YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Mining Project

West Point & Lisbon, Ohio

O. H. 558

JACK POZENEL

Interviewed

by

Samuel Kirkland

on

March 4, 1981

JACK POZENEL

Jack Pozenel was born on June 22, 1912, to John and Mary Pozenel in State Line, Pennsylvania. Jack's parents were immigrants from Yugoslavia who came to the mining community of State Line to escape the uncertainty of life in Eastern Europe.

At the age of two, Jack and his family moved to West Point, Ohio, where Jack's father had secured work in the Y & O Coal Company mine subsequent to the closing of the State Line "Pit".

In 1929, Jack found it necessary to quit school so as to help support his family, and at the age of sixteen, started working in the Kirk-Dunn Coal Company Mine alongside his father as an apprentice miner. Spending only one winter in the mines, he enlisted in the U. S. Army where he served out a three year term. After being discharged, Jack returned to the only "real" work available around his home, mining. He worked in a variety of underground mines between 1933 and 1940, when he began work for a "stripper," Marshall Mining Company, outside of Lisbon, Ohio. In 1951, Jack left Marshall Mining to work for another surface operation, Torrence Coal, where he was eventually promoted to mine superintendent.

Over his career in mining, Jack experienced the difficult circumstances of bad air, bad roof, excessive water and a familiarity with "firedamp" or explosive methane gas which at times would ignite and roll balls of flame over his head along the onset of heavy surface mining equipment which

eventually caused underground mining in the Columbiana County area of Ohio to become "impractical".

As a citizen of West Point, Ohio for the vast majority of his life, Mr. Pozenel spent many hours observing the major past time, the Coal Company's baseball tournaments. As well, he spent his time riding the electric Y & O Trolley which ran between East Liverpool and Salem. Jack was also instrumental in the organizing and development of the West Point Volunteer Fire Department.

In 1963, Mr. Pozenel saw an opportunity to become self employed as an independent insurance agent, having an office in Lisbon, Ohio. The Pozenel Insurance Agency has become one of the significant independent agencies in Columbiana County and serves to employ not only Jack but his son Michael, as well. At the present, Mr. Pozenel is continuing his business and foresees no retirement in the near future.

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INTERVIEWEE: JACK POZENEL

INTERVIEWER: Samuel Kirkland

SUBJECT: Trolley lines, Mine locations, V.F.D., Mine conditions

DATE: March 4, 1981

K: This is an interview with Jack Pozenel for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program on Mining, by Samuel Kirkland, on March 4, 1981, at 10:00 a.m.

Jack, you were born in State Line, Pennsylvania in what year?

P: 1912.

K: Tell me a little bit about your dad and mom, and State Line, and your dad's work.

P: I wouldn't know too much about State Line; I was two years old when I left there and moved to West Point. Dad was a blacksmith. He learned to be a blacksmith when he was in Europe. He said he went to blacksmith's school when he was ten years old. He said he didn't get any money for working at all; they just kept him, that's all he worked for. He went to school four years to be a blacksmith.

He migrated to this country when he was nineteen. He worked in the mine at West Point and also at State Line. State Line was just a small mine and West Point was much larger. He loaded coal for the first year he was here. Then he finally got in to be the blacksmith because they had enough tools that needed sharpened and bits that needed sharpened. That's what he did all the while they were in business there until 1928 when they shut it down.

K: Where did your dad come from?

P: Yugoslavia.

K: What mine was that in West Point?

P: It was the Dill Dunn Mine. It started out as the Kirk-Dunn Mine and Mr. Dunn bought out Kirk and it was the Dill Dunn Mining Company. The last it was was the Seiger Fill Company. They had bought out Dunn, about six or seven fellows, and they paid one million and a quarter dollars for the mine at that time.

K: What year was that?

P: I think it was about 1925 or 1926.

K: That was a lot of money then. How many men would work there?

P: At one time there were as many as 300 working there. That is counting the two shifts. They had a skeleton crew at night, but I suppose day turn had 200 to 220 men, and then the rest would be on the afternoon shift. Y & O Railroad used to run through there of course, and they would haul them down from Lisbon on the streetcar. They would even be sitting on the steps. The streetcar would be that loaded at starting time and quitting time there were so many people from Lisbon working down there.

K: Did most of the people from West Point work in the mines at that time?

P: Oh yes.

K: So that was a little mining town?

P: It was a pretty good size town. The population around that time was probably 1500 or 1600.

K: Where was the Kirk-Dunn Mine located?

P: Right in the valley west of Beaver Creek.

K: What other mines were there at that time?

P: It started out with the No. 1 Mine and then they had the No. 2 Mine; it was located at the intersection of what is now Rt. 11 and Rt. 45 and Rt. 30. Then they had another mine west of the No. 1 mine, about a quarter of a mile; they called that the No. 4 Mine. Why, I don't know. There was no No. 3. It didn't develop nearly as much as No. 1 or the No. 2 mines. They ran into faults up in that area and they had to shut it down. It wasn't in operation too long. No. 1 and No. 2 were there for a long, long time.

K: Your dad went to West Point in 1914 because the mine was bigger?

P: Yes.

K: How about the pay, was it better?

P: No, I don't think the pay was much different. I think the only reason they went there was because it looked like it was going to be a job that lasted longer.

K: When you were little did you ever go down in the mine with your dad?

P: They didn't chase you out of there if you went there. But I was a paper boy from the time I was about eight and I used to cross right there at the mine to go from one part of town to the other. I always stopped at the blacksmith shop to see dad and some of the other blacksmiths. There was a gentleman there by the name of Klager that hooked the cars on.

K: Was that a shaft mine?

P: No, slope.

K: Did they load a lot of coal?

P: I've seen as many as 25 or 30 flat cars in the bottom of that little tunnel.

K: What all did your dad do in his job, sharpen bits and . . .

P: Sharpen bits, and of course at that time you drilled all the holes by hand. You sharpened all your augers. You used picks and shovels and would keep them straightened out. Also he sharpened bits for the cutting machine, but they had a regular machine that would do that. He just had to heat them properly and put them in the machine and it would sharpen them. He didn't have to hammer them out. For a long time he did hammer them out.

K: How did your dad like working there?

P: Very much so.

K: Was the blacksmith shop on the outside?

P: Yes. It was a pretty good six blacksmith shop; they had three blacksmiths.

K: How did your dad come to the United States?

P: He probably had some friends. In fact, Steve Chuck was over here and he was down at State Line at that time. He and dad had been friends in Europe. I think he was one or two

years older than dad. He talked to dad; I think he went over and talked to dad. Dad saved up enough money to get over here.

K: Was it pretty much the work and type of living over here that intrigued him?

P: He always said that over there you didn't have control over anything. You just had to do whatever the dictators told you.

K: When you were little, how about your mom, did she support your dad in the work? Did she not like mining? Did she ever say anything about it?

P: My dad was here a few years and then he went back and got her and brought her back. She was just a housewife.

K: I'm interested a lot in West Point when you were little, the mining town, the people, some of the significant names of people and the organizations, what the miners did for recreation and what the kids did, some significant places, things like that.

P: In the winter time mostly there wasn't much to do. We lived by a creek there and everybody used to ice-skate in the winter time. In the summer time we had awfully good baseball teams as most mining towns did have.

K: What was the name of your team?

P: West Point Ball Team, that's all. We had a couple of good men that could have gone on if they would have had the opportunity.

K: Do you remember their names?

P: Sam Roberts and Seth Martin.

K: They were miners?

P: Yes.

K: Was that a big activity for the whole town?

P: It certainly was. Whenever there was a ball game everybody came.

K: Are there any other clubs or organizations for the miners?

P: Just the United Mine Workers Union.

K: Do you remember when that came into power here?

P: Not really.

K: Did your dad favor the union pretty much?

P: Yes, they all did pretty much. The union at that time wasn't like it is now. They were much more sensible than some of the union operators are now.

K: Do you remember any real significant people when you were younger in town?

P: A fellow by the name of Naylor really started it, and then Bill bought it off of him. It was very small when he bought it off of Naylor. Naylor ran a grocery store there, Pete Naylor. We always liked Bill Dunn pretty much, even though he was way above us as far as financial . . . We never had any union problems.

K: Did everybody in town pretty much respect him and look up to him?

P: Very much so.

K: What kind of mine did he run? Was he a good manager?

P: He didn't run the mine.

K: He just owned it.

P: He would be there every day.

K: Would he stop and talk to the men, the workers?

P: Definitely. He was a really down-to-earth man.

K: What about the men that ran the mine, what were they like?

P: Very nice. Paul Hobert was the superintendent. Several foremen lived in the community with us. Herb Morris was a foreman, Joe Kuzar Sr., Bill Martin, Jim Babb.

K: How about foremen's salaries compared to workers? Did they do a little bit better?

P: At that time it was all piece work; there were no hourly rates. You got so much a ton for loading; you got so much a ton for cutting. The guy that wanted to work couldn't make much more than the superintendent could.

K: Did the foreman get paid by piece work too?

P: No, he was a salary man.

K: There didn't seem to be any labor friction between management and union?

P: No. Not at that time. In Seager Fill Company, when they formed later on . . .

K: What year was that?

P: 1925. They wouldn't go with the men. They were trying to get the men to take a cut in wages and the men wouldn't do it. They were getting $7.50 for an eight hour day; that was the standard rate. They wanted them to drop back to $6 and they wouldn't do it. That is when they shut the mine down. The mine was in so deep; it was about three miles from one end to the other. It went in and they had what they called the south section and that went west; that was the high coal. It went in about 1500 yards and then it made a swing to right and came back and went north; they called that the dip. That was the low coal section. They had two areas.

K: When you talk high coal and low coal, how high would the high coal have been?

P: The south averaged about four feet. The dip averaged about 32".

K: Is that No. 6 coal?

P: All No. 6.

K: How about in West Point, were there any special places where everybody seemed to congregate after work? Where did all the men cash their checks and that?

P: They didn't get checks; they got cash, money.

K: There weren't any company stores?

P: No.

K: Where did the men congregate on a Saturday evening or something like that?

P: We really didn't have any community center like that. They had the Miners Hall. We used to have square dances there sometimes, school functions.

K: As you reached your teen years did you pretty much decided you had to go work or join the Army?

P: When I became old enough to work the mine was no longer there.

K: This was about 1928, 1930. Did the other mines shut down

about this time?

P: The other ones were shut down before that. No. 1 was the only one that was running.

K: How about the other mines around East Palestine or Lisbon, were they shutting down about the same time?

P: They had the Coleman Mine also that Bill Dunn also owned. When his mine shut down he went out here and was blacksmith for Dunn at Coleman Mine.

K: Was that 1928?

P: No, it was before that, 1926.

K: That was in Log Town?

P: Just beyond Log Town.

K: How many men were there?

P: About 75 or 80.

K: What about the other mines around State Line and Palestine?

P: I don't remember too much about those?

K: What were the reasons they shut the mines down?

P: The territory was so far to haul the coal out. The deeper you get the more water accumulation you have and the more pumps you need. They said it was costing too much to get the coal out. They told the men that if they would go along with them they would try to run it a while longer, if they would help them out in wages, and they wouldn't do it.

K: Do you think the strippers had any effect?

P: At that time there weren't any strippers.

K: Do you know if Pittsburgh consolidated any land around West Point?

P: Lots of land. We tried to buy some off of them.

K: I think they still do, don't they?

P: No, Buckeye bought it. My brother and I tried to buy. They wouldn't sell it to us. They said that some day they were going to move a machine in there, a shovel.

K: What year was this you were trying to buy that?

P: Probably 1947, 1948.

K: They intended at that time to strip this up here?

P: They thought maybe they would, if they could develop enough acreage around there. Of course, everything was mined out. They could have if they would have come up a little earlier, in about 1938. That was when the strip mine started in our area.

K: 1928, 1929, what did you do, decide to go to the service before you went to work?

P: No, I worked at the sewer pipe here in Lisbon. In 1929 they started paying us 20¢ an hour and I didn't think that was enough money but I couldn't get any better job so I went into the service.

K: When did you finally get in the mines?

P: The deep mines?

K: Yes.

P: I didn't get into the deep mines until 1944, 1945.

K: Where was that?

P: I worked right there at West Point. Maruca had a mine there just west of West Point about a half of a mile. It was all pick work mine; you had no machines. I worked there two winters and then I worked at the Rock Camp Mine one winter. Then I worked here at Log Town for Frank Ieropoli Mining Company one winter.

K: How many guys worked there?

P: There were about 25 of us. At one time it was a really good mine when it first went in. It was pretty nice coal. It was about 36", 38". That was No. 3 coal. When I worked there it was down to about 22", 24".

K: What did you think of that work?

P: I didn't have much choice. I didn't like it.

K: Would you go back to it?

P: No. I don't think I could do it today. We had to shoot the roof to get the car in. There wasn't even enough room to get the car in the mine, so you had to shoot 12" of draw slate out of the roof to get the car in. They didn't pay you for that.

K: Did you wear knee pads and that?

P: All of the time.

K: That was all pick work?

P: No, that was machine work.

K: What did you do?

P: Load. I helped my brother-in-law--he ran a cutting machine--for about two months, but I didn't like that at all.

K: How was cutting?

P: Too much dust.

K: How was the ventilation?

P: Mostly pretty good. That No. 3 had a little bit of gas. One guy got a haircut one day from that. He was a mine inspector, Reese, and we had a fire boss and he must have gone in and checked it but not gone all the way. Later on they got in there and they had the mine inspector with them and he was up ahead and the gas exploded. They said they thought the fire boss lit a cigarette back down in the room there. Nobody got hurt bad, but they did get a haircut; it burned all the hair off of them. I guess it knocked him [Reese] down. He was in the hospital for a day or two. I think he was shook up more than anything else.

K: That's the first explosion or fire I've heard of in any of these mines around here.

How deep was that mine?

P: We were in about a mile.

K: I mean surface. How much cover would it have?

P: In the No. 3 vein, when we went in we had to blow a road. The slope was about 80 feet down there. They mined all that coal in that bottom and then the coal took off up the hill. Then it leveled off at the top. It must have had 400 feet over top of it.

K: What did you guys do to clear the gas? Did you have good curtains and stuff like that?

P: Pretty good. On the low level was where the air was and that is where all the fans were setting. The only time they had a problem was when the bottom would fill with water and the air couldn't get through. That is why the

fire boss had to go in. That is the only mine that I ever worked in that had a fire boss.

K: Did they use a pump?

P: They had steam pumps.

K: Outside?

P: No. Inside, right at the bottom of the pit. There would be a lot of mornings we would go to work and Frank Ieropoli would be there pumping water himself. The had DC currents where they made their own current there. They had their own boiler room. They had this pump right at the bottom and it would be buried in water of course. It is a good thing it was a steam pump because nothing else would have pumped it. That thing would throw a 4" pipe out there. It just threw that water out of there.

K: Did it pump it outside?

P: Yes.

K: That was a piston pump, right?

P: Yes.

K: While you guys worked who was the boss with you guys?

P: We didn't have a boss. Frank was the owner. I don't think we needed papers then even.

K: What year was that?

P: About 1936.

K: No, you didn't need papers then. I think it first started in 1944.

Who was your fire boss, do you remember?

P: A fellow by the name of Walters.

K: What did he do, go in before the shift with a bug lamp?

P: Yes, he would go in at 6:00. He had a regular lamp and would go in and check it. I don't think there was over two or three times when he wouldn't let us go in.

K: You don't know what kind of gas you had, one percent or whatever?

P: No.

K: Were you there at the explosion?

P: I was working there at that time.

K: Did you feel it?

P: We weren't in the mine; they were in it. We were outside waiting to go in.

K: What happened then? Did they call you guys outside? Did you know if anybody was hurt?

P: The only people inside were the mine inspector and the fire boss and Frank Ieropoli.

K: Who brought them out?

P: Frank brought them out; he didn't get hurt.

K: That was at Log Town, right?

P: Just west of Log Town.

K: The other mines that you mentioned out there where you worked, where were they?

P: That's the only one I worked at out there.

K: Where were the other ones?

P: I worked at Rock Camp, which would be about three miles east of West Point. That was the No. 7 vein down there that we had.

K: What was the work like there?

P: They had machines, cutting machines. It was low coal. There you took the bottom. You didn't dare touch the top because you couldn't hold it if you opened it up. You would take a foot of clay out of the bottom and you had to shoot it and load it. They didn't pay you anything for that either.

K: You were still getting piece work, right?

P: Yes. The only time you got paid was when you loaded coal.

K: Did you get paid for slack?

P: Yes. They wanted you to load it separate.

K: Was that union work too?

P: No. We belonged to the union, but there were no union representatives out there. I think our union representatives were from Burton.

K: Do you remember any guys getting hurt or any fatalities?

P: No, I don't think. I remember when I first started at Rock Camp I was in a room next to a fault. They had break-throughs for air to go. I heard something dropping in the other room and I went over in the other room and crawled through a break-through and hollered up to some guy and told him his room was caving in and that he better get out. He said, "No, it isn't going to cave in until tomorrow, or maybe tonight." I told him it was coming down pretty good. He said it would be all right. Sure enough we finished cleaning the room up and pulled the track that evening and the next morning we came and it was caved in.

K: How did you hold the roof?

P: We laid some timbers.

K: Did the mine shut down then and you left, or did you just decide to go to other work?

P: I quit the mine and went to work at Mullen's Manufacturing. I worked there about seventeen months and got laid off about six or seven times in those seventeen months but was always called back. So I figured that was enough of that for me. Then I went into strip mining.

K: Do you remember when the strippers first started moving in around here?

P: Sure.

K: Tell me about that.

P: The first strippers were with Central Mining, but then they had the big outfit on old Rt. 30. They had a big steam shovel there; I think it was a Marion 300 steam shovel. I think Marshall came in there on Rt. 518 about 1937.

K: Was that No. 6 coal?

P: Yes.

K: That was easy coal.

P: They were selling it for $1 a ton at that time, I think.

K: You went to work for Marshall in the 1940's, right?

P: 1938 or 1939.

K: What prompted you to do that?

P: I was working at Mullen's and had got laid off and had put my application in there and they called me and told me to come to work.

K: What was that work like?

P: I was oiling on the shovel. I oiled about seven months and they started operating.

K: Did you like that?

P: Yes. That is when that Guffy Coal Bill came into effect. They had to raise the price of coal. I think it was triple what they were getting, which was around $3 then. Marshall moved out of this area and moved into Pennsylvania because it could sell the coal there to Penn Power. He couldn't get that much off of Ohio Edison here. They moved back here later on though, when things straightened out.

K: When he moved out did you got to that other company?

P: No, I went to Pennsylvania with him.

K: Was that a pretty good machine?

P: Yes. It wasn't a big machine. It was long.

K: So you moved quite a bit of dirt with that?

P: Yes.

K: How did they load the coal?

P: They had a Marion 77 or 79 and they loaded the coal with that.

K: What did the people around here think about the stripping?

P: They didn't like it.

K: Because they were tearing up the land.

P: That and the blasting. You can't blame them.

K: Looking back at working underground compared to surface work, I know you're going to like the surface work a lot better.

P: Yes.

K: Were there any differences in the type of people you worked with?

P: I don't think so. Most of the fellows that worked in the

deep mine went to the strip ones after.

K: How about the mine managers for the strip mines, did they seem different?

P: I always got along well with Marshall Mining.

K: The superintendent job, what was that like?

P: It was too time-consuming. I used to average 80 to 85 hours a week. I was on a salary. I got tonnage, this helped. Sometimes we had three mines going and I was the only boss.

K: Did you have papers?

P: Yes.

K: What was that like?

P: It wasn't too hard. I thought it was an easy test myself. I don't think they gave the surface miners near the test they gave the underground miners.

K: Did you remember much about the inspectors? What were they like?

P: Your dad was one of them.

K: Do you remember him?

P: When I was superintendent your dad was inspector out here.

K: Did they give you a hard time?

P: No.

K: They were easy to get along with?

P: Yes.

K: How about the federal?

P: They weren't too bad. We tried to do what was right most of the time. Any time they would come they would have some kind of recommendations.

K: What seemed to be your biggest problem as superintendent?

P: Too many hours, and breakdowns. I wasn't really a superintendent, I just had that title.

K: Who planned the layout of your cuts for you?

P: We did that ourselves.

K: How about the management of the company then? Organizing the trucks and everything, was that your jbo?

P: No. We had a weigh master. They were our responsibility once they were on our property. We had to make sure the roads were fit for them and things like that.

K: How aobut overall, the stripping, is there anything that sticks out as being significant?

P: Nothing I can think of.

K: Breakdowns?

P: Not so much breakdowns, just malfunctions.

K: Who did you sell your coal to mostly?

P: Ohio Edison at Stratton and some to Goodyear in Akron.

K: Did Torrence sell to Ohio Edison too?

P: Yes. Ohio Edison at Lowellville, Akron, and Stratton.

K: How about Frank Ieropoli, did he sell to power companies too?

P: No, mostly domestic coal.

K: Do you remember when the town started converting from domestic coal to gas and oil? Did that hurt the mines around here?

P: I don't think he sold too much here. Usually the guys came in from Youngstown with their trucks and picked it up. They had one fellow from Youngstown that used to haul fifty percent of his coal back up into the Youngstown area. It was a good coal. No. 3 is a good, hot coal. It is dirty because there is a lot of sulphur in it. It is a hot burning coal.

K: How did you get out of mining then?

P: To me it looked like I was going to have to do something because I was going to outlive the strip mine. I had an opportunity to go into the insurance business. One of my friends in Lisbon asked me to help him and I did. He had me get a license and I went on my own then. I did that for three years while I worked in the mine. I built the business up to the point where either one or the other had to go. Of course, I quit the strip mine and went into insurance.

K: Who did you start out with?

P: Guy France.

K: Overall, what do you think of the insurance business, especially in the Lisbon area?

P: It is a pretty good business, I think. It had changed an awful lot. I think the reason for this is because the people have changed an awful lot. People demand more all of the time. Now that the economy is bad we have claims that other people wouldn't even think about ordinarily. It is a good business though, as long as you're honest and do what you think is right. The more times you can say yes, and the less times you can say no, the better off you are.

K: Is there anything else you want to add--life in West Point, how the towns have changed?

P: Personally, West Point is a very nice place to me. I've lived there all of my life and like it really well. It hasn't changed too much. You don't have as much mining hustle bustle, but there is always something else going on. We started a fire department in West Point around 1944.

K: Tell me about that and how it developed?

P: We had several fires and never had any protection. Finally a fellow's garage burned down and we thought that was it. There were very few that weren't in favor of the fire department. We took up a collection and elected officers and decided we would canvass the whole area. If I remember correctly we collected around $3700 from the folks. We went over to a town in Ohio and bought a truck for $2500 and we were in business.

K: What were some of the big fires that you remember?

P: We really didn't have any great, big fires, just houses and barns.

K: At that time the kids from West Point, when they reached eighth grade they came up here to Lisbon to school didn't they?

P: Yes.

K: Did they bus themselves?

P: No, they rode the Y & O streetcar. It was a nice car that they had. It ran through West Point every hour on the half hour. It cost us $4 a month to ride the streetcar twenty days. Ordinarily it was 26¢ to ride to Lisbon, and 26¢ back home of course. Liverpool was 47¢, I remember that. We got a book of twenty tickets for $4. We paid that ourselves; nobody paid us. The school board didn't pay

us or anybody.

K: Do you remember when the streetcar was put in?

P: That was before my time.

They had a big firehouse at West Point. It belonged to the Y & O Railroad.

K: The firehouses ran the trolley?

P: Yes. That was their main power line. The building was big enough that they just ran these flat cars of coal right in the building. They opened them up and it went down into the bins.

K: Did that supply the power for the entire line?

P: Yes.

K: Were the lines about the track?

P: Yes. They tore it down in 1933, 1934.

K: Did they rip the track out?

P: They bricked the track out before that.

K: How did it run? Did it follow pretty much what Rt. 30 is now?

P: It stayed in Warren. I guess it crossed Rt. 30 a couple of times and ran alongside of it going into Liverpool.

END OF INTERVIEW