YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Crucible Steel Project

Personal Experience

O. H. 1151

FRED TWYFORD

Interviewed

by

Mark Twyford

on

November 12,1987

FRED TWYFORD

Fred Twyford was born on December 17, 1932, the son of Curtis and Grace Twyford, in East Liverpool, Ohio. He attended East Liverpool High School for three years before leaving to go to work at the Homer Laughlin China Company in 1952.

After being laid off from Homer Laughlin in August of 1952, Twyford enlisted in the United States Army. He served in the army until August of 1955 when he was honorably discharged with the rank of corporal.

In May of 1956 Twyford went to work at the Crucible Steel Company in Midland, Pennsylvania, where he worked until 1960 when he was laid off.

In February of 1961 Twyford reenlisted in the army and served until February of 1964. Upon leaving the Army for the second time Twyford was rehired at Crucible Steel, where he worked until the mill closed in May of 1983.

Fred and his wife, Janice, have one child and reside in East Liverpool. He is currently employed by the East Liverpool School System as a crossing guard.

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INTERVIEWEE: FRED TWYFORD

INTERVIEWER: Mark Twyford

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

DATE: November 12, 1987

MT: This is an interview with Fred Twyford for the Youngs town State Oral History Program, on the Crucible Steel Project, by Mark Twyford, in East Liverpool, on November 12, 1987, at 10:00 a.m.

Mr. Twyford, I see by your biography sheet that you were born during the height of the Great Depression. What memories do you have of your early childhood?

FT: Not very much. I'll be fifty-five in December. I grew up in East Liverpool. I went to Washington grade school, then three years down at the Liverpool High School. Then, I went in the service. We used to play all over Lisbon Street.

MT: You grew up down by the Lisbon street area?

FT: Yes, I did. We had a good bunch of kids and every thing. We generally played in our own neighborhood.

MT: What was your mother and father's name?

FT: My father's name was Curtis Twyford, and my mother's name was Grace Twyford.

MT: They were both from East Liverpool also?

FT: Yes.

MT: You went to the Washington School?

FT: It was the old Washington School building. It is an apartment building now. They closed all the grade schools and made junior high schools in Liverpool.

MT: When your were in grade school, what did you like best about school, or high school?

FT: Getting out.

MT: There wasn't a favorite subject you had?

FT: I liked arithmetic and reading.

MT: What did you like least about school?

FT: History.

MT: History.

FT: I didn't like history or English.

MT: In between the time you left high school and the time you started at Crucible, did you have any other jobs?

FT: Well, I went in the service in 1952 and got out in 1955. Then, I went over to Homer Laughlin after the service and worked to December of 1955, and then the mill called me May 1, 1956. I put twenty-seven years in up at the mill.

MT: What was your job at Homer Laughlin?

FT: I was a ware boy. There were four of us. We took care of thirty women.

MT: What kind of money did you make at Homer Laughlin?

FT: No, it wasn't that good for the work you put in.

MT: So, you had an application in at the mill, and then they eventually called you?

FT: Yes, I did.

MT: What was it that made you look to Crucible for employ ment? Was it the high wages?

FT: The high wages and the steady employment.

MT: Did you have relatives that worked there?

FT: I had a couple uncles.

MT: Did that play a roll in you getting the job there?

What was the hiring process like?

FT: You went through the employment office. It wasn't that bad getting in if they had the openings. When I started, we had 6800 men. Then, when I left the mill we had about 2500. When I started in transportation, we had 212 to 215 men. They had an extra board with seven men. If somebody reported off, you would come in and work their job. I worked the extra board for almost seven years. In 1959 they had the big lay-off, and I was laid-off for almost two years. In the meantime I worked at Bloor's pharmacy for little over a year delivering prescriptions.

MT: Then, you went back in the service?

FT: That was February of 1961. I went back in the service and got discharged in 1964. Then when I went back to the mill, the mill was working real good. I worked from 1964 to 1982 when they shut the mill down.

MT: Do you remember what led to the big lay-off in 1959.

FT: There was a steel strike that lasted for a hundred and some days.

MT: That was at Crucible?

FT: Crucible.

MT: Did you belong to the union at that time?

FT: Yes.

MT: Did you take part in the strike? Did you picket?

FT: No, we didn't have any pickets.

MT: When it was settled, was it to the satisfaction of the workers?

FT: Well, when they settled it, I was in the service.

MT: When you first started out at Crucible, you were a brakeman?

FT: Well, my first two days I worked a track gang. You had to work the track for the first two days, and then they put you on the extra board.

MT: What exactly is a track gang?

FT: A track gang laid tracks rail, put racks on, and stuff like that.

MT: That was a hard job? Is that why they had you start out at that?

FT: No, that is the way they had everything set up. You worked two days as a track man.

MT: Do you remember what kind of money you were making there your first year there? Your average weekly pay?

FT: About $275, $300 every two weeks.

MT: How did that compare to what you were making at Homer Laughlin?

FT: Oh, probably $100 dollars more.

MT: Was the work a lot harder at Crucible or was it easier?

FT: Some days it was hard work, and some days it wasn't.

MT: How long did you have to be there before you were in the union?

FT: I think it was sixty days, and then you started paying your dues.

MT: Could you explain the extra board a little bit more? They put you wherever there was an opening?

FT: Like if the open hearth needed a man, you would work that job. If they had another job open up from 3:00 to 11:00 and if they couldn't get none from the extra board, they could double you out on that job. Mostly, the guys would be home. They would give you a two hour call, either before the turn or after the turn.

MT: So, you had to make sure you were home within the two hour period.

FT: Right.

MT: During this early period you didn't have any say over what you worked or where you worked?

FT: No.

MT: After you advanced past the extra board, what was your first permanent job?

FT: Well, my first permanent job was brakeing. The extra board was brakeing, too.

MT: Did you perform any other jobs off the extra board?

FT: No, just brakeing.

MT: What exactly is brakeing?

FT: Well, you have a conductor who is in charge of your crew, you have an engineer that runs the engine, and you have two brakemen. The conductor is responsible for the crew. We make up trains. We made up buggies for scrap for the open hearth and electric furnace.

MT: Does that mean that you filled them or you hooked them together?

FT: We hooked them together. First we had pin and knuck les, and then we went in to the coupling type buggies.

MT: That was easier?

FT: That was a lot easier.

MT: Have you performed any other jobs other than the brak ing and track gang?

FT: I was the hook on for the crane for a little while. That was taking the crane from the car dumper back to the yard office to put on buggies that had gone on the ground and unload the cars, pig iron and stuff like that.

MT: I think you mentioned earlier that you eventually became a conductor? You eventually did that too.

FT: Yes, I was a conductor for my last five years in the mill.

MT: So, you were in charge of the brakeman?

FT: Right.

MT: Of all the jobs that we talked about that you performed at the mill, which of them did you prefer the most?

FT: Do you mean which place?

MT: Yes.

FT: I liked the electric furnace and the open hearth. You would make up your heats, take them up the hill, and charge them charge the machine. He would charge the scrap, and then you would go back and get the empty buggies and put them back in the scrap yard.

MT: What job did you find the hardest?

FT: I would say track gang. When I first started you would do the digging to lay your ties and everything. When I

left the mill, they had a backhoe that could do the work of about twenty men and for way less time.

MT: Did the wage you received depend on the job you were performing? Like did a track member make different money then. . .

FT: Yes. I think track gang was job class A, brakeing was ten, and conductor was thirteen. Then, you had your shift differential in later years.

MT: You mean, more for afternoon and even more for night turn?

FT: You made $.15 more for second, and I think $.30 more for 11:00 to 7:00.

MT: You joined the union after sixty days of working there. Did the union have any say in what job you performed? Could you go to the union and say you wanted another job? Could they get it for you?

FT: Only if they had another job open. You could put a transfer in, but the union couldn't place you. That was up to the departments in the mill.

MT: Did the union play a roll in that, or just the depart ments?

FT: Mostly your departments. If a job opened up in the cold strip and you had the seniority over somebody else, you could put your bid in for it. That is no sign that they would be giving it to you.

MT: Was there politics involved in things?

FT: Not that I know of.

MT: Some jobs were obviously more dangerous then others, were serious injuries common at Crucible?

FT: Yes, I was in the mill for twenty-seven years, and we had one guy that got killed down at the electric furnace. A car rolled back, and he got caught in between two cars. Then right before I started, an ingot rolled on a guy down at the electric furnace and smashed him. Those are the only two deaths I know of.

MT: What about people being injured, was that common?

FT: It was common.

MT: Were you ever injured while you were at work?

FT: I was going to pick up bloom butts, which is cut off

pieces of scrap from ingots and my foot got caught in a piece of wire and it threw me up against a car. I had two black eyes over that.

MT: They compensated you for that?

FT: Yes, they did.

MT: Did you feel it was fair?

FT: Yes.

MT: Did they compensate most people fairly, do you think?

FT: Sometimes, sometimes not.

MT: Did the union play a role in that?

FT: Yes, they did.

MT: During the time you were at Crucible, did safety measures improve?

FT: No, I think safety measures got worse.

MT: In what way?

FT: We had Ocea, and Ocea I think was working with the company.

MT: What is Ocea?

FT: Ocea is a corporation that was supposed to be for safety, but they were against the men. Everytime we turned something in, it would never be finished. If the craneman would turn something in saying his crane was unsafe, they wouldn't do anything until somebody got hurt on the crane.

MT: Ocea wasn't there when you first started?

FT: No.

MT: They came in later?

FT: They came in later years.

MT: Who was responsible for safety before they were? Just the mill itself?

FT: The mill itself. We had a safety man, but some of them were good, some of them were lousy, and some of them went along with the company.

MT: Aside from people being injured, what other if any

health hazards were common at the mill? What plagued the mill workers? There was a lot of smoke involved.

FT: Oh, there was smoke involved, there were cars not loaded right, cars jumping the track.

MT: Could you describe what a typical day was like for you at the mill beginning with when you left in the morning and ending with when you would come home at night.

FT: I would leave home 5:15 a.m. and start work at about 6:45 a.m. or 7:00 a.m. I would go out and work for an hour and a half or two hours, come in and have our coffee and sandwich, go back out and work until 12:00 or 12:30, come back in and eat dinner, go back to work and finish up at 2:00, then we would punch out at 2:45. I would go home and do my work at the house.

MT: I know you are supposed to work from 7:00 to 3:00. they didn't care really care if you came in a little early and left a little early?

FT: No, they didn't tell you what time to leave. Once you have a regular job that is when I would be leaving the house at 5:15. Our gates opened up at 5:45, and we would go in, get a coffee. Then, whenever the yard master came and asked us for a switch, we would be out there doing it.

MT: Excluding the money you received, you weekly wage, what other benefits did you received from the company?

FT: Well, in about the last six or seven years we got dental and then we got eye care, and then we had hospitalization and everything.

MT: Were the benefits good that they had?

FT: I think they were.

MT: Did you get any other type of benefits?

FT: No, that was it.

MT: What about vacations?

FT: Vacations were good. At ten years you picked up three weeks. In later years they started giving thirteen weeks.

MT: How long did you have to be there to get that?

FT: Twenty years I think it was.

MT: After ten years you got how many weeks?

FT: Three weeks, then you could pick up five weeks up to twenty-five years.

MT: What was the workers attitude in general towards management?

FT: Some management was good and some was lousy.

MT: It depended on the individual then?

FT: Most generally.

MT: What they called the white hats, was that the management?

FT: Yes, they were white hats.

MT: How did you get to be a white hat?

FT: It is the company. If they wanted to promote you, they would promote you. They would ask you first.

MT: Did you ever have the opportunity to. . .

FT: No, sir. I wouldn't take it.

MT: They received a higher wage though?

FT: No, like a yard master, he would pull in conductors's wages plus $.50 an hour more.

MT: They weren't in the union, right?

FT: Well, if a guy went from off the board, conductor, or brakeing, he would still be in the union,but he wouldn't be a white hat. He would just be filling in for, for example, a yard master until they picked up one.

MT: So, there was some politics involved in who they wanted to be white hats.

FT: Right.

MT: That would be the hierarchy at the mill that would select them? The union played no role in that?

FT: No, the union didn't have anything to do with that.

MT: Do you feel that the union consistently acted in the best interest of the workers?

FT: Most of the time.

MT: Did they do anything. . .You say this Ocea came in and

safety conditions declined. Did the union try and do anything about that?

FT: The union would come in with there safetyman. They would get there heads together, and nothing would be said about it until something happened again.

MT: So, the union wasn't able to achieve much in that area.

FT: No.

MT: Your wages went up consistently throughout your career there?

FT: Yes. We got our contracts and everything settled.

MT: What were the big points of the contracts? What was the union able to achieve? They got your Ohio wage, what else?

FT: We got our Ohio wage, then we got our benefits. Then, they started to get a little bit better pensions.

MT: What about. . .Did they have anything to do with breaks during the day?

FT: No.

MT: Overall, you feel that they acted in your best inter est. Now, when the mill closed in 1982, did your opin ion of how the union operated change?

FT: Yes, it did.

MT: Did you feel. . .

FT: Because later on other mills were bought by the men as Essops, and they did not notify us that the mill was going to shut down. If they did, I think the workers would have applied to Essops to buy the mill and run it themselves. Nothing was said about it.

MT: Nothing was said that it was going to close down, or nothing was mentioned about Essop?

FT: They said something about a month before the mill, which men didn't have enough time to even. . .Well, we didn't know about Essop. Weirton's working real good since the men bought the mill out.

MT: What proposals were made, do you remember? Another steel company was going to come in?

FT: Well, I was done when the other steel mill took over. I was drawing unemployment. When LVT came in and took

over the mill, we never even heard of them.

MT: Wasn't there a Cyclops that was going to come in? Isn't that right?

FT: Yes, but the company wouldn't talk to them.

MT: The company wouldn't?

FT: The company wouldn't talk to them, or else Cyclops. . .They had a mill up in Pennsylvania someplace which was just barely working. With Colt everything was modern, and they could have made a run at it.

MT: Why wouldn't the company talk to them?

FT: Nobody knows.

MT: Did you feel that the union didn't advise the workers properly toward the end?

FT: That's right.

MT: Is that feeling shared by the workers?

FT: By most of the people that worked in the mill.

MT: When you look back now, what changes would you have made at the mill if you had the power to make changes?

FT: I would have made changes in the white hats.

MT: How would you have changes that?

FT: When I first started, we had one boss for every twenty men. When I left the mill, there were more bosses running around that didn't have anything to do than workers.

MT: So, you would have cut down the number of white hats.

FT: Right.

MT: When you first started, did the white hats do their job? Were you pleased with them then?

FT: Yes, the bosses did their job. They didn't harass you like they did in the last three or four years.

MT: In what ways would they harass you?

FT: Oh, if you weren't ready to be right there on the job, they would want to turn you in to the union to get your discipline action and time off. The union went along with the men because most of the time the men were

ready to go.

MT: Any other changes? You would have had another set of safety standards.

FT: They made a couple of remote control engines, which the one man carried the box and operate the engine. Then, you would have one break. Say, if the rail was wet, the engine would slide all over the place. If the box got wet, the engine could be out of control. We almost lost one one day.

MT: How would you improve that?

FT: I would have had the control taken off and put the engineer back on the engine. The engineer could stop the engine a lot better.

MT: You mentioned when you started the track gang, the people on the track gang dug the holes. Later on they got a backhoe to do the job, is that right?

FT: Right.

MT: That reduced the number of men they needed to do the job, right?

FT: Right.

MT: Were there a lot of technical improvement that forced a reduction on the number of men employed?

FT: No. When I started we had four crews with about twen ty-five or thirty men on the crew. When I left, we had about ten men working of one crew, and they were work-ing all over the mill.

MT: So, from the time when you started to the time when you quit your job didn't really change a whole lot.

FT: No.

MT: You said the mill closed in 1982?

FT: That was my last day of work, April 24 of 1982.

MT: When were you officially retired?

FT: May 1, 1983 I took my pension. In between I was on unemployment.

MT: You said you had twenty-seven years at the mill, right?

FT: Yes, right to the day.

MT: If you started in 1956, do they include the time you were in the service?

FT: Yes, they did. The three years from 1961 to 1964 my service continued on.

MT: When you were in the service, did you serve in the United States? Where were you stationed?

FT: I went to fifty-two, I went to Atlanta, Georgia, and went to school for a body men. Then, I went to Germany for thirty months. In Germany I painted vehicles and everything.

MT: Is that what a body man does?

FT: If we had fenders or a tore up jeep, we would just replace them. We would paint tanks, three quarter ton, and half tracks and jeeps.

MT: Where were you stationed in Germany?

FT: I was in K-town , my last base, but I was all over Germany.

MT: When you left the Army for the first time, you were a Corporal, right?

FT: Right.

MT: When you went back in the second time, did you retain that same rank?

FT: No, I went back in as a private, but I picked up PFC in about nine months from prior service.

MT: So, they didn't allow you to carry that forward?

FT: No, but I carried my years on for longevity pay.

MT: Was your job the same when you went back in the second time?

FT: The second time I was on the chemical school. I took basic at Fort Knox, Kentucky because I had to take it over. Then, I went to chemical school down in Fort Mcclellan, Alabama.

MT: What was chemical school like?

FT: Oh, you had different gases and everything. We had schools down there, smoke generator and smoke. We would put students coming in, which was for eight weeks, and they would take these classes and go to other schools themselves.

MT: What was the purpose of chemical schools?

FT: Chemical warfare was what it was.

MT: So, you were involved with the handling of these?

FT: No, just the school. We had people that were in charge of that that were with it a lot longer than I was.

MT: Did you go over seas again then?

FT: Yes, I put eighteen months in the states, then I went over to Okinawa, Japan. Then, I went over to Thailand for 165 days, came back and finished up on Okinawa, and got discharged in February of 1964.

MT: Were you involved with the chemicals the whole time? What was your job in Okinawa and Thailand?

FT: No, we would put. . .We had different classes that we would perform there. Most of the time I drove a jeep or three quarter ton.

MT: You became a body man the first time and then you were involved with the chemical school the second time, did you get to select those?

FT: No, they just put me in it.

MT: It seems silly that they wouldn't make you a body man again?

FT: Yes, it does.

MT: Did you enjoy your time there?

FT: Yes, I liked the Army.

MT: Why didn't you think about making that a career?

FT: Oh, because the mill started up about two or three months after I went in the service the second time, and I was stuck for three years in the service.

MT: There was no way you could get out back then?

FT: No.

MT: When you went in the first time, was the Korean War over yet?

FT: It hadn't started yet. I went in 1952 and I think the Korean War started in 1953.

MT: You were in there until 1955?

FT: Right.

MT: You didn't have to go work. . .

FT: No, I was in Germany. A lot of guys were trying to transfer to Korea to cut down their Tour of Duty overseas. We had quite a few guys that were in Germany that got their chance to go to Korea, but I stayed in Germany.

MT: How much could you get your tour cut down?

FT: I think it was thirteen months overseas then.

MT: The second time you went in, they were sending troops to Vietnam, weren't they?

FT: The Vietnam War started in 1965, and I was out when it started.

MT: So, you got lucky enough to miss both those.

FT: Both of them.

MT: Another question that comes to mind is, did you perform most of your work outside when you worked at Crucible?

FT: Yes, most of it was outside.

MT: You had to perform your work in all kinds of weather?

FT: Right.

MT: I imagine that was pretty hard some days.

FT: Some days you had to go through the snow. Then, you had rainy days. Then, the union got together with the departments, and we finally got boots and rain gear after about fifty years in the mill. They finally got the men something sensible to work in, you didn't have to pay for it.

MT: Before that time you either had to supply your own, or just. . .

FT: Go out in what you had.

MT: You had to work in almost all weather, nothing prevented your work?

FT: No.

MT: One year, I can't remember when it was, but they had a

really big snow. Did that halt operations in the mill?

FT: That was 1950, which I wasn't up there, but it did slow the mill down almost to a standstill.

MT: When you look back at things, did you have an idea that the mill was going downhill?

FT: No, I didn't.

MT: It was all pretty much a surprise to you how things happened.

FT: It surprised all the men.

MT: Who do you think is to blame for that?

FT: I think it was the company mostly, because the govern ment gave them a big write-off. With the Chapter 13 they filed for bankruptcy, and they closed up.

MT: Do you think the federal government could have done more to. . .

FT: Yes, they could have.

MT: For the steel industry in general, or just Crucible?

FT: All steel mills they could have helped. The EPA came in and the companies that weren't doing to good, they started putting regulations this on it or that on it. The companies weren't making money from pouring steel. The companies just had to go one way or another, and most of them went bankrupt.

MT: When the mill closed and J&L eventually came in, you said the Cyclops offer wasn't really considered. Was there ever an opportunity for you to keep you jobs, or to take lesser wages?

FT: No.

MT: You never even had a choice of what to do?

FT: No.

MT: Well, I think we have covered all the jobs you've done and the conditions you worked under. Is there anything else involved with Crucible that we haven't covered on that you can think of that might be important to oth-ers?

FT: Yes, don't get in the steel mill because the steel mills are done.

MT: You don't think there is any hope for it?

FT: No, not with the federal government. They are shutting the mills down and imports.

MT: Okay, I really appreciate you taking the time to speak with us. Are there any other people that you can think of that would be useful to talk with? Maybe people that worked in different departments?

FT: Yes, I know a couple.

MT: Could you give me their names?

FT: Charles Nortrup, Bob Edgel.

MT: Do you know what department they were with?

FT: Bob Edgel worked in transportation, and Chuck Nortrup worked in the Bar yard.

MT: Do you know of any white hats?

FT: There is Jack Peas, he was in charge of the track gangs.

MT: He was one of the white hats that you aren't opposed to?

FT: No, Jack was Okay.

MT: How about any union leaders?

FT: Well, we had a man that was president of the union that is back in there now. He worked in transportation which is Ron Friess.

MT: Is he still up there now?

FT: Yes, he is president of the union.

MT: Is he a friend of yours?

FT: We thought he was.

MT: On the whole the men who are laid-off aren't pleased with him now?

FT: No.

MT: Okay, I appreciate you taking the time to talk with us. Thanks very much.

FT: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW