.

N: The thing was, I was selling all kinds. People were buying and ordering that there, but when you go to deliver a lot of them would say, "Well, I can't pay you today. I'll pay you so much." Well, you couldn't do that. The first thing you know, why, you got caught up. There were a lot of pressures in that there. So, I see an add in the paper that May Sterns in Pittsburgh was hiring salesman for door to door. I went to May Sterns, and I went out with the salesman to show you

how to sell washing machines. You had books, you know, how to work the refrigerator. Then refrigerators were just coming in, and you would take the ice box for a trade in. Well, the gimmick was, "Boy, I'll give you so much money, way more than it is worth," because they sold every refrigerator they got, they sold it some company for \$1. They took them and refinished them and sold them down in South America. Anyhow, I was selling refrigerators and washing machines like nobody's business. I was figuring I was rich, going to be rich, but the thing was no credit. The sad part is. . . I'm going to put this in. I was thinking about it, but I'm going to put it in anyway. The sad part was that you weren't allowed to sell to a colored person or Negro as they called them then. The poor people were so bad off, and most of the time it really was just a waste of time because they didn't have the money. But the fact was that was your discrimination.

T: Was that door to door that you did this?

N: Yes, door to door. As I said, I soon found it was just as bad as white people. They wanted the refrigerator, but then they. . . May Sterns, by the way, my uncle worked for Westinghouse back when radio was just coming in, and we had one of the beginning of radio. We had people standing around listening. He built the coil set.

T: Is that right?

N: Oh, yes. The coil set, and he had a piece of Gilina that you had. Where we lived was a place called. . . This is something a lot of people don't know. They KDKA, the first radio station in the world, is not true.

T: Oh, is that right?

N: No, they have admitted it since, maybe in the last ten years. Double Day Hills was actually the first radio station in the world, but they thought they had a toy. Whenever my uncle had built this set, we only lived a few blocks from this Double Day Hill. We would catch them on another slide as it was called. They would just be talking, once in awhile you would hear cussing out there, but they thought it was just among themselves. Anyhow, then KDKA finally changed it too, KDKA the first commercial radio station. So, there is a little lesson for you folks in college.

T: Okay, I didn't know that before.

N: The reason I told you that there was getting back. Television was coming in, see? May Sterns, this compa-

ny came in, and they set up this television. Now, at one end they had a screen. I would say it was about ten by ten. Then the back of the store was a big screen about five by five. It had a square of real bright lights. They had the master of ceremonies that was always calling. . .No matter if it was a wedding or anything, he was the master of ceremonies, but it was so comical to see them. Their lips were coal black, and their eyes were real black eyebrows, and their face, they had some kind of pinkish stuff on their face, but when it showed up on the screen, it showed up black and white. It showed up good. The announcer. . . the girl's number quit, and I was standing there. The girl's number quit, and he wasn't there, and the girl said to me, "announce that number." "Singing in the Rain" I think it was, one of those songs, and I stepped up to sing the song and everybody started to laugh and that there. I turned around and looked down, and there I am looking like a Ubangi because I didn't have any make-up on. Anyhow, this get to another first that maybe they don't know in college. They still don't have the public. . .They say someday we are going to get the phone. They got it, but it will be the day when we see who we are talking to. Believe me or not, they had it then. That was the idea behind the whole thing. The salesman would be at the one end, and you had a screen about six by six. The customer would ring the bell and you would lift up the receiver, and their picture would come on, and your picture would come on in their booth. They had a little camera. You talked over the phone in the store and out there. The idea was to ask them how they liked everything and that turned in to selling them the different things. Well, that was about coming close in with 1936 because September 1936 they were hiring in the steel mills. I started going around, but when you would go around they wouldn't hire you from Pittsburgh. A friend, my wife and her girlfriend and husband. . .He had come to Pittsburgh to work for his step-father in a gasoline station. He got called back to Midland, Crucible Steel, and he was only there about three weeks when his wife called my wife and told me to come down. He thought I could get a job. I walked down and got a job, walked right in, not realizing what they were doing. The companies were hiring people from out of town so that the union wouldn't get a foothold which only lasted for six months or something. Anyhow, that how I came to living in Pennsylvania, but I lived in East Liverpool.

T: What kind of money were you making at Crucible when you first started?

N: When I started Crucible, I started in what they called the platform. That meant you worked wherever they sent

you until a job came up. When I first went in, I reported to platform, and they sent me over to what they call number two mill. Number one was a small mill, number two was a middle mill and the barmill was the big mill. They sent me over to number two, and the first reading I got from the foreman was "Now, I want you right off the bat to understand this here: I can't hire you, but I sure as hell can fire you, and I don't hesitate a minute's time." In those days they didn't either. If they didn't like you, they fired you. I'm putting this in, so some of the younger people can understand what it was like in those days. Anyhow, that guy, that same foreman and I, I didn't really talk to him for maybe ten years later on an even keel, because I never liked the way he treated me when he came in. He turned out later, when the union was in, he became a better foreman.

T: How long were you on the platform?

N: Oh, I would say I was on the platform about close to a year. The thing was. . . Another thing that griped me was, the second day the platform foreman sent me to number one to record, the recorder. The recorder records everything at the lower end of the mill, and the recorder at the top, he is the first recorder. He makes more money. I realized this later, I didn't realize then. But I was there for about a half hour when the foreman came down with another guy. He said, "You are going to go back over to number two and work." I didn't know the story for some time later. Here, it was a friend of the bosses. They sent this guy to work, so he jumped up probably seven jobs right off the bat. As I eventually became a heater at the end of my working days, there was no way that I could have ever got that job as a heater. The farthest you could go was heater helper, because all the boss's nephews, nepotism. It was rampant.

T: That was even toward the end?

N: No, that was. . .

T: Early on.

N: This was when I first started. After the union got in, that all changed. Just as the company and union were assigned to papers, the roller, my job. . . I had eventually over the time moved up from working on the hot bed. I went to recording. There again, my education was, I was afraid, but you didn't have to use a typewriter. They showed you. I did find this out. No matter how much schooling you have, you are still going to have to learn it all over again and do it the way of the company, which is right, you know. Anyhow, I

learned the job. That automatically, because the union was in, that automatically gave me the chance when the heater was off. The heater helper moved up to heater, and the recorder moved up to heater helper, and the recorder down moved up. Everything was done fair.

T: What exactly is a heater and a heater helper?

N: Well, a heater in a number one merchant mill was a finishing mill, number two was finishing mill and barmill was a finishing mill. The barmill wasn't actually a finishing mill, but they broke it down from the ingot down into a four by four or a five by five, so that number two or number one furnace could reheat them to go through the mill. The number two, they rolled the bigger steel, so they had a machine to pick the billits up and place them in the furnaces. In number one we rolled the four by fours and five by fives, and it was a continuous furnace from the back. We would roll two billits in at a time and push, then we would have to get by hand to turn them out until later on when they modernized the mill. It was hard work.

T: I bet it was. All these jobs that you have mentioned, they are all part of the platform, are they?

N: No, no. The platform remained the platform, but it was supervised different than it was in the beginning. Regardless of when the union came in, the union agree, and rightly so, because everybody came in you had to start at the bottom. There was no more coming in and taking a guy's job away from him. You had to start at the bottom, and you moved accordingly to your seniority. Now, there is another myth that you got your job because of seniority. Well, I could never figure out anybody in their right sense. If you are going into a job and you couldn't do it, how long could you last? You couldn't last very long. There was quite a few people that they would move up, and they knew you couldn't do it, so they would move back to their other job. Then that man would jump over and move into that job, but it was all done on a fair thing. In a mill like I worked in everything. . .When that mill started that whistle blows, we started, that steel had to be ready to go through the rolls. That went through what you call aught and double aught. There was a man there when it went through aught, he turned it over to go through on a diamond like, and then it went down a roller line. Then it went into what you call the number one, and it went through six rolls. The six rolls would keep turning that steel and rolling it down to another size. Then it was big enough to make a bend and come around. When it came around, then it was man power. He had to grab that with the tongs because it

was getting down small and swing that vice with his own strength clean around and put it in the next a whole. You had to stand there and do that. Now, they had spells because there was no way they could work in that heat. With big fans on you had spells.

T: Did you have to perform that job?

N: No, no. The heaters job was to make sure that that steel. . .You also had to bring that steel down. The number one merchant mill was. . .A lot of the guys told me that no way they wanted over there because in the other mills you could place your high carbon steel and your low carbon steels in different furnaces. You would have low carbon, high carbon, they were all coming, and if you had low carbon steel you had to heat that and you had to have it, make sure that you didn't burn the high carbons because the high carbon steel would burn up like that. When you were a heater the reason you were the highest paid man in there, because you had thousands upon thousands upon thousands of dollars worth of steel in two furnaces. You had to run two furnaces. Your heater helper was on one furnace to turn them out, and you were responsible for that steel.

T: Is that one of the more dangerous jobs, also?

N: Oh, it was. . .In the old days it was real dangerous because, when I was recording, one of the heaters. . .The steel was stuck. That was another thing, the steel would stick. We would have to get in there and take bars and pry it loose, throw it out by hand, and have the crane come and pick it up and throw it in the scrap pile until we got down till where we could roll again. Sometimes the steel, the high carbon, would stick because the mill would break down. There was nothing, you had it ready to roll, and you there was no. . .See, in the beginning all you had were two giant furnaces. The furnace man, he dropped the coal down, and he had the steam and whatever he needed down there to make the gas. The gas came up into the giant boxes. There were four, it separated into four boxes. You had four chains, and you had to regulate those chains so that you could get an even heat or a little hotter heat in the middle because the ends naturally want to go up around. All you had was. . .You may have then used steam and air. You actually made your own gas as you went along. So, the heater really was making its own gas to the temperature, and you had to learn that all by eye. The only thing you had on the steam gage was to tell you how much steam you were using, twenty-five pound or thirty pound. How much steam you were using, that is all you had. The air handle had nothing on it. You had to learn. . .

When the war came, they were sending, some of the heaters had already gone. I was working my last week as a heater helper then, I was working my last week because I had a week to get ready to go off to war. Well, the boss came in and said, "Are you all ready to go?" I said, "As ready as I can be I guess." He said, "Well, I got news for you. You're not going." I said, "Why?" He said, "They just brought in a blanket. A blanket deferrment. All heater helpers and heaters, no ifs, ands, or buts about it, you couldn't enlist if you wanted do." They didn't know when they took these heaters, they didn't realize that it took three years to learn to be a heater helper alone, and five years to be a heater. Just that you could move into that job on your own. Well, they were sending all the experienced men, and the steel was going down. there was scrap steel and everything else, especially in the bigger mills.

T: What did you think about that, not being able to go? What were your thoughts?

N: Well, I had mixed emotions. I had a family, and I had mixed emotions. I just said to myself, this is the way it is. What can you do?

T: You can't do anything about it.

N: You can't do anything about it. My son did say to me, "Dad, what did you do in the war?" My younger son. I said, "Well, I got a certificate from the Navy," which I did. All the heaters and the different men, we got a certificate. Number one, we were the only mill around that we actually heated and rolled ourselves out of a job. We had to shut the mill down during the war for four days to wait for the rest of the mills to catch up and get us steel so we could roll it. That is the only citation that I got. I took a lot of kidding about it, slacker, and different things just in a kidding way.

T: You can't fight a war if you don't have the steel.

N: Well, that would cost a lot of lives, too, the way I figure. We will never know how many lives we lost because of inferior steel.

T: What other jobs did you perform while you at Crucible, besides heater helper?

N: Well, as I said, I came over into working on the hot bed.

T: Could you explain that a little bit?

N: Now the hot bed, the hot bed was from when the bar came out of the last roll. At the upper part of the mill they had a man, they call him the snapper. He had to snap that. . . That bar was coming through there at about thirty miles an hour, and he had to snap that bar so that it would fit on the top and kick it onto racks. The racks would work in a wishy-wash way, that bar down was cooling. By the time they got to the end, probably, there was about maybe twenty, twenty-two racks. By the time it got down to the bottom, it was cool enough that the bar would roll down. The hot bed man, it was his job to make sure they were all straight.

T: That's the racks?

N: No, after they rolled down.

T: Okay.

N: And the Shear man, he could only take, the smallest bar he could take twenty-two, and the biggest one eighteen. It depends on what size you were rolling. When it was your job to cut those bars, or to bring that amount of bars over. When he was near the end of the cutting, he would pull a lever, and a rack would come up. Then, the rack would bring over the bars. Well, if he got started around one another, you had to, when he dropped the rack on the bars, then it was up to you to stand there and push those bars and keep those bars down near the. . . Move down to them with a hook with a little flange on it. You had to keep them even because the rolls would bring it together. One day after I was there for awhile I got the idea. We had wooden shoes that you wore in the other mills because they had to get inside. Well, even in ours you had to get inside the furnaces when the mills were shut down. When they shut down you had to get in the mill and clean out the scales and everything. You had to have wooden shoes. I got the idea one day putting on one of them wooden shoes. I found if I stood up on the rack, I could just take it and roll them. From that day on I made the job easier for myself and everybody else that came along. The shear man didn't have to keep cussing you for not getting the bars over.

T: Did you ever have to go in the furnace or anything?

N: When I was on the platform, oh yes. We have to go back to when I started on the platform. On a Sunday, they shut down on Sunday morning, and they let the furnace cool down as much as it could. From three to eleven, the heater would come. No, the furnaces would cool down, then you would come out at three to eleven and the heater would be there. If you were a number two, you would have to put these wooden shoes on, and they

have wood planks, they always had a lot of planks, new ones. You would throw a plank in, and then you would put this burlap on top of you. You had water like a shower. You would let that water get on you, then you jump in the furnace and run in there. You had these asbestos gloves and you would grab one or two bricks, come and throw them out, and the next guy would jump in. Oh, hot enough.

T: What was the temperature in there? Did anybody know?

N: Oh, let's see. It probably was at least 700 or 800 degrees.

T: Is that right?

N: Oh, the board would catch on fire. Somebody would grab the board, throw it out, and then put a new board in. That's the old days. It was awful working in steel mills in the old days.

T: How long was each person in there? Just a couple seconds?

N: Oh, you couldn't stay. You had to come out, and take the burlap off you because it was hot. Maybe there would be six of you, and by the time you got back, the burlap, you could put it back on.

T: How far into the furnace did you have to go?

N: Wherever the bricks fell out of the furnace.

T: About how many feet?

N: Well, the furnace, nine foot bar, the furnace was at least twelve foot. Twelve foot wide to put the bars in. Now, over in number one it was a different thing. You had to roll some of the steel off. It cooled down, you had roll it off then get in there and dig. But, it was a smaller furnace.

T: It didn't get as hot.

N: It didn't get as hot, but it was hot. You had to take board and wear wooden shoes and the asbestos gloves, and you had to dig that scale that built up. You had to blow all that scale off and push it out of the front of the furnace, or shovel it out the side of the door because you couldn't push it out of the front of the furnace. If you did, that is where the billet fell down, and it would pile up down where the rolls were.

T: In this number two, did anyone ever fall when they went in there, or was anyone ever in there for a prolonged

period?

N: Oh yes, it was dangerous. You were always continually. . . If the power went off you were at the mercy of the gas, whether it was going to explode or not. In the number two, the barmill, in the old days they had the doors open, and he was putting cold billets into heat and the power went off. It exploded and took every bit of clothes off of him. All he had left on, he was stark naked, left standing in his shoes. They say if he had been so far of this way or back, he just happened to be in the right place. He just got a first degree burn, but he had goggles on, you see.

T: Okay, we were discussing some of the working conditions, having to go into the furnace. . .

N: Well, a lot of that there was in the beginning before the union came in. After the union came in, then. . . There was a lot of protection we didn't have. The state of Pennsylvania, the man would come in, they would tell them a week ahead of time that he was coming in. That week they would take all the extra men they had and clean up the mill, and tighten up things. He only came in once a year, and he would give the company an excellent report, and then it went back to what it was. After the union got it, little by little, that is when we got the hard hats and the steel shoes, steel-toed shoes and everything.

T: Do you remember what year the union came in, or about what time?

N: Oh, I think it was around in 1937.

T: So, not long after you were there.

N: Around 1938, maybe somewhere around there. At the beginning of the unions, there was another union trying to get in. I joined it, and here it was, they took the money and run. I swore I'd never join a union. Well, then when the CIO came I wouldn't join. I was one of the last ones to join. What I told them was I would be the last one to join, and I kept my word. I was so mad, the other ones took my money and went off with it. In a way it was a little silly, but being a hard headed steel worker. . . The thing was, I became a better union member than a lot of them that was in there in the beginning because I'm a staunch union man. The simple reason is what it is showing up now. As the union came up, the other jobs that weren't union, the stores, the people that worked in the stores, they got better deals. They got the insurance that they never would have got and that. Now you can see that it has gone the other way. They came in and raided our pensions.

Mr. Baker went into the social security, took the millions and millions of dollars which he had to pay back which don't belong to the government. That is the people's money that worked there. I hope the day comes when we can separate it where it belongs. Well, that is jumping a little ahead.

T: That is what I was interested in, your views on the union. It sounds like, certainly when they first came in, the CIO did a great deal to help the men.

N: Yes, but Mark you have to remember, the union in no way could come out lily white in any shape or form because we had a lot of stuff going on in the unions that shouldn't have went on. The men had to fight the unions, too.

T: What are some examples of that?

N: Like after many years, you have cliques in the union. It got so I didn't go to some of the meetings. If one clique was in for one election, I didn't even go to the meetings because it wasn't any use. I'll give you the bottom line the way I feel with it. I was with the union when it came in, and the union was still there when I went out. It is still there as far as that's concerned. The way I feel was. . .The men, which I told them long before I retired, we were pricing ourselves out of a job. What good are these raises when it showed after a year all that they, they've got it all back. Prices raise up, and they have got it all back in a year. Go for the benefits. Keep the wages to a living and the wages, once we got up there, the wages. . .Say you were making \$10 an hour, and you didn't go any higher. Automobiles or anything else is not going to go up because there is nobody jumping up. Management in the steel mills, it is absolutely a shame that they got away with what they got away with. They had some of the dumbest, stupidest people in there under management. I had no education, but they had no idea what they. . .That is where they went, from the nepotism. We had one guy come in there, and he was a general foreman's son. He came in in the summer time to work, he was in college. He came in to learn the steel business. He was drunk when he came in. He didn't belong to the union, so people just got. . .This is just one instance. It is fair for me to say this because the same thing happened with the union people. The only thing is the union stuck behind a man too long. It finally got down where they realized that that man is coming in drunk and he is going to have to be punished. That came around to that because he was jeopardizing life, and the union men did that themselves. I even did it myself. I said, "Hey, I am not working with that man." You understand what I mean?

T: Yes.

N: If he is up there feeding. . . Well, the guy down below. . .

T: It's a little dangerous.

N: If I come out there drunk, and I am going to be up there and not know what I'm doing. I can blow up the furnace, do anything. So, they finally cut it way down.

T: Is it safe to say though that during the early years you were really pleased with the union, that they made a lot of changes safety wise?

N: I have to say I am pleased with unionism, I'm not pleased with some of the people that got in it. You understand what I mean?

T: Yes.

N: It is the same thing as I told you with management. You had the wrong people in the union, running the union. In different places they had the wrong people, and you had the wrong people in management. You see, one time they came to me when I was heater helper and wanted me to become a foreman.

T: Now that is a management position?

N: That was foreman of the mill, and I said, "Well, I'm going to tell you, (the superintendent) I'm going to tell you this here. I'm going to thank you for the left-handed compliment." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Did you really think that I would be so stupid to give up my seniority and become a foreman where you can fire me tomorrow, which you do and you know it and everybody knows it, you fire them. That is the reason why you need one now." I said, "I don't understand it." He said, "We like your work, Chuck." In fact, when I retired, they called me down to the office. I retired when I was sixty-four. I was out one night on a light up turn. I was on top of the furnace, and I got a pain down my arms. I couldn't get down off the furnace, I was out there by myself because there was nobody working. It was about a half an hour before I got around. I went to the doctor, and he told me I had heart trouble. That would be a long story, but I didn't tell nobody. I didn't tell my wife, nobody. I told them I was going to retire. That is the reason I retired a year ahead of time. I found out after I retired that I didn't have heart trouble. It was only in the chest, but you are not interested in that.

T: Oh yes, I'm interested in everything.

N: Well, I retired a year ahead, and they called me down to the office and they wanted me to stay the other year. I didn't tell them the reason why, but I actually was telling them the truth. I said, "I can not absolutely go home at night." I said, "This steel mill". . .Well, the crucible steel was noted for one of the best steels in the whole world for quality steel. Today, you are sending crap to the customers. They are sending it back, General Motors sent back two car loads. I said, "Because someone is coming in from up above and is demanding that we roll more steel. I turn steel out of this furnace that I am ashamed of," and it was a fact. That is the reason I say with 100 percent that management ruined it. Somebody came up. . .I say they were the beginning of the conglomerates, and conglomerates have ruined this country.

T: When did you notice this downfall of the industry?

N: It started about three years before I retired. It started out moderately, they brought in these guys, they would follow you around in your job and see all that you did. Through the places they would cut out this person, cut this out, cut that out. Quality steel was slowly, slowly, slowly. . .

T: The union just went along with these cuts?

N: Well, you see, there is where the union couldn't do anything.

T: Well, they did away with jobs instead of men, is that it?

N: Yes, they would cut the different. . .See, I can't, for the rest of the mill and steel industry it was twice as. . .They did away with the jobs and all that. In our mill they couldn't do away with the jobs. The guys came out on the light up turn, the four guys that came out for the furnaces. I told them, I said, "I don't care what you do after four hours as long as both of those furnaces are done." Instead of dwelling it out like they used to do. So, they started getting in there and working. Actually I even got a better job on the services. It wasn't very long till the foreman came and said, "Chuck, the superintendent said that they are only going to bring the furnace men out for four hours." I said, "Why?" He said, "Well, I see them sitting up there with their arms folded sleeping or reading." I said, "I told my men. . .I'm going down to the office." He said, "No you don't." I said, "I told my men I have to have those furnaces lit up and

the steel ready to roll for 7:00 in the morning." I said, "That gives me four hours in case something goes wrong with a gas valve or something out there, and also I am going to tell the men." So, I went and told the men, and the men went to the office and said, "We're not working." They said, "We go in there and work our butts off so we're done. We go in and Chuck himself says that he is more than satisfied with the job." That there was saved.

T: Oh, they saved that.

N: Yes. They were going to drag it out like they did before, only give you three hours or sometimes two and a half hours to try to clean a furnace. That was crazy. That was a little thing to show you how they were coming down on different things, cutting down.

T: Do you think that might have been a problem with the mill that you think you are supposed to work an hour for an hour's pay, but not everybody was doing that?

N: It deceives the people on the outside. If I was on the outside, I would feel the same way. They can't understand though. If you go in number one. . . When you were heating the steel, you had the helpers that opened the doors and turned the billets over so that you would have an even heat. That heat is hitting you in the face, you know what I mean?

T: Yes.

N: That is hot. Okay, they could come away while the twenty billets on each furnace is being rolled. Down in the mill, my God, there is no way they could stand in that ring of fire. That man was allowed to lay down. He was on fifteen minutes and off fifteen minutes. If he laid down and rested, threw water on his face, read a book or whatever. He wasn't taking anything away from the mill. He was doing it on his own time. The company and union were agreeable, too, that he was entitled to his time off and that was it. They wanted the people to go cut scrap when they were supposed to be getting their rest. It doesn't make any sense at all, but that is what caused a lot of friction.

T: I can certainly understand it in that case that you mentioned. Did you know of any abuses of that though, where it wouldn't be recommended?

N: There were a few guys. They cooked up the idea that they would work a half hour and take a half hour off. They were on the lower part of the intense heat when you got down in there. The foreman came along, and

they went up in the locker room and went to sleep. That was a bad mark against us, and the union finally put a stop to it. The company always used that to tell the outside world. Like downtown, the butcher downtown and the guy that owns the Isaly's said, "All you guys do is sleep and eat and read up there." I said, "Well, it is a funny thing, the company is making a lot of money. They must be doing the work themselves." I said, "How would you like it if somebody came in here telling you how to run your store?" I said, "Why can't you get it in your mind that the steel mill is not the same as here?" I told off the guy at Isaly's. I said, "Believe me, you are known for having the lowest wages in East Liverpool," and they are.

T: What about injuries and deaths, were those common?

N: Injuries in the beginning, you always had a hospital, and they had a full-time doctor and nurse. The only thing was. . . Well, I don't really have the time to go into what I was going to say about insurance companies. The insurance companies would raise the premium that the company had to pay in the time you were off. What the company would do to save the high premiums, they would make you come out and go to work on the platform. If you could sweep up or something like that, okay. Just as long as you were out there they would pay you minimum wage, or whatever labor was making, but you had to go out to work. You wouldn't be making much more than if you were off, but the union went along with them on that. Sometimes it kept some guys from faking, but in my own mind I think the insurance companies are taking us for a run because it is so hard to get insurance. As soon as they aren't making a bundle they will drop you no matter who it is. The same with the automobile insurance. Like myself, I'm with Colonial Penn. I've been with them for a long time. I'm guaranteed that they will never drop my insurance. Two years ago, all of a sudden, I got a letter: Your insurance is canceled. In bold letters, your insurance is canceled you have two weeks to get another insurance company. The thing is I didn't take it. I called them and I started telling them what the score was. I got the guy on there and told him my lawyer figures it is time to sue and everything else.

T: They saw it your way then?

N: Well, they did come back. It did turn out that the computer, which is not always right, picked my name up wrong. The thing is I would have been out of insurance had I not fought it. I'm still with Colonial Penn, believe it or not, because I'm guaranteed that and the fact that they tried it once they aren't going to try it again.

T: You had the chance to be a foreman, is that what a white hat was?

N: That is what they became. It became a law through the union through legislation. They even had to wear the white hats, the coats. They had to go to this car first and everybody special coats before you wore burlap. The guys that went in the furnaces had special suits which became a lot better, and they always had more men. Everything became better.

T: What was your view of the white hats? Did you think they performed their jobs well? Do you think they were fair?

N: Just like the union men working, your personality and what kind of guy you were. Were you a rotten guy, good guy.

T: So they vary just like everybody else.

N: I got along with all foremans in the mill. One reason I got along was because I was actually in the middle. The company, when the union came in, they wanted the heaters to be a company man, and the unions wouldn't stand for it because they never made them foreman before. That is how. . .We were reasonable...I had about eight men under me. I was in the middle. If they didn't want to do something, you have to the union. I'm a union man, you know, it was comic in a way. I had a guy one time get mad at me. He was jumping up and down. We had a old desk on one side for if we had to do any writing, it was just an old desk. He jumped on the bench and he was jumping up and down. I got up on the bench and jumped on the desk and said, "I can jump higher than you, so go ahead and jump. I belong to the union, too." You had that kind, you had comic things. It ended up. . .Oh, I had one guy come, he worked out on the mill. We had the operator that belonged to the mill, that is the guy that called for the billets, he hit the buzzer. He came up, and I was up in the back working or something. He was blowing the horn and hollering on the horn, and the heater helpers got mad and they threw him out. It got down too cold and the cobble broke a roll. Well, before the roller came up, I came back down and saw what was going on, saw what was going on before the roller. The roller is the highest paid in the mill work, in fact, the foremans don't make near as much as the heaters later on. They used to make more, but then later on they just kept bringing on foremans. They had to go out in the street and bring people in that didn't even know a thing that was going on. This is how bad it got.

T: Is that right?

N: That's the truth, that's the absolute truth. Nobody would take the job because. . .

T: Lose their security.

N: Yes, they wouldn't pay anything. The roller was up and we got into a fight. I told him to go down back where he belongs. I said, "You and I are going to the union." I was mad, he was mad. The Superintendent came up, and he wanted to know just what was going on. He said, "Chuck, you got a broken roll down there." I said, "You go back down there and tell that roller to keep that S.O.B. the hell away from that place. He came up here and made the heater helpers mad and kept going for the steel, and they gave it to him. When the roller found that out, the roller was upstairs and he wasn't even in the mill. Oh, it was really something. I was talking to the Assistant Superintendent and this roller gets him and chews him out. He comes up and I don't see him. I just turn in time and he comes way down, and I just pulled back. He misses me, and he hit his fist against a board or something there. I went after him, and the Assistant Superintendent grabbed me and held me back. I'm telling you this story because it can give you an insight. It is not all dull. So, I told the Superintendent I said, "Call the police." He said, "Chuck, please don't." I started to cool down because if I called the police he was automatically fired. He was the instigator, and I probably would have got some time off. That is how mad I was. It ended up that I took the guy in the locker room after everything was over after we put in a new roll and then we got rolling again. In the locker room I said, "Now I'm going to tell you something, the next time you want to take a swing at me wait till we go outside where you are not going to be saved by somebody where we can fight it out man to man. If you want to go out right now in front of everybody, we are finishing turns." I said, "I'll be outside, and I'm am going to wait out there for one half hour." I waited one half hour, and he didn't show up.

T: No.

N: Well, I've got to be honest, I had no business taking a swing at him because I was too big for him. I weighed at that time about two-hundred and ten pounds. That is before I took all of my weight off. I did that purposely, my weight, taking it off. Wrestling with steel and everything. Hell, you could hit me in the stomach. A stomach from all that work was just like steel. Maybe that is what helped me live to seventy-six, maybe that is what helped me, all that hard work. Okay, what

else? Do you want to hear what went on before the union came in, some pranks they used do?

T: Sure.

N: Okay, wintertime. One winter there are a lot of them that happened, this stands out in my mind, they were throwing snowballs. Someone was throwing a snowball at someone and it hit the electrician inspector along side of the face with it. He came down and he couldn't find out who threw the snowball, so he walked away. Now the crane goes back and forth to the mill, there are two cranes as far as that goes, to pick up the steel. What he does, this is wintertime, is he gets big bucket of cold water and takes it up on the crane. He gets the craneman to come down over the cradle, that is where you pull the steel off after it comes through the sheers. He dumped that cold water on top and didn't he hit it perfect. The only thing was he ruined about four or five thousand dollars of steel. The water hit the cut steel and ruined it.

T: That was an expensive prank.

N: Oh, he got time off. That was some of the things that went on, you know, you got time off. After the union came in, all that stuff was stopped. One thing the union did. . .

T: Took all the fun out of stuff.

N: Well, took the fight out which was a good thing. If you were caught fighting and the two of you went at it and one couldn't prove the other one did it, you were both fired. The union didn't stand behind you at all. You were fired. That is why I said that guy was fired. I never had any trouble with him naturally after that because everybody told him, "You don't know how lucky you were." That was good thing about unions. When I first went in the mill, they paid you in cash. I was only there about four or five months when they changed it. You had to go out to the pay office, what they call the pay office, to get your pay. They didn't have the lighting in the outside. People get hit in the head.

T: Is that right?

N: Oh, yes.

T: That was common?

N: That was before I went there. I was only there about three months when that was being changed and that is when I heard the stories about how they got hit in the

head and grabbed their pay off.

T: Were fights common before the union came in?

N: Well you see, even when I went there a lot of people could hardly speak English. They would go to New York and different places, and that is how we got the mixture, which is what America is. Don't misunderstand me. That's why in the olden days they called it the melting pot, you know, and they had to learn to speak English.

T: What various types of people, from what countries?

N: Everywhere.

T: All over.

N: Oh, yes. You see the Swedes, the Swedish people were noted for steel. Clean up until half way through my working in the mill. The rollers were Swedes because they knew what they were doing. Well, look at Andrew Mellon, he was a Scotsman. He brought his ingenuity from. . . Like everything, all the ingenuity came from the Old Country.

T: So, you think that working hard is responsible for you long life. Was there anything at the mill, like health hazards that you think cut some men's lives short?

N: Sure, that dust on the floor all the time. It was real bad way back, and we called it silica manganese. General Motors was the only one that used it in cars. That is the reason why General Motors, way back, had the cars that didn't break down on the springs. See that is what we did. We rolled around right into the coil, and we rolled the springs, too. We had the coils in the front and the springs in the back. We rolled for General Motors and Chrysler and Ford. We rolled for all three of them because we were considered the best. Then Ford learned Crucible's technique, and they started doing their own. They built their own steel mill. They still bought off of us, but they rolled a lot of their own steel.

T: Now dust, that was in your department?

N: Well, that was in any department. You had to have big fans all the time, or you wouldn't be able to work. You were inhaling that all the time. I had sinus trouble so bad I had to sometimes come home and rub myself with Vicks salve, take a couple aspirin, and tie a handkerchief around my eyes and go to bed till the pain went away.

T: Have your problems along that line left since you left there?

N: Well you see, if steel is going all around the floor, it is pretty hard to do away with, but they had vacuums and things. I'll tell you, one year after I left that mill I haven't had a headache. I get a little sinus once in awhile. When I left that mill, I made a complete turn around. I worked three turns, ate all different kinds, the doctor even said he didn't know how people lived because we had to work different hours. I went out to California, and the doctor out there. . .My oldest daughter is a nurse out there. She never did make it to the hospital when she went out there. She went to work for this specialist, and she stayed with him all the time she lived there. I called her when I retired, and she told me to come out. I know you're not interested in this.

T: No, I'm interested in everything about you.

N: Well, I went out there, and the thing was this doctor back here was treating me for heart trouble, but I had a cyst inside my breast. When I went into the office, right away he told the nurse to get me a bed. He operated. In six more months I would have had cancer, they would have to take both breasts out. Had I stayed back here I. . .So, I thought I had a second chance, and I quit smoking. Well, I already quit smoking before that, but I quit drinking. I started to live like a human being, eating breakfast and supper. What I did, I eliminated my dinner. I only eat breakfast and dinner. Then if I want a handful of peanuts or pretzels at night, well I do. I get on the scale and keep myself at my ideal weight. I had a complete physical examination about eight months ago. The only thing I couldn't figure out, high blood pressure is what I had, too. My blood pressure is perfect because I take my medicine at the right times.

T: You devised your own diet though, right?

N: I think the worst thing people are doing today is listening to these manufacturers saying cut all this out on account of cholesterol. They don't tell them that they are also damaging the good cholesterol. I don't know why the doctors don't. My doctor told me out there, "You have got good cholesterol that you have to remember now." The thing is pushing yourself away from the table. I brought myself down to. . .I stay between 180, 185 pounds. I came from a forty-four, a large forty-four, to a small forty-two. From a forty to a thirty-eight waist line for my height and everything. When you get old, you don't go back in like when you were young. I keep my stomach fairly flat. 188 he said

is the ideal weight for me, so I stay between 180 and 185. I get on the scale everyday. Every doctor in the United States will tell you that is the worst thing you can do. I disagree with that being hard-headed, but I figure this way, your body has a clock. If you get on the scale everyday, which my wife finally started to do and she said it's worked for her too, it is not the idea. . . You don't do that until you come down to the ideal weight. Come down five pounds below what your ideal weight is, and get on the scale everyday. Make up your mind that the minute you hit that five pounds you are going to cut out something new. Sometimes I eat a little bit more breakfast. As soon as it hits 185, instead of two eggs I eat one, instead of four slices of bacon eat two slices of bacon. Don't do away with anything. I eat butter. I eat salt. I have high blood pressure, but I take my medicine. If I don't watch I would die. I have this test. They took a pencil from my doctor, wrote on there and circled it- low salt. Seventy-six years old, high blood pressure. I eat butter. I have nothing against margarine. My daughter, God bless her, she does. She believes in all that stuff, and she is a nurse, too. One day I did say to her, "Did you ever read about good cholesterol?"

T: Was your last year at the mill in 1976?

N: 1974.

T: So you left before the mill finally went under. Do you have any thoughts on the union's role in the mill going under?

N: Yes. After I left, that big raise that they got. They got that big raise, and that was the beginning of it. That was not the beginning, that was starting the downfall of paying too high. When they were building all the new machinery, they came in, they wanted to put in all the new machinery. The steel mills wouldn't do it. They were probably second-hand cranes, second-hand this and second-hand that. When we modernized our mill, so help me Crucible Steel, they bought a second hand mill from one of the big companies that was putting in. . . I'll tell you. It rolled one billet at a time through. The company that sold them that one rolled four billets through at a time. That was the kind of stuff that the companies did. So, what did the manufacturers do? They went over and told these countries how they could put this new machinery in. They went to Japan, and Japan said, "Hey, we got something here." That was really the beginning of the jobs going over-seas. You see, the first thing they are hollering about is fair trade. I say that is a bunch of bologna. How can it be fair trade? Did you see tonight, just tonight, the balance of trade went fifteen billion

dollars and so forth, Japan and all those other countries. That is our jobs. As soon as you say something, these people that sit up there. . .All they are interested in is the money. They showed them how they could make more for stocks and everything. They showed them, and the stock market showed them, didn't it? What, five hundred billion dollars is down the drain. It will never be recovered. The only thing that saved us. . .The last Depression there was nothing to save us because the banks closed. That is how people lost everything they had. I didn't lose anything because I didn't have anything. I lost a job, but in youth, why that was. . .Anyhow, nobody is asking them to bring every job back. All they have to do is start calling it. . .Well, instead of calling it fair trade when it is not fair trade, like equalize it out. Do you know what I mean?

T: Yes, I know what you mean.

N: In other words, instead of bringing in one-hundred tons of steel, bring in fifty tons of steel. They still have fifty tons of steel, and our people. . .Or, even if it is thirty tons and leave seventy over there.

T: Yes. Just make a dent in it.

N: Make a dent in it and let our steel mills get built back up. I'll tell you another thing and this is against the administration. Under Carter is when Chrysler borrowed the money. Everybody was up in arms about them borrowing the money, but look what he did. He didn't have to pay that money back, he had eight or ten years yet. He paid the government back and saved all those jobs. Now, if they would have went to the steel mills and helped the steel mills out a little bit. . .No, all they were interested in was bringing steel in from building war machinery from steel from the cost of Japan all over the world. What I am saying is there has to be a balance in everything.

END OF INTERVIEW