YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Erie Railroad Project

Railroad Experiences

O. H 397

WILLIAM NAPLES

Interviewed

by

Jerry Mullen

on

November 20, 1975

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: WILLIAM NAPLES

INTERVIEWER: Jerry Mullen

SUBJECT: Erie Railroad Roundhouse, Steam Engines, Depression, Diesel Engines

DATE: November 20, 1975

M This is an interview with Mr. William Naples for the Youngstown State University Oral History Project History of Erie Railroad, on November 20, 1975, at approximately 3:00 p.m.

First of all, I would like to know a little something about your parents and your family?

N: I was born and raised in Brier Hill, the west end of Youngstown, on Division Street, in 1904. About 1911 we moved to a house on West Federal Street, about one-quarter mile east of the Erie Railroad roundhouse and repair shop. My parents have lived in Brier Hill all their lives; that is also in the west end of Youngstown.

During vacation in 1918--it was during the war--I went to work on the railroad just for the vacation. I fell into a machinist apprentice job. When September rolled around, I quit and went back to school. I only went to school for one month and went back to work for the railroad. I was down there from 1918 to 1971, fifty-three years.

M: What did your dad do as an occupation?

N: He was a blast furnace man and worked for the Youngstown Sheet & Tube.

M: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

N: I have two brothers and four sisters.

M: Are they all in Youngstown?

N: All in Youngstown . . . well, one of them is in Niles.

M: You said that your parents came from Italy to the United States?

N: Yes. They settled in Youngstown near the mill; they bought a home there and that's where they lived.

M: Do you recall in which year it was?

N: I know my dad came here in 1897 and about three years later he sent for my mother.

M: And then you were born in 1904?

N: In Brier Hill.

M: In what year?

N: 1904.

M: Can you tell me something about your school days and education?

N: I went to Brier Hill School up to the fourth grade and then they built Tod School which was closer to home for us. I went there up to the seventh grade. That's all the education I had, up to the seventh grade.

M: Where was Brier Hill School?

N: Brier Hill School is between Columbia Street and Lafayette Street. I went to Jefferson School for manual training.

M: Did they destroy the school when they built the new Tod School?

N: No, it's still there. Brier Hill School is still there. It was Brier Hill all the time. Brier Hill is where I went. Then when they built Tod School, I went to Tod because it was closer to home. It was walking back and forth almost two miles; we didn't have any buses. We had to walk both ways, rain, shine, or anything.

M: Was it grade one through eight in Brier Hill?

N: Right.

M: What kind of school was it?

N: It was just a regular public school. They had the three yards, like they have now. We went to Jefferson for manual training for the men, and kitchen economics for the girls. That's about all you got at that time, way back before 1910.

M: So you went to school, quit for the summer, and worked?

N: Yes, but I went and got my job back and stayed there.

M: Why did you decide to go back?

N: It was during the war, and my parents were coming up against such hard times that we needed a little extra money.

M: How old were you at the time?

N: Fourteen.

M: Did you have to lie about your age?

N: Four years!

M: And they believed you?

N: Well, I don't think they cared then. They needed men. They needed help. When I was sixteen years old--I guess when you're sixteen you can have an apprenticeship job. Twelve and a half cents an hour is what I started at. My first full pay, fifty-four hours a week, was $12.99. I often wonder why they didn't give me that extra penny.

M: Would you describe, first of all, the shop that you worked in in 1918?

N: It has been torn down since then. It was the old machine shop. We had boring mill, 12"-18"-24" and 36" lathes, shapers, planner, drill presses, bolt cutter and puncher. In the back end was the carpenter shop with band saw, buzz saw, jointer, and other small saws. On one side we had a blacksmith shop with four forges and a steam hammer.

M: You mean you made all the replacement parts?

N: Now you can overhaul the diesels just like automobiles are. You go to the part store, get your part, and set it

in. The machinists at that time had to make their parts. The thing was that they kept modernizing all the time. You would get to know how to make one and pretty soon you have to know how to make something different. Like when they went from solid brass bushing where they went into cast iron bushing. You had to make one that would press in and another one that would float in there.

M: Where did the bushing fit into the engine?

N: On the cranks in the wheels. The main one would be from the piston on the main rod to the main wheel. That was the big one; that was a driver. The steam pushes the pistons back and forth and drives the main wheel. It was connected to two or three or other; it all depends on the size of the engine or locomotive. It dragged the tank along and is filled with coal and water.

M: A tank was attached to the . . .

N: Locomotive. It seemed like one. You probably have never seen a steam engine.

M: No, I don't think I have What was working in the shop like during a typical day during the war?

N: When I first started as an apprentice, I was on a bolt cutter, just getting bolts and putting threads on the ends of them. It all depends on what size bolt they needed and threaded them. After six months, you probably went to the drill press. You would drill different size holes for brake hangers, rods, or for whatever you needed them for. Then later on, they gradually break you into a shaper, planer, and then on the small lathe. You spent 1,041 days before you would be a machinist, about four years.

M: What kind of unions did you have at that time?

N: At that time, we didn't have much of a union. They were just coming in. They had some, but they didn't have them like now. It wasn't compulsary to join. The unions were frowned upon in shops at that time.

M: Did you progress by ability or by time in?

N: The company had certain rules set up and you would go by that.

M: Mostly by adding up your hours?

N: At that time we were working nine hours a day and five hours on a Saturday, I think, or ten hours a day and five hours on Saturday, something like that. Anyway, later on when we got that eight hour day, we went eight hours, forty hours a week. You worked whatever your seniority allowed you to work, either day turn or second trick or third trick. You go according to seniority, like they do now. If you had enough seniority to hold a day job and you wanted a day job, you could. But if somebody else from another term had more time in than you did, they could bump you off and you would have to take the slip.

M: Who was your first boss?

N: Ted Cullen. He was the master mechanic. Ed Dechant was shop foreman.

M: When did you get your first promotion?

N: In around 1920; the union came in and got pretty strong. In 1922 there was a railroad strike. I had six months to go and I couldn't finish it out; I had to wait until after the strike. During the strike, they took in a lot of nonunion men. They brought them up from the south someplace and they put them to work. When we went back to work three months later--they settled the strike--all these fellows that were hired during the strike had seniority over the men that originally worked there. When it came to layoffs, that was a preferred list on top. They wouldn't touch them.

M: Was that when you organized a union?

N: The union was organized before that. The union got stronger in the shop.

M: Was it organized over the entire railroad too?

N: Yes, all over the Erie. The Erie Railroad had their own union. They were International Association of Machinists, but each railroad had their own general chairman. They took care of the area. Bill Nester was the general chairman at that time. His responsibility was the Erie Railroad, but they all accounted to the International Association of Machinists. That was organized a long time ago, but to get it around to different places took a lot of time.

M: Why did the men go out on strike? What were their grievances?

N: I think, if I remember right, the contract shop. They wanted a contract to work out at different companies, so they got mad. The main reason was to cut wages and have longer hours. The Wilkof Company was supposed to take the roundhouse over and work for them.

M: Then what happened?

N: On account of the strike, they got out of that.

M: The company decided not to contract the work out?

N: Yes, because the men wouldn't go back until things were straightened out. It was the same way in Meadville. Another locomotive company had called to go in there and repair. They wouldn't be working for the Erie anymore, indirectly. In other words, the union wouldn't have anything to say that way. At that time, I didn't belong to the union. I wasn't a union man; I wasn't a union man until after I had finished my apprenticeship.

M: Did you have to join?

N: No, we didn't have to. I stayed the first day; I thought they said that I didn't have to go out because I was an apprentice. You didn't do much on the first day of the strike. Then when I went out a bunch of picketers said that I better not go back in there. So I didn't and I stayed home until the strike was settled in October; we went back. It lasted three months. Outside of that we have had pretty good . . . I don't think we have been on strike at all since then. There were a lot of threatened strikes, but we never lost time on account of a strike. I have been laid off a lot of times on account of a slack in business. The shop where I worked mostly carried iron ore from Cleveland to Sheet & Tube and Republic Steel Company in the summer months. During the fall then, the carrying stops, this far, and they cut down the forces. Thanksgiving or Christmas time I would get laid off. Come spring again, they would start to call us back to work. In the meantime, you could get a job someplace else.

M: Was there any unemployment compensation?

N: No, we had nothing then. No unemployment, no compensation of any kind, no Medicare, no shop insurance or anything.

M: Simply all your wages were what you got?

N: That's right.

M: When was the first time that you were laid off from the Erie?

N: 1925.

M: Do you remember why?

N: Reduction in business. I was off then almost a year. I got married in 1926 and I was working at McDonald Steel at the time. They called me back to work down at the Erie and I only worked about a month or so when I got laid off. About six months later they had an opening up in Cleveland and I worked up in Cleveland for awhile, for about six months. It was at the East 55th Street roundhouse.

M: What happened when the Depression hit? What did you do then?

N: WPA [Work Projects Administration]. WPA worked for the government there for awhile. I put eighteen months in it. Every once in a while, I would fill in. When there was somebody laid off they weren't hiring anybody, or if somebody was off sick or something I would get called in and get a couple of days here and there.

M: How were wages then compared to when you had started?

N: They were a lot better than from when I had started. I started at twelve and a half cents an hour in 1918. When the government had taken the railroads over, right after that, they raised me up to twenty-five cents an hour. Then I got a five cents an hour raise every six months. I must have been making about sixty cents an hour as a machinist in 1925.

M: Why had the government taken over?

N: World War I was still on in 1918.

M: I see. Then they reverted back to company ownership after the war?

N: Oh yes. The government bought a lot of engines too and sold them back to the railroads. They had big engines, all kinds of engines. We had some great, big engine that was built for Russia and it never was sent to Russia.

M: When was that?

N: That was right after the war too, in 1921.

M: You were making engines for them?

N: No. They were made someplace to be sent to Russia but then when the war was over, they had to use them up here someplace so we were using them around here.

M: How were they different from the ones that you normally used?

N: There were a lot of different things. They even had those bumpers in the front like you see on the English engines.

M: Cowcatcher?

N: No, these looked like bumpers besides the cowcatcher. There were coil springs on both sides.

M: What was the purpose of the bumpers?

N: It was the regulation over there, I guess. If you bump something, the spring would take up most of these bumps.

M: Oh, absorb the impact.

N: That's right. The English engines, I think, still have that.

When I was working up in Cleveland it was at that time that we had our first little girl. We were going back and forth to Cleveland for a while until we found a room up there. We stayed up there six months and then I was called back to the railroad here. I worked for a little while and then got laid off. That was in 1929, then I got laid off all together.

M: For how long?

N: I didn't get back to full-time until 1937. I was working off and on a little bit. Since 1937 I worked all the way through to 1971; we had no layoffs. Of course, by that time, I had quite a bit of seniority. The men that did have the seniority over me either retired or passed on. When I retired, in 1971, I was on top of the list; I had been there for about fifteen years before. I was the ICC inspector for the shop; I would inspect engines. That was one of the privileges of having seniority. When the job goes up for bid, the man that had it before retired or . . . if you wanted it you could bid on it, and if your seniority was high enough, you would get the job. It paid six cents an hour more.

M: What were the tasks or the duties of the job?

N: Inspecting engines and signing the ICC forms after the engines were inspected. You know the ICC form that they put in engines?

M: Yes.

N: You had to inspect all the items it had on there and make sure that they all were in good working order. Then you had to swear to it that they were before you would sign it. You got a differential of six cents an hour.

M: What were some of the things that you inspected on the engine?

N: The running gear and at that time in the steam engine was a steam gauge and water glasses, steam leaks, and the air brakes. You had to make sure that all the air was okay and your pistons traveled and all that stuff. If it was in good condition to me then the other side of the boilermaker would sign their half for the boiler: the tubes, the firebox, and the grates and all that stuff.

M: How often did you have to do this for each engine?

N: Every month, but steam engines and safety valves every three months. Safety valves, we call them pops, are on top of the engine; some of them had three; some had two and they had to be set so that if the pressure got up to a certain pressure it would release the pressure.

M: Have you ever seen a steam engine explode?

N: No, I've never seen one, but I've heard of one that exploded on the way to Pittsburgh. It was one of our engines; 2535 was the number of the engine, and it was on a passenger train. It seemed like the boiler just went right off it and it landed someplace, but nobody got hurt.

M: Did they ever find out why it exploded?

N: No. I really don't know. I've heard the rumors that maybe the water had gotten too low. The water got too low and the top sheet got hot and when they put more water into it, what they call injected it . . . Injector is a steam-operated siphon that siphons water from the tank to the boiler. It builds up enough pressure to put the water into the boiler and when the cold water hits the hot sheet, the steam goes up so fast that there isn't enough time to release.

M: Where do they store the water in a steam engine?

N: You mean the extra water?

M: Yes.

N: In the tank behind it. They sometimes had an eight to twelve thousand gallon tank back there and the coal in between them.

M: How much water on a normal run from Youngstown to Kent did a steam engine use?

N: It all depends. I don't know Maybe around five thousand gallons.

M: What is a master mechanic's job?

N: He is a supervisor for all things that go on in his jurisdiction, which I guess was from Brier Hill to Kent-Meadville, Pennsylvania. At that time we had K e n t, Leavittsburg, Sharon, New Castle, Lisbon. The Niles track to Lisbon had a little shop up there. He was responsible for all that and then the master mechanic in Meadville had his jurisdiction from then on

M: His duties were to keep all the engines in proper running order?

N: Proper running order and he was responsible for anything that went wrong in that division.

M: If the engine would break down on the road or something.

N: Like Mahoning division. Of course, they made the divisions a lot bigger now. At that time, they weren't so big. We had more shops and different little places where they took care of the engines.

M: What is a mechanical engineer?

N: It's the same. That's what I'm talking about.

M: What is an environmental engineer's job and duties?

N: We didn't have any of them; we had what you would call . . . he wouldn't be an engineer, but he would be a man from the car department who was on equal footing.

M: What were his duties?

N: To see that the cars were in running order, repaired and available when they needed them.

M: Do you mean damaged cars?

N: Damaged cars if they could repair them in the shop. He would see that they were repaired and if they weren't repairable here, they would have to send them to a bigger shop that does that kind of work. It was the same thing with the locomotives. We did a certain amount of work, what we called at that time back shop work, where if there was big damage or an engine had to have extensive repairs, they would send them to these bigger shops where they had more equipment.

M: What were a chief electrical engineer's duties?

N: At that time we didn't have any electrical engineers. At first we had these oil lamps. There was nothing electrical on the engine, just these little, oil lamps. We had a man there clean them up and put kerosene in them. Later on, we got the little steam generator that sat on the steam engine that was run by steam for lights, front and rear and cab lights. I don't think they had an electrical engineer for that.

M: You mean the chief electrical engineer probably came along with the diesel engines?

N: Yes. The diesels are mostly electric.

M: I would like to ask you a few questions about the Brier Hill yard now. What is a hump track?

N: A hump track is a track that is raised higher than the rest of the tracks. When they wanted to switch a car to a certain place, they lined up the switches to this hump and they pushed the car over this hump. It would go by itself and they wouldn't have to follow it in. They would just push it over the hump and your other yard lines would be all set and you turned whatever track you wanted. There was one, two, three, or four track. A brakeman or somebody would stay at the switch and when he knew where the car was going, he turned the switch. All he had to do was put the car over the hump and it was lined up to go into the track it was supposed to go in.

M: Kind of a fast way of sorting cars?

N: Yes.

M: What did they use a cripple track for?

N: The cripple track . . . When the car inspector comes down and inspects the car, the freight train over, if the car is not safe they put it on a cripple track. Then

a car repairman would have to go and either repair it there if he could or if he couldn't they would have to bring it to the yard.

M: Would you explain or describe a roundhouse?

N: I'll describe the one that we had down there. It had twenty-two stalls with a turntable in the center.

M: Circular stalls?

N: Yes.

M: Like spokes of a wheel then?

N: Yes, but only a little more than half way. Every one of the tracks had pits in them, what we call pits. At first, they were only about two feet lower than the track, where the men would crawl under to repair anything in the undergear. At that time we used to have a lot of stuff to repair, like bearings, grease boxes, and stuff like that. You had to get underneath to do that. Later on through the union, I guess, they were forced to put them lower. You never had standing room, but you had a crawl space about three or four feet. You had a better chance where you didn't have to lay on your belly in water or anything like that.

When an engine would come in from a run they would come to the ash pit, then the coal dock. They would take on coal, sand, and water to fill the water tank. Then they would go out to the turntable and go into one of the vacant stalls. Then the inspector would look it all over to find out if anything was loose or broken or anything was wrong. He would give it a regular inspection; he would have to go underneath the engine, all around the engine, into the cab, try the brake equipment, and see that all the safety appliances were okay and all the grab irons. Grab irons are the things on the side of the engine; he had to make sure that they weren't bent and had no sharp edges on them or anything like that. He also had to see if the cupplings worked okay and all that stuff. If there was something wrong a report was made of it and put on the foreman's desk. He would assign a man to do the work. If it was boiler work it would be a boilermaker; if it was tank work or repair work like that it would be a car repairman; if it was mechanical work it would be the machinist; and if it was pipe work they had a pipe fitter.

M: How did the turntable operate?

N: One time, a long time ago, they had to push it around. They still have to push them if the motor goes out on them. It was operated with a motor, an electrical motor, geared down. If you didn't balance the engine exactly right on it, they would have to move it so that the traction wheel would be on the rail. You don't want to get too much weight on that traction or it won't move because it will be too heavy.

M: You mean you had to find the center of gravity so . . .

N: So the balance would still get the traction.

M: What's the traction?

N: They had a big wheel there. Inside the pit was a rail that went right around the wall. There was a wheel on the motor; the motor was geared down to this big wheel and another gear would turn the wheel. The wheel is what operated your turntable.

M: When did the old roundhouse . . . was it destroyed or torn down to make room for another one, the shop that you originally worked in?

N: No. They tore it down all right, but not to make room. The diesel shop was made where the old machine shop used to be. That was around 1950.

M: Which building did you work in when you started?

N: In the old machine shop.

M: Where was that located at Brier Hill?

N: At Stop 7 right there between Youngstown and Girard, almost on the boundary line just before you come to the west end yard office.

M: Were there any other buildings that they constructed between the time that you worked in the older building until the new diesel shop?

N No. They have added on several times as the engines got bigger and longer; they lengthened the roundhouse stalls to get these bigger engines in. I think they only had done that to five or six stalls. Mostly they got the long engines in, but when they started to make bigger engines they didn't have room so they had to put about ten or twelve feet on the end of the stall and put more track in there.

M: Are you speaking about diesels now when you say longer engines?

N: No, steam engines.

M: Just larger steam engines?

N: Yes, bigger and longer. They made the tanks where they carried more supplies. They had to supply more water and more coal so that they could go farther without having to stop.

M: Do they still have a roundhouse at Brier Hill now?

N: No, it was all torn down. They have the turntable there, but the roundhouse was all torn down. They used the turntable to turn the diesel engines, but the roundhouse was torn down in the early 1960's.

M: What replaced that, anything?

N: No, we didn't need anything. They had the diesel shop built by that time.

M: So the diesel shop took the place of the roundhouse?

N: Yes. The roundhouse was mostly for steam engines, equipped for steam and stuff like that. We had done diesel work there for a while until they built the new shop. We had a really good, modern diesel shop.

M: Can you describe what that looked like, inside and out?

N: I don't know the dimensions. We could get three diesels in there, the yard diesels, in a stall. They had pits in them and the pits were pretty good and big; you could walk in but you still had to stoop when you inspected the running gear. About halfway up they had a platform where you could go on top of the engines. Of course, at the upper level you could go right into the engine room.

M: Approximately how high was the building, how tall?

N: About fifty feet, I think, and it must have been about fifty feet wide, and one hundred yards long. In the one side we had an overhead crane; that's when we removed the engines from the frame and then replaced the engines. We used to do a lot of that, complete overhaul of an engine. Then we would have one ready when needed, if something burnt up or broke up in the engine. They would go on this one side and that's

where the heavy repair is; it's called a heavy repair side. Running repair side, that's something I forgot. There were two tracks for running repair and there were two tracks for heavy repair in the diesel shop. They all run parallel from one end to the other. You could come in one end, go straight through in two of the stalls, and the other two stalls were just in heavy repair; you just go in one end and come back out.

M: What is the difference between heavy repair and running repair?

N: Heavy repair is work that takes a long time to do or heavy work. In other words, work that can't be done right away. Running repair is if you have to get them done before the engine goes out. The men call for three o'clock and you may have two hours to get the job done so that it can get dispatched at three o'clock.

M: So running repair is kind of like minor repairs?

N: Yes, that's right. Right behind there was a big storeroom where you got all the parts. Alongside of that was an oil room where all kinds of different oil and greases were kept for the different parts of the locomotive. During the Second World War, oil was kind of scarce and we had a big oil filtering machine in there where we would reuse the oil again. When we drained oil out of the engine we got three or four barrels of oil in an engine; that's one hundred and fifty gallons or better. We would save that and then they would run it through this machine and use it again, put some added stuff in it and use it.

M: Did it perform as well as a new oil?

N: They claimed it did, yes. Chemists used to come down and check it every once in a while to see if it was okay. If it wasn't good oil, when it gets in the crank case it's just like your automobile, if you don't have good oil in it, why, you are going to have a lot of burnt bearings. But the bearing held up pretty good.

M: What kind of lubricants did you have to add to a steam engine?

N: For the steam engines all we had was a regular heavy oil for parts; grease for the main rods and side rods. They had a heavy oil of what we called valve oil. This was put into a lubricator that was run mechanically with the movement of the engine and that would feed drops of oil into the cylinder that operated the pistons and the valves and air pump; it kept them lubricated.

M: What kind of lubricants did you have to add to a diesel engine?

N: Mostly oil, crank case oil.

M: Any other kind?

N: No, mostly crank case oil. Once in a while you would have to look at the governor and see if the governor needed oil. You had a governor that governs the speed. It was operated with oil pressure. If the oil level was way down, the engine would stop.

M: Which engine was more complex, the steam engine or the diesel engine?

N: The diesel engine would be more complex because it had more moving parts. It depended a lot on electrical work too.

M: Which one was more difficult to repair?

N: Diesel.

M: Which one did you prefer to work on?

N: Steam.

M Why?

N: I was born there you might say. Like I said, we had to make the parts and every part was part of you, you might say. You made it and made it fit. Once in a while we might have to repair something, but they had these parts in the storehouse and you would go to the storehouse and get it. If you could repair a part and they didn't have a new one to put in then it would have been all right, but on the steam engines we had to make all of our parts, our bolts, main rods, pins for all our guys, and even what we call gibbs, the slides, the things that slide back and forth on the engine on the cross head. They slide between two guides that keep your pistons straight and if they are not the right thickness on the bottom, they come down too low and you have a steam leak at your piston packing. The packing at one end of it that was supposed to hold steam in, if it leaked you would have hot steam going out in one end.

M: Could you describe the major parts of the steam engine and the method in which it operated?

N: The main thing, I think, of the operating part would be the valves and your cylinder. Your valve operator allowed just enough of the steam in to push the piston and the crank back so your wheel would turn. After you got it to the extreme end--this valve had to be on the other end--it released the steam from one end and let steam in the back end and pushed it the other way. The valve on top is working and when your pistons are going back and forth this other valve is just working slowly enough to get your steam in the back end, push it toward the back, and then by the time it gets to the end it has to start feeding the steam in the back end and push it back. By that time it will release the exhaust in the front and pick up the steam from behind.

M: How big was the steam boiler?

N: They had different sizes; they had some about five feet in diameter and about twenty feet long. There were some bigger and some smaller. That's another job we would have on the steam engines. On top there is a dome with a lot of bolts on it. When the steam was all out of it they had to go in there and crawl down into the boiler; it has cooled down by this time. Sometime if you had a hot job and had to get it done right away, you would have to sweat a little bit. Then there is a valve in there which is operated from the cab. When you pull the throttle in the cab, it would open up this little valve and let the steam through this valve in the dome and that is the steam that operates your cylinders. It's controlled from the cab. If a pin had broken there and they had a leak we had to go down there and repair that and all the connections.

M: What kind of fuel did they use on the steam engines?

N: Coal.

M: Just coal?

N: Yes. Later on, of course, they had the shovel up and then they had the stokers. All the firemen had to do was get the coal down so that it would go in the troughs.

M: What was the difference between the passenger engine and the freight engine?

N: The freight engines were heavier because they had a bigger load to carry and their wheels are smaller for more power. The passenger engines had bigger wheels and had a faster stroke and more trim.

M: As compared to the steam engine, how much more horsepower would a diesel engine produce?

N A lot more, but I forget.

M: I think the diesel engines today produce . . . the largest Erie engines produce about thirty-six hundred horsepower. Do you recall how much a steam engine produced?

N: No, I can't remember.

M: Do you remember any names of the steam engines?

N: B-5's are the small engines, J-18, A-18. If some of these classes had a letter behind them that means they have some kind of extra equipment.

M: If an engine had a prefix, what did that stand for?

N: Different parts that had something added on to an engine that other regular engines didn't have; they had just like a regular B-5S and there was an extra air pump on it or something, a little extra equipment on it. Then he had pony trucks for something; pony trucks are a name of little trucks on the front engine.

M: What's that?

N: We called them pony trucks. There was an extra set of wheels in the front of the engine, in front of the driving wheels. Those two or maybe one, they had a pair of them on each side, that's how they classed engines, by the wheels: two, three, and four.

M: Per side?

N: Yes.

M: What were the pony wheels?

N: The ones that were in the front were the leader.

M: They weren't driving wheels though?

N: No, not exactly; they were more to help the driving wheels carry the load in front.

M: Do you remember any popular names or nicknames for the engines?

N: The one I remember is Fantail, and the white passengers were Highwheelers.

M: Was there ever an engine called The Berkshire?

N: Not that I know of. We had a few engines down there when I first started with names on them. One engineer had had his name on it, Shay, and he would get that engine every day; it was just like his. In other words, he wouldn't work unless he had that one engine and he put his name on it. There were a couple of others but I don't remember the names.

M: Do you remember which companies made the engines, the names of the companies?

N: Baldwin made most of our engines, Baldwin Locomotives. The valve gear were made by two or three different companies, Stevenson, Baker Valve Gear, and then there was another one that I don't remember.

M: How about later when they started with the diesel engines, which companies made those?

N: Alco. Some of them were Alco and some of them were Baldwin, which was probably the same Baldwin Company that used to make the steam locomotives. Then Lima Hamilton made engines too, General Motors diesels.

M: Which type of engine was more dependable, steam engine or a diesel?

N: Well, there are so many parts on a diesel that could go wrong electrically where on a steam engine you could always go out--unless something was really broke--and always get them in.

M: You mean bring them back to the shop?

N: Yes, bring them back to the shop or get them going. The most delicate thing on a steam engine was the air pumps and if something went wrong with an air pump you couldn't do much unless you had maybe a small valve that you could change out on the road. They had an advantage. There were always two diesel engines; if one broke down the other one could always bring it in. The bigger diesel engines had two engines in them. But the steam engine, unless they broke a main rod or wheel or something like that or a tire came off, they usually could get them in.

M: So the steam engines are more durable?

N Yes.

M: Which ones are more efficient?

N: Diesel.

M: Just because they have a larger capacity?

N: Yes, and they are available all of the time. In other words, when you had a steam engine, if you let a steam engine stand you had to have someone to watch it, to keep the water in it and keep the fire going. With a diesel engine you could just set it there like an automobile and forget about it until you need it again.

M: How often did you have to put water in an engine say on a run from Youngstown to Kent? How many different places did they stop to get water?

N: Well, if they left Youngstown and if the tank wasn't too big--it all depends on how big the tank was and the capacity of the tank--you could probably pick up water at Leavittsburg and you can make Kent to get more water there.

M: How about across the division from Meadville to Kent, would they have to stop at all, the larger steam engines?

N: I don't know.

M: How many different sizes of engines did they have and what was the purpose for the different sizes?

N: A lot of the B5's were mostly for switching maybe in a small yard or someplace and a small plant. Truscon Steel used to have these B5's, the small ones, and go in there and switch the cars right in the plant going to Sheet & Tube. Just like now, they are using the small diesel engines at Sheet & Tube. They couldn't put a big one in there; they could but it wouldn't be profitable. There are about three or four different size diesels. The bigger ones they use . . . now what they call 900's. They are using them for switching in the yards now or they used to use these small B5's 1800's.

M: Steam engines?

N: Yes. The Lima Hamilton engines usually are smaller, but they got rid of all of them.

M: Do you remember what they did with the steam engines when they changed from steam to diesel? Did they scrap them or . . .

N: They scrapped them and somebody probably bought one or two for a museum someplace.

M: Did you ever have a favorite engine that you liked to work on?

N: No, not particularly; it made no difference. They all were a challenge.

M: This might be a little difficult with the changing value of money today, but do you think that a steam engine was more costly than a diesel, or the other way around?

N: I can't answer that one.

M: During the war years, the Second World War, did things change differently? Were things different than during normal times for you as a man in the diesel shop?

N: During the Second World War we didn't have diesels.

M: Steam then.

N: We still had steam. We didn't get diesels until, I think, 1948

M: Did you have to work a lot harder?

N: They had more men and I think the government was picking up the biggest part of the check. Some of the work was cost plus and worked a lot for the government, but they are still on Erie Railroad.

M: Were there ever any security checks on engines?

N: No. There might have been security checks on freight trains when they went out there to make sure that the equipment was all right and not sabotaged or anything like that. As far as the engine was concerned, I never saw anybody around.

M: Do you remember some of the men that you used to work with in the 1930's and 1940's?

N: I remember Nick DeNishio, Nellie Osburn, Joe Vitalie, Nick Deramo, Jack Dillon, Joby, J. Lambert, A DePiero, R. Nagle, H. Bier, L. Kimm, V. Clayton, it takes time to think them out but there were a lot of them.

M: I suppose you weren't working constantly during the day; I suppose you had a few breaks here and there?

N Yes. The railroad is like that; there is no use trying to deny it; you get your breaks.

M: What did you do in your idle time while you were around the shop?

N: Not too much. Some of the fellows found ways to keep them busy . . . doing nothing, but heck, you get your job done and you're waiting for another assignment; you have a little time.

M: Did you ever have to leave the shop and go out on the road someplace, travel to an engine to repair?

N: Yes.

M: What did you have to take with you?

N: It all depended on what the trouble was. We took as many tools as we thought we needed, but if it was a big job then you have to . . . like if the wheels were burning or a trailer brasses that were burnt or something, then you would have to take jacks, but most of the time you just had enough to go out there. A lot of time we went out mostly for trailer brasses or journal box brasses. On journal box you didn't have to jack the engine up but you had to get underneath the engine out on the road and it was a hard job trying to get underneath because they didn't have a pit. You would have to squeeze down there and get the old brass out and try to get the grease cake in. Most of them had grease cakes in them. We would get all of the old stuff out and put a new one in and try to get it in the shop without it getting hot again. It was the same way on the trailer brasses. If the journal wasn't scorched you would be all right, but if the journal was scorched some, you would have to smooth all of the rough spots off of the journal, put a new brass in there, put enough grease in there, and pack it enough to stay like that. If it got hot again it would melt all the babbitts off of the brass.

M: What is babbitt?

N: It is something like lead. It is the soft metal that is underneath the brass that is supposed to keep your wheel nice and smooth and running. If your wheel got hot, your journal got hot, and it would melt the grease cake and it would run down both sides of the . . . into the packing underneath. It would start to get hot and the first thing you knew, you would have a fire there.

M: Did you ever have to work on engines from another railroad?

N: The only place where I had done that was when I was up in Cleveland. I worked mostly on nickel plate engines.

M: Were they any different from Erie engines?

N: Not much.

M: If there was one thing or a few things that you could change that you think would make things more efficient or make your job easier or better, do you know of any that you would like to see made?

N: At the time, no. You were assigned a certain job and it was up to you to get it done and do the best that you can on it, that's all. If you need help, why, just go to the foreman. Ask him for help and you would always get it.

M: Were the foremen men from the union who were promoted?

N: No, the foremen weren't union men at the time, but I think later on in the latter years that I worked they were allowed to join a union. They weren't allowed to join; I think the company wasn't allowing them to join.

M: Was your boss a man who had just worked on the railroad and had been promoted through various jobs until he reached a foreman's position, or was he a man who maybe had gone through a special trade school to learn?

N: They must have had some type of training, but most of the fellows that come as foreman down here come from a different shop. Like Lou Holland, he came down from Kent. Now his son is foreman down here. Then Joe Elles, he came from Meadville; Harvey Cary came from Meadville. We had a fellow from Hornell come here and another from Marion. So usually it is very seldom that they get a man from the local shop to be a foreman. I don't know why. Maybe it is because they know everybody closely and are good friends with everybody and it's pretty hard having a friend giving nasty jobs.

M: Did you ever get bawled out for something you did wrong?

N: Yes. When I was inspecting, sometimes you might miss something. Then the engine goes out and they have a failure and it can't complete its run or something like that. Then they call you in and want to know why you missed it. They know why, you didn't see it. You have to make a statement and say you'll look a little closer in the future and try to do better.

M: Try not to be human in the future. Do you remember your most embarrassing moment, your biggest mistake you made?

N: I'm sure I had them, but I don't remember what they are now.

M: Did you have to spend time away from your family or were you home every night?

N: Mostly home every night unless we got a call on a break-down and we would have to go out and maybe wouldn't come back for two or three hours. But they would always leave word and have someone call home and say that you were going to be a little late or something. Sometimes you got a chance for overtime if you liked working double or over like they called it. The trick following you is short a man or two men and they need somebody. If it is your turn to work and you want to work, you want to double over, then you double over. You start at seven and quit at eleven at night, a sixteen hour term.

M: Did you do that very often?

N: Not very often. I've done my share of it to help out. Sometimes if they couldn't get anybody, I'd help out rather than see them stuck.

M: Was there a most memorable incident that ever occurred to you? Was there something like a major accident or something of that sort that really sticks in your mind?

N: The major accident was during the Second World War, I think, when they were running passenger trains up to the arsenal from Youngstown. One of them was going up there and it was pretty foggy and a big freight train with engine 3400, I think, on it ran square into this train. It was a miracle nobody got killed. There were a few hurt, but nobody got killed. In some of those coaches, the rail went through the coach and just cleaned every seat right out of it. There was not a seat left in two or three of those coaches.

M: But nobody was hurt?

N: Nobody was hurt badly. That's what I heard. We got the engine down to the shop and it was almost a total wreck. A great, big locomotive like that, a 3400, was one of the biggest engines we had.

M: Did you ever have the chance or the opportunity to go to another railroad and look over their diesel shop or exchange ideas with men who worked in the other shops?

N: No.

M: Do you feel there was another job that you might have liked to have done on the railroad besides the one that you did, or were you happy with what you were doing?

N: You always think the grass is greener on the other side, but I don't think so. I was satisfied. I made a good living down there and it kept my family going. I didn't make a lot of money, but it kept a roof over our heads and bread on the table.

M: Did you prefer working in the 1930's and 1940's compared to the 1960's or do you think it was easier to work in the 1930's and 1940's?

N: No, it's about the same.

M: As far as the attitude on the railroad is concerned?

N: The attitude got a little stronger in the later years. They demanded a little more. But you didn't have to give them any more than you thought you could. They couldn't get anymore out of you anyway if you didn't want to do it.

M: As far as you're concerned, did the railroad change drastically over the years or was it more of a gradual change?

N: It was a gradual change. Every time you got a new supervisor, of course, they wanted to make a better showing on them. If they got a new president, everyone wanted to make a better showing. It kind of died, but then it went back to the same thing.

We had other little shops like Leavittsburg, Niles, Ferrond, Pennsylvania, and New Castle. New Castle is [illegible] out now, and Niles is about done and so is Leavittsburg. I don't know about others. There were mechanics up there and I got a chance to go up there and be foreman once in a while. So I got my share. Of course, we didn't have any men, you only had yourself. But you were classified as a foreman.

M: Was Brier Hill shop one of the larger shops of the railroad?

N: No. It is now, but at that time it wasn't. It was just a regular shop. Meadville was bigger and Kent used to be bigger. Kent is not there anymore. Kent is wiped out altogether; there is nothing up there at all. Now Marion and Hornell are the two biggest shops.

M: Were the shops eliminated because they changed to diesels?

N: Right. The steam engines may have required more attention than the diesels. Like I said, you can take a diesel, set it someplace and leave it there, whereas a steam engine has to have constant care almost. You have to keep the water up and keep the fire going and you can't leave it for too long. With the diesel engines, you can leave them and go back a week later and start them up if the battery is not dead.

M: What have you done since you have retired?

N: I think I've worked harder since I've retired. I should go back to work and rest. I have enjoyed my retirement. I belong to a lodge, The Knights of Malta. Did you ever hear of that?

M: I've heard of Malta and Knights, but not the two together.

N: Knights of Malta originated in 1048 by about six or seven monks to take care of the sick; it has been going on ever since then.

M: What do you do today in the organization?

N: We don't take care of the sick but we visit the sick or help out wherever we can and try to keep it together. It used to be all over the world. At one time they had a navy and army; they were the military crusaders They started out with the Knights of St. John's of Jerusalem, then went to Rhoades and now it's Knights of Malta. There were more names in between there. The Knights of Malta got their name when they had the island of Malta. It was given to them by Charles V. from Germany in 1530. He gave them the island and they stayed on it for a long time until it was taken away from them in 1798 by Napoleon.

M: So you visit local hospitals today?

N: Yes.

M: Are you a member of any other organizations?

N: No. Well, there's Erie Veteran and Chatterbox and a couple of little ones like that. I'm actually not a lodge man, but for some reason I got into this thing and now I'm the head of the Ohio delegation of the Knights of Malta, the grand commander of Ohio.

M: You're the grand commander? I take it then that it is a national organization?

N: It used to be worldwide. Headquarters were in Glasgow, Scotland. It used to be all over the world at one time, but now we are down to about four states. It is mostly a religious outfit.

M: How many kids do you have?

N: Three; two boys and a girl. My one boy passed away when he was twenty-nine years old. He worked for the Erie too. He was a fireman.

M: How about your other son, is he a railroader too?

N: No, he is a production engineer. He started out with General Motors, but now he's in Detroit with a sales outfit, the Edwards Company.

M: Was there a history of railroaders in your family or were you the first?

N: I was the first.

M: How about your brothers, did any of them get involved in the railroad?

N: No. I have two brothers. One is a body man and the other one was a structural ironworker.

M: Is there anything else you would like to add? I have run out of questions.

N: That's about it.

M: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW