

Interview with Orville Rogerson

Interviewer: Gordon L. Swartz III

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**RAILROAD HISTORY
ON THE LINE**

INTERVIEW WITH MR. ORVILLE ROGERSON

Gordon Swartz: First of all, tell me your name and today's date.

Orville Rogerson: Today's date?

GS: Yeah. Just hold that up closer.

OR: What is today's date? About the twenty-fifth?

GS: Twenty-third.

OR: Twenty-third.

GS: Kind of hold that up close to your mouth there, or else I'll hold it if you want me to. Just make sure its on. It's fine.

OR: My name is Orville Rogerson. This is October 23, 1995.

GS: I'll tell you. If you want to start, even give some personal background, about yourself, before you even started the railroad. We'd like that.

OR: Well, I think we ought to maybe talk this over a little bit.

GS: Now we are beginning, I have the microphone on.

29 **OR:** Well, I was born in 1917 in Wheeling, West Virginia, Twenty-ninth Street. I went through Webster Grade School, Wheeling High School. I worked at several other jobs before I went to work on the railroad in March 19, 1942. The railroads were a lot different then than they are now. The work was a lot harder. Of course, we didn't know any better. I remember we had to spend time learning different things around Benwood, tending switches, learning the different switches, learning the loop switches, and so on in Benwood Yard. I remember I worked two weeks for free, learning the work. You couldn't think of that these days.

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GS: No. Did you just go in there and say, just start working, or.

OR: Well, I was looking for a job, and I was driving down through Benwood, right at the firehouse at Benwood, and my brother-in-law was standing there. I had an old 1931 Chevy, and I picked him up to take him home. He worked on the railroad. He says, "Where you been?" I said, "Looking for a job again." You know, jobs them days last about six months, then you get laid off, and you look for another job. "Well," he says, "they're hiring on the railroad. Turn around, I'll take you back up." So, we went back, and I got hired, and the next two weeks I spent learning what work I could, and they finally put me to work on pay, which was \$7.40 a day in the yard and \$6.90 a day on a road, but, at that time, about all the other jobs I worked made about \$15, \$18 a week.

57 **GS:** What other jobs did you work?

OR: Well, I worked out at () in East Wheeling as an order clerk and helper on a truck. I worked for the Jewel Tea Company making up orders for their trucks, and I worked for the United Dairy, night turn. Finally I got a regular route, but I got moved out of there, too, and, let's see, I worked for W. H. Michener. A lot of people up there don't even remember him I imagine. He was a produce, wholesale produce man. I got bawled out for whistling on that job.

GS: Just too happy, huh?

OR: Yeah. So we moved around quite a bit, but finally I got on the railroad, and I worked there thirty-five and a half years.

71 **GS:** So you would have been in your late twenties by then, by the time you got on there.

OR: I think I was about twenty-five.

GS: Twenty-five.

OR: When I went on the railroad. Railroading sounds tough, and I guess it was, but I made a good living at it. I raised three girls and built this house.

GS: Were you married when you started at the railroad?

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OR: Yeah. Yeah.

GS: Still married to the same woman?

OR: Still married to the same woman.

GS: Okay.

76 **OR:** We fight about every day, but , oh, do you want some stories about the work around?

GS: Yes, sir, yeah. You could tell us about, tell me about that training period that you went through. What did they have you doing there?

OR: Well, you had to learn to line up the switches for incoming trains and outbound trains and so on. I can remember during the Second World War. There was trains coming and going all the time, and you worked sixteen hours and off eight hours and be right back out for sixteen more till you wore out.

GS: Mostly troop trains then, probably?

OR: Troop trains coming through and, oh, tanks and everything, you know, on flat cars, and armed guards on them. You name it, and it was there, and they hired all kind of men during the war. Most of the good men was in the army, you know. I remember one fellow. I was running a midnight turn, and, at that time, the tracks in Benwood Yard, some of them were so close together you couldn't walk between them when they had cars on all the tracks, you know. You had to work from on top of the cars. Now you're not even allowed up there, you know, and I remember there was an old fellow come in from Glen Easton to work extra, and I caught him one turn midnight. I'll never forget that night as long as I live. He must have been sixty-five years old then, and, of course, you had to get up on top of the cars to relay signals, you know.

102 **GS:** How did you, did you use lights for that?

OR: Oh, yeah, you had to work with a lantern, you know, but, at the time, it was electric light, so, but I did work with oil lights when I started, but this old fellow would get up on the top of the cars, you know, and, like, I'd be way down in the yard there on a string of cars, you know, and he'd be back up close to the engine. I'd let him work the head brakeman job. That'd be close to the engine. He'd follow

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the engine all the time, and I'll never forget. He give the engineer a signal to move, and, as soon as the engineer'd start to move, he'd be down on his hands and knees holding on to the catwalk, afraid he was going to fall off. Then you'd have to go up and get him and get him back down, and you couldn't hardly work with him, you know. We had an awful night.

GS: Did he last very long?

112 **OR:** No, he didn't, but he would come in. They let him work regular midnight. He could get a ride in from Glen Easton. He didn't have a car, and he would come in in the afternoon and sleep on that floor in the brakeman's shanty until the midnight turn went to work. He must have needed the money that bad, you know, that he had to work..

GS: Sounds like he was scared to death though, right?

OR: Yeah, and I can tell you another little thing that happened to me when I was tending what they call the crossover switches. They had a few passenger trains then, and this one particular train, I think it was thirty-eight, would come down from Wheeling and go around the loop at Benwood. Have you ever seen that? Well, it might be torn up now. I don't know. I haven't been up there for a good while, but they would come down from Wheeling, go around the loop and up on a hill and over the bridge to Ohio, to go out through Ohio.

125 **GS:** I know the area you're talking about.

OR: Well, there was a crossover switch tender, that was me at that time, to go up and line up the switches at the other end of the loop to let that train around, you know. The regular main track ran right straight through Benwood, but, when this train come to go over in Ohio, you run him around that loop so he could get up the hill and go around the bridge. So, I'd been up and let him around the bridge, and he went around down to Benwood station and on over, and it was my job to line the switches back and go up and get the mail off of that train and take it down to the Benwood Yard office. So, I got the mail and was carrying it down to the Benwood Yard office, and there was a yard engine switching. Of course, all steam engines then, you know, and, I didn't know it at the time, but this fireman had a big long hook. Oh, it's as long as from here over to the corner, say, fifteen feet, and they would use that when they would get like clinkers in their fire, when their fire was getting bad shape, they'd rake their fire around with that. Well, that thing would get red hot on the end, you know, from raking them coals around in there, and just as I walked by that engine that fireman flopped that hook out between the

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gangplank and the water tank and the engine, and that red hot thing went right by my face, and I could feel the heat from it when it went by, you know. Oh, it would've blinded me, maybe killed me, if that had hit me, but it missed me, but, buddy, that scared me. But there was just lots of things happened then, and it just seemed like you just took them all for granted. You just didn't think too much about it. Then I fell off the top of a boxcar one night while I was working, and that was sixteen days off without pay. So, I can tell you a lot more stories, if that's what they want.

154 **GS:** That's what they want. I'll ask you some about what, you talked about the army time. That's what you started out.

OR: Yeah.

GS: Were you in the army?

OR: No, the railroads kept me out of the army. In fact, I was called three times, and the third time I was called, I didn't tell them on the railroad. I felt bad because all my buddies was in the army, you know. I wasn't that brave. I just didn't like being home when the rest of them were gone, you know.

160 **GS:** Yeah, but the railroad was a deferment?

OR: Yeah, and I was called to go to Huntington, and I went to Huntington, and coming back on the train the trainmaster walked in, and he said, "What are you doing here?" and I told him. I told him why. He said, "Well, we can't have this." He said, "We need you worse than the army needs you." So just about three days before the contingent that I was in, I got a deferment, but they were funny days. When I was called to Huntington. Now this is hard to believe now. They made me leader of that contingent because I had a high school education. Can you imagine that?

GS: There probably weren't. Evidently there weren't too many people that had them then.

OR: That's right. There wasn't, and college was. That was the farthest thing from my mind. I had to go to work. I worked really before I was out of high school.

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GS: Well, okay, something else you mentioned. You mentioned about the injuries, that you fell off a boxcar and you. Were there a lot of injuries during those times, to your friends?

180 **OR:** Well, yeah, but not really a whole lot when you think of all the things you did and all the men that were working. There one night. Now I didn't actually see this. There was two brothers worked on the railroad, John and Bill Burley. I can't remember whether that was during the war, or when it was, but they were working the loop, that loop I was telling you the passenger trains went around.

GS: Yeah.

OR: Well, they had a train pulled on there, and they were working it from both ends, and they had an engine on one end and an engine on the other, and this John Burley. I don't know really how it happened, but he made a cut, and somehow or other when they pulled apart, he went to go across between the couplers on the two cars, you know, and the engine on the end, on the other end, took the slack and shoved them back together, and just coupled him up between them. Of course, it killed him. I didn't see him, but they said there was blood come out of every hole in his body.

198 **GS:** He got in between the couplers.

OR: Yeah, he just got coupled up square. Oh, there was, well, there was another fellow, his name was Frank Terrace. He used to catch a ride across the bridge when he quit work on a train going over to Bellaire, going over through Bellaire, and he went to get on a train one day, or one night, fell down between them, and was just cut all to pieces. Yeah, I've seen. Well, a lot of people in Moundsville knew old Beany Hicks. He was a deputy sheriff at one time in Marshall County. He was working with me the night he got killed. That was on a Christmas Eve. Oh, it wasn't as bad as it sounds though. Those things didn't happen that often, you know. They taught safety all the time, but still there was a lot to be desired, too. We worked on them old cabooses. You never had a toilet on the caboose. You carried your own water. You carried ice for your icebox, and, if you had to go to the toilet, you went down over the bank somewhere, and I've stood out on the shortline, that's from New Martinsville out, well, what they call the shortline goes out through Jacksonburg and. Are you acquainted down in there?

223 **GS:** I don't even know where Jacksonburg is.

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OR: Well, it goes. There's a. That roads still in. It goes out through from New Martinsville out through Jacksonburg, goes out through Hartzell. There's a tunnel right at the top of Hartzell there.

GS: Okay, I know the area.

OR: There's lots of stories about Hartzell, too. That tunnel was a single track tunnel, and, when you'd have like a. You'd get a hundred, a hundred and ten cars of coal car empties to go over in the Fairmont region, either to place in the mines or set them off for the mine runs to pick up, and that'd be just about enough for a miley to pull up over that hill and through the tunnel, you know, and, if you didn't have an engineer and a good engine, they could hang up in that tunnel, and it was bad because the tunnel was just about big enough to hold that miley. There wasn't much clearance, you know, and all that sulphur and smoke and stuff.

GS: What's a miley?

OR: A miley is a big engine.

239 **GS:** Okay.

OR: A big engine.

GS: That's the big one. Okay.

OR: Yeah. A macada is more of a road switch engine. They don't haul near as much. It takes a couple of macadas to haul what a miley can.

GS: Jacksonburg. That's Route 20. I know where you're talking about.

OR: Yeah.

GS: Yeah, yeah.

OR: I remember. Is it okay to use names?

246 **GS:** Sure. Sure.

OR: Gilbert King. He lives out on Fork Ridge now. You might have his name there.

GS: If I don't, I'll put it down.

OR: He was promoted as an engineer, and I was promoted as a conductor in the same class. One of the first trips I run, and one of the first trips he run, we got together. I don't know whether it was the first trip. I can't remember, but it was right the first or second trip, we caught them together, train of empties to Fairmont. That's a hundred and ten cars.

GS: And through that Hartzell Tunnel.

OR: Of course, his father was an engineer, and he was a good, conscientious man, and he could handle an engine, but we were both new. He was new at being an engineer, and I was new at being a conductor, and if we didn't have a trip to Fairmont. We had two new brakeman on a new job and went down the river all right and out through New Martinsville and out the shortline, going up through Hartzell. We almost hung up in the tunnel, but we got through, and when you get through that tunnel you go down a hill on the other side into the Monongah division. That's Monongah division over there. This was the Wheeling division. I had to walk over. I can't remember just what the reason was, but I had to walk over at Lumberport. Lumberport was a junction. You come to Lumberport. You went across a bridge, down through Shinnston and so on to Fairmont. Well, when you went the other way, you went to Clarksburg. So, whatever the reason was, I walked over, and Gilbert looked down out of the engine at me, and he just looked like a colored person. His face was coal black. Well, they had gas masks on those engines to wear through the tunnel you know, so you could get a little air to breathe. All they were were a canvas bag like that you put over your face with isinglass window in it you could look out through, and you hooked them up to your air valve on the engine to get air. You get air from the pumps on the engine through that.

284 **GS:** That tunnel, how long was that tunnel?

OR: It was pretty close to a mile long. I don't remember just exact, but it was. When the engine was coming out, the caboose was pretty close to going in with a hundred and ten empties. That's just about, and old Gilbert, he just looked like he was playing little black Sambo, and I looked up at him and couldn't help but laugh, you know. He says, "Come up here." He said, "I want you to show me where you hook this air up to these gas masks," and I went up, and I said, "Well, there it is right there." He said, "I've been looking all over this engine for that, and I just overlooked it." He was probably, you know, pretty well worked up, the first trip

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and everything, and just didn't see it, and he went through that tunnel without a gas mask, and he looked like he was about ready for the coffin, but that's just one of things that happen.

GS: Did they have air that you hooked into?

300 **OR:** Oh, yeah.

GS: Well, did you have it as a conductor? Did you have one on?

OR: We didn't need it back on the caboose. By the time that train rolled through there all that sulphur and fumes and stuff was pulled out with the train, you know. Oh, I made a lot of trips over there, and some of those engineers were good ones, and there was a time, I worked flagman a good bit. You'd be back flagging, say there was, you'd be meeting a train. In them days, you had trains behind you, and you had trains ahead of you, you know, and you had to meet them in sidings on single track, you know, they would have sidings, and, well, they had signals, you know. A train coming in would blow signals that he was going to take, we called it taking hole, you know, or if he was coming on the main track.

314 **GS:** Taking a hole. That's going up a siding?

OR: Yeah. I could hear. When you get out that shortline, you can hear them train whistles for miles, you know, and I could pretty nearly tell you what engineer it was and what engine he had just the way he blowed the whistle. They all, the whistles had different sounds, and the engineers had different rhythms of pulling them, you know, for signals, and, oh, there's just a lot of things, but it won't all come to me.

GS: Let me ask you. Let's see, I made a note here. Getting back to, did you have any benefits or anything like, you said you had sixteen days without pay. Did you have a union or anything? Any benefits?

OR: Well, yeah, we had a union, but, at that time, early, the union didn't do a whole lot, but as it went on it got better, and things got pretty good, you know.

GS: You got some insurance benefits later on?

OR: Yeah, but I never got a whole lot out of insurance, but I did get paid for some of the days I was off.

333 **GS:** Well, that's, you mentioned sixteen days without pay.

OR: Yeah, well, that happened both times. Well, I say both times. I got knocked off a caboose one time and fell on that same leg, and I was off sixteen more days. Oh, I can tell you a story about going down the other side of Hartzell Hill one night, we had a derailment. Those days, we all worked with train orders, you know. They would hand your orders on at the telegraph offices you'd pass. This telegraph office was Dolan. That's before you get to Lumberport, and I'd just went out and grabbed my orders and come in this caboose and reached over the table to turn the light up, oil lights. You had oil lights on them cabooses. As long as I worked, we had oil lights on them, and I just reached over to turn up the light and read the orders, and the train went into emergency. Well, we call that the big hole on a railroad, when one goes in the big hole, but, when you're on a caboose, you grab the first thing you can get ahold of, because I've seen them cabooses stop and the windows keep going. That's how hard they stop with a train of empties, you know. People don't realize that, but that's a calamity on a rear end of that train, when it goes into emergency. All them empties slide up together, and you're on a rear end, you get the.

358 **GS:** In other the words, the engineer was stopping, because there was a derailment.

OR: No, the train broke in two, see, and the air hose broke, and when that air hose breaks, all the brakes shut up right now, all the way, and it makes a, just a calamity's all it is. And that stop, it wheeled me around, and I hit my ribs on the corner of a bench. It was at the table. Slammed my back around against the door, and they had a rack on the door that held fusees, you know for. Tore that off the door and dumped me down in the corner by the ice box, little ice box they had in there to keep their water cold. Well, it knocked all the wind out of me, and I had a little fellow Jackie James. He was from South Wheeling. I think everybody in South Wheeling knew him at the time, and he was a little short, squat fellow. He couldn't hardly get on the caboose when it was moving. I always would close the switches and open them for him, because he couldn't catch the caboose if he'd get off, and he run up. He says, "You all right, Rog?" Well, I couldn't talk, see, and he got to jumping up and down and hollering, and he says, "Jesus criminy, say something." If I could've said anything, I'd laughed at him, you know, but I couldn't talk. He was about half crazy, you know, there for a little bit, but I come out of it, and then he was all right, but I think we derailed three or four cars then,

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but the actual derailment didn't amount to a whole lot, but it was just things like that that kind of kept you going.

389 **GS:** Makes it interesting, that's for sure.

OR: Yeah, oh, it's, I spent many a night. I used to tell people that I knew every one of them ties on the short line by its first name because my feet had been on all of them.

GS: Did you travel that route that you just talked about? Was that your regular route?

395 **OR:** Well, you would get those jobs for a while, you know. Maybe you'd get off of them, take another job. When I got to where I could hold the, switching these chemical plants along the river, I would take them in preference on account of being home, see.

GS: That's another question I wanted to ask you. Were you away from home a lot with this job?

OR: Early, yeah, before I got seniority enough. When I got the seniority that I could hold jobs close to home, naturally, I took them, but there's something else. Something else that's kind of hard to believe, I hauled stuff or helped haul stuff in to build both the Aniline Plant and the Solvay Plant, and here they are both gone, and I remember when they built them plants, oh, these plants will be here from now on. There's enough salt down in under here to last forever, and here they are gone, but they were good jobs down there. They had good people working in them, and I got to know everybody in the plant, and you could go in there and do a day's work, a day's hard work, and enjoy it because it was a nice, they were nice places to work, and, if you did your job, they went along with you.

423 **GS:** You switched at the plants?

OR: Yeah. They had regular turns. It would go to different plants, and then they had. I remember one night I was switching down Pittsburgh Plate. I think that's the most cars that ever come out of that plant. We got a hundred cars out of that plant in one night. That's hard to believe now. Of course, that's loads and empties both, but a hundred cars is a lot of cars, and, oh, you take nights when you have a heavy snow, and them switches get full of snow, you know. They were supposed to have trackmen come out and help you with the switches, but the trackmen didn't

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always get there, and you wanted to get your work done, and lot's of times, you know, you'd sweep out your own switches to get the work done.

GS: The trackman was on the train.

OR: No. They would come out. They would call them, and sometimes people in the plant would get their own men to come out.

GS: I understand.

441 **OR:** There was a lot of tough days, like every other job, a lot of tough days, and lot of good ones.

GS: When you started to work, it was the B & O, right?

OR: Yeah.

GS: And was it B & O the whole time you worked?

OR: No, no, it was taken over. I think at first they called it the Chessie System, and then it was the C & O. No, how was it? I guess it's still the Chessie System, maybe. I don't know. I didn't follow that up too good. It was still the B & O to me.

GS: Okay. You were a switchman. You were a conductor. What other jobs did you have?

OR: Yeah, well, yeah, well, you see, now in the yard, the conductor on a yard job is called a yard foreman. He's actually a conductor. He runs the job, and on the road you're either a conductor or a brakeman or flagman. Head brakeman is called a brakeman, and a flagman is really a brakeman, too. He does any switching where when he don't have to protect the train like flagging on the main track, you know. He helps with the switching and so on.

463 **GS:** And then there's the engineer, of course.

OR: Yeah, engineer and a fireman. See, we had five men on a crew then, engineer, and a fireman, conductor, and two brakeman.

GS: That was when you had steam engines.

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OR: Yeah, well, we had them for a while with the diesels, too, but they just gradually cut the crews down. Now, I understand, there's some jobs just an engineer and a conductor. That's all there is. I don't know what you'd do if you'd get in trouble out on the road. You'd just have to holler for help, that's all.

GS: The fireman, you never did that job, huh?

476 **OR:** No, I've helped firemen and so on like that, but I never fired. See, a fireman works his way up to where he's an engineer. They have a test to pass, the same way with brakemen and conductors, you have, like I told you about Gilbert King and I were promoted in the same class. He was an engineer. I was a conductor, and we've had some wild times together, too, since then. Yeah.

GS: When did the diesels, when did they start using diesels? Do you remember? Was it a sudden change or gradual?

OR: No, no, you know, it was sudden enough. It was too sudden. We didn't like the diesels too well, I mean, the brakemen and the conductors. Well, I think maybe the engineers might have liked them, but, if you're working out in the yard, especially after you'd been working with steam engines, you know, you can hear a steam engine, and you know he's going to move, and, if you're in a bad place, you know to get out of it, you know, like, say, you've got a head brakeman that don't have much experience. If he'd happen to get a engineer signal and you'd be in them cars, well, you hear a steam engine pull that throttle back to move, you'd hear all the commotion up on the engine, you'd get out of the way, where a diesel was more or less quiet alongside of a steam engine, and a lot of us were scared of them at first, but we got used to them, you know.

508 **GS:** What you said a while ago about there's not even room to walk between those cars when they were in the yard.

OR: Yeah, that's why you had to work on top. Now later they, I don't remember whether they took a track out and used that space to move the other tracks over, or whether they just got more room some other way or not, but they did widen them out later, but there was times when it wasn't safe to walk down through some of them tracks because you couldn't even, you'd have to get down and crawl almost, like underneath the sides of the boxcars. You'd only have like about that much room up in there, and, you know, if you'd be up in there and they'd move them, you'd be just out of luck, that's all, but nobody ever got caught like that. Now there was a fellow one time. I can't remember who it was. He got squeezed. There's a

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wall goes up to the old viaduct, up Wheeling, and Wheeling Yard was right in there. He got squeezed between a car and the wall there one night. It didn't kill him.

539 **GS:** There wasn't even room to walk beside the wall.

OR: Huh-uh. You got any more questions?

GS: Oh, yeah, yep. Okay, you talked about you started out as a brakeman or a switchman.

OR: Yeah.

GS: And you, did you take a test to advance, you say?

OR: Well, in the beginning you had to go up before the trainmaster and whoever they had to question you about the work. That wasn't any promotion or anything, that was just to get you in working at first. Yeah. Right in the very beginning, but then, when you became conductor, you had to take a test on that, because, you see, there was all kind of. Well, them days, you know, even the telephones along the railroad, you couldn't depend on them to work, and you depended on what orders you had in black and white, and you had to know the rules. You had to know. I could go in to that, but I'd have you so mixed up by the time, because you're not a railroader.

GS: Right, not at all. Well, I was wondering how you advanced. You did have to know what you were doing.

558 **OR:** Oh, you, yeah, you got a pretty good test when you went into conductor and engineer.

GS: Of course, seniority played a little bit into that.

OR: Well, as far as holding turns, that's where seniority come in, but you had to take the test for the conductor and engineer.

GS: You were talking about a hundred and ten cars empty, going through the Hartzell Tunnel. That's a long train evidently.

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OR: Well, that was about the average train for going over in that mining district. A hundred and ten empties was figured about right coming over.

GS: How about loads then?

571 **OR:** Well, coming back, at that time, the usual train would be about ninety-five, a hundred cars. They figure about ninety-five hundred tons to a train. See, some coal cars would weigh fifty tons and some would weigh seventy and so on.

GS: Okay, maybe it went up to ninety-five cars?

OR: Ninety-five hundred tons. It did run about, according to what the weight was, you know. You could have a bigger train coming back than you had coming over. You'd get a helper up over the hill. They'd put another engine behind your caboose, you know, and, when you got up to the tunnel coming back, you just cut that other engine off, and he'd go back, see. After that, why, you didn't have too many hills coming back. You'd never believe where the worst hill was coming up the river from New Martinsville, right down here at the Triangle Conduit coming up out of Moundsville.

GS: I know where that is.

OR: We used to have to double that hill every once in a while. Go as far as you could and then cut your train off, or cut the head end off and set it in the siding, see. Then you'd go back and get the rear end and pull it up to clear the siding, then go in the siding and catch the front end again, pull it out and double on to the train, and then you'd go up through Glen Dale. See, it was level after you got up to the Conduit. You could.

608 **GS:** A lot of work to get through there.

OR: Yeah. Sometimes they'd have them days too they had an engine working at Moundsville. At one time they had two engines working at Moundsville.

GS: They'd come out and help you through there?

OR: Yeah, they'd come out and shove you over the hill if you couldn't make it, but, if there wasn't anybody there, you had to double the hill, and that was a pretty good job.

GS: Mostly you were hauling coal at this time you talking about, from there?

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618 **OR:** Yeah, yeah, coal. You'd get a train of mixed freight now and then, about once a day, but at one time, there was thirteen turns in that Fairmont pool, and we were so busy, you'd leave Benwood, and there would be twelve turns behind you. You'd think, well, I'll go to Fairmont and get back and get some rest this next trip. By the time you'd go to Fairmont and get back, all of them would be out. You'd come in and head out, and one of the callers, his favorite saying was, "Sleep fast. I'm going to be calling you."

GS: Okay, I think I understand. Thirteen different crews.

OR: Yeah, thirteen different crews, and, by the time you'd get back, you'd be pretty nearly head out.

GS: Wow.

OR: Yeah.

GS: You're talking about the whistles on the steam engines. Did the diesels have the same type of whistle, or?

642 **OR:** Well, I can't tell you how that whistle worked. It must have been off of air.

GS: Could you tell?

OR: The steam engines had steam whistles.

GS: Yeah.

OR: But I think the diesels had air. Now I can't say for sure.

GS: Well, you were talking about you could tell the engineer by the way he blew the whistle.

OR: Yeah, you know they had a rope up in there, and there was one, Hobert Mason was his name. He lived in New Martinsville. He'd get ahold of that cord, and you could just watch his lips, and you'd know from watching his lips what he was blowing, you know, like a crossing signal or something like that. Yeah, there

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was a lot of good fellows worked on the railroads, boy, and the number of them that's dead now. Man, oh, man, it makes you, it makes you wonder.

664 **GS:** You were talking about the grade coming into, by Triangle Conduit. How steep of a grade?

OR: I can't tell you what grade that is, but it fools you, you know. I never thought of it as being much of a grade till I got on the railroad and saw how them guys had to work to get up over there, you know.

GS: If you were away from home, would you be away from home for a week at a time, a day at a time?

OR: Well, it all depended. You could spend a day going to Fairmont. Well, maybe, if your turn was up, they might call a work train out of Fairmont. Well, you'd go out on that work train, and that night come back to Fairmont. You might be away from home three or four days before it was over. Of course, they very seldom, I don't remember ever being called myself two times in a row for a work train out of Fairmont, but it might have been done. I don't know, but, oh, you get over there and get behind a derailment, you know, where you couldn't come back, and they'd deadhead you on them old B & O buses, and they all stunk from gasoline. You'd be half sick by the time you got home, and I've got. We lived on Wheeling Avenue over there then. I've got off the bus in front of my house. See they considered your time deadheading from Fairmont to Benwood as rest time. I've got off of that bus, walked in the house, and the phone would be ringing. I'd be called to go to work out of Benwood.

710 **GS:** You'd been riding the bus all that time.

OR: Yeah. Well, see, they always would give you at least a two-hour call. They'd take a couple of hours and come over.

(End of side A.)

722 **GS:** You hauled a lot of coal. What about the steel mills? Did you ever go up north, you know, up where Weirton is and on up?

OR: Well, you see, Pennsylvania was mostly up in through there.
(Break in interview due to technical difficulties.)

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749 **OR:** At one time there was two locals. One would be coming out of Fairmont and the other one coming out of Benwood, and this old fellow in Glen Easton would always, oh, a big, maybe a cubic yard box of shoes, and I don't know if the other fellows thought much about that or not, but I always wondered where all them shoes went when that little town, he could've put shoes on everybody in that town and had a lot left over with one box, but he would, it seemed like, oh, maybe once every couple of weeks, he'd get another big box of shoes, you know, but, them days you'd have two, three, maybe even four, what they called package cars, and, instead of having two brakemen, you would have three brakemen, and it was your job to unload them cars between Benwood and Fairmont, or Fairmont and Benwood, you know, but sometimes that could get kind of raunchy. You'd have big, heavy equipment, you know, and have to get help to get it out and everything.

GS: You physically unloaded it, you mean.

763 **OR:** Yeah, see, as a rule, at one time, I guess before my time, they had a lot of locals because they didn't have trucks like they got now, and them locals used to supply them towns with what they needed. The old feed store there at Cameron. You can remember that surely, if you're from Cameron.

GS: Yeah, I remember that.

OR: Oh, I worked into Cameron a good bit. I was up there one time on a work train and stayed there for a week. Pipeliners were in there, and the railroaders were in there. It was a pretty wild town for a while there.

GS: How many people you figure were in there then? They used to have some big hotels in Cameron at one time.

OR: Yeah, but I can't tell you anything about that, because I don't really know anything. I mean, we, I usually always stayed on the caboose.

GS: You stayed on the caboose.

775 **OR:** And Guy Thomas, he was a conductor then. He was a prince of a fellow. He had originally lived in Littleton, and he would go out to Littleton and stay with relations out there.

GS: Well, there was, what about passenger trains? You really haven't mentioned much.

OR: There was thirteen passenger trains run when I first started out, and the passenger trains were considered the first class train. You had a timetable, and it gave the passenger trains time at every, oh, like every siding, or every telegraph office, and it was up to the rest of you. See, freight trains were usually second class trains, and then they had extra trains, you know, and you had, you had to know your orders to get along. That's why you had to pass all them tests, you know, for running a crew, and it was up to you to clear those trains. If you had a train out on the main track and there was a passenger train due, say in fifteen, twenty minutes, you'd better find yourself a siding and get in it.

GS: The passenger trains had the track, in other words.

791 **OR:** Yeah. You were supposed to clear them no matter what. I can remember one time we had a train of empties going down the river, going to go to Fairmont, and, as a rule, they would stop at Foster. That was a siding right above Fish Creek. You know where Fish Creek is down here? Well, there's a siding. It's still in there, that siding. They would usually stop and take water. There was a water tank there, and they'd take water in their engine. I remember I was back flagging. I never thought they'd stop and take water, but they did, or maybe they was having trouble. I just can't get it straight here, but, anyhow, it was a nice, clear night, and I was a flagman then. I wasn't running a turn. I don't remember who the conductor was, but them days, when the train stopped, the flagman got off his rear end and took off back up the track.

GS: That was your job to make sure.

OR: Stop anybody behind you. Well, it was a nice, clear night, and I remember thinking, oh, it's nice and clear, you know, and all at once that fog just come right down on me, and you couldn't see anything. Well, about that

time they called me in, and, when an engineer calls a flag in, he's supposed to wait three minutes and take off, you know.

811 **GS:** They call you with a whistle?

OR: Yeah, they blow the signal for you to come in. About that time they called me in, and I put a fusee down, and you have a set of torpedoes, two of them, you put on the rail. When anyone hits them torpedoes, they know there's somebody ahead of them, you know.

GS: Right.

OR: So we went, I had to run. I was back pretty far, and I had to run my butt off to get, catch the caboose, you know, but I caught them. So they took siding at Natrium, and we no more than got in the clear till a passenger train went by, but things like that happened then, you know, and you had to clear them both ways, you know, coming up the river and going down the river. They'd go to Parkersburg. They'd go over through Fairmont to Grafton, in through there. Oh, it was, it kept you on your toes. I've went out that short line with my timetable on one knee and my orders on the other, going through them orders and checking them with the timetable, and making sure everything was right, and there's lots of times. Oh, I wouldn't say lots of times, but several times, you'd have to stop the train and call a dispatcher and ask him just what he meant with these orders. It didn't jive with your timetable, you know. You wanted to be sure of what you was doing.

830 **GS:** Well, when you called, did you use phones or what kind of system?

OR: They had telephones. There was usually a telephone at both ends, well, all the time. There was a telephone at both ends of a siding, and they had them at other places, but the telephones didn't always work, see. It was just like about everything else then. When you wanted it to work, it didn't. I remember one night. This is a pretty good story. We were. We'd left Lumberport, and we were going through Shinnston. All at once, we stopped. Well, there was a telephone, oh, not too far behind us, and I was flagging at the time, and I went back, and that was the first thing I did when I'd get back was get on the telephone and try to get ahold of somebody and see what was going on, you know. This telephone had a head set on it, just one ear, and I'm trying to get somebody back there, and everything a cackling, or crackling and a popping, you know. Old Hiney, that's Henry Nightingale. He lives up in the other end of town. You might have his.

846 **GS:** Yeah, I've got his name, yeah.

OR: Well, he'll verify some of these stories if you want to tell him. First thing you know, Hiney come running back and in the telephone. He said, "Get that

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headset off your head," and I wondered what was the matter, you know, and I took it off and stepped outside, and he says, "There's a high tension wire across them wires down there in town, and it's across the railroad, and it's stopped us, and they sent me back to make sure you didn't get on the telephone," and here I was. Yeah. We must of only had about fifty cars then. Oh, things.

GS: I asked you about passenger trains. When did they quit running?

OR: Well, it just, I don't know when the last one run, but it just come kind of gradual. It didn't, like I said, I think it was thirteen trains come through Benwood the first year I worked.

860 **GS:** Thirteen a day.

OR: Yeah, and they just went slowly there. At one time there was two trains came each way out of Parkersburg, and there was two trains from, well, just one train. It would come from Grafton during the night. Or how was that now, let's see? It come out of Wheeling in the morning and come back at night from Grafton. Yeah. There was a lot more than that before I went to work. See, I was just on the rear end of the, the really, the change.

GS: I know my wife, she rode the train out of Cameron when she was a little girl. I know that.

OR: Yeah.

GS: Of course, there's no tracks out there now.

OR: Some of them, no, some of them old fellows. I can remember one conductor, Vince Glasgow. I forget how long you had to work before they would give you a regular pass on the railroad, and lots of times I would deadhead from maybe Benwood to Fairmont or Fairmont and back, and, if that old bird was on the passenger train, he would not haul you without a pass, and he knew that you worked on the railroad every day. I used to get so mad at him. Yeah, if you didn't have a pass, you didn't ride. That's all there was to it.

880 **GS:** Were you supposed to carry a pass with you?

OR: Well, you were supposed to get what they called a trip pass.

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GS: Yeah.

OR: Well, lots of times they were kind of hard to get around the caller's office, you know, and the officials wouldn't be working at night and so on, and lots of times you just had problems getting them.

GS: He knew that person, and he still wouldn't let you on.

OR: Yeah, he knew. He'd pass us every day and see us, you know. We'd be maybe on the local in the sidings, and he'd pass us and see us and never, but there's another thing that was good about the railroad. When they'd, say they'd have a derailment, or they'd have just a work train out, they used to have a cook, you know, had a diner on the wreck train and everything like that, you know, and some of them cooks, they could cook pretty good, and, if they knew they were going to pass somebody in a siding, you could pretty well near figure, when the wreck train went by, there was going to be a big bag of sandwiches thrown off to you, things like that, you know. Oh, lots of things. It was a good job

894 **GS:** You say a wreck train. What's that?

OR: Well, they call them out for derailments.

GS: Okay, okay.

OR: Things like that. I remember. You acquainted out around, out where the gas company has their wells out on the short line there. Oh, I can't think. Ain't that awful? Well, anyhow, you come by these gas stations, and there's a bridge. You make a big long bend like this. We're going over that bridge one day, nice summer day, you know, and I had got back on the back of the caboose and was looking at my train going around the curve, you know. I think it was about the thirteenth car from the caboose decided to go in the creek, and there was about three of them just jumped the track and went in the creek. The cars were still sliding there, you know. Of course, they'd went in emergency, but I was getting ready to leave her.

910 **GS:** I imagine.

OR: But they stopped all right.

GS: Just sitting there watching them go.

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OR: So, that was a case for the wreck train right there. I used to like to keep a lot of food and stuff on the caboose. You have trouble, you know, you'd be out. You could fix the whole crew up with food if you had to. That was a pretty good thing, too.

GS: It was kind of like. You got to know everybody, and it was kind of like a family?

OR: Well, I'll tell you how it was. When you got out there, if you had, it's like anything else, if you have a good crew, you got it made, and you more or less had to get along with one another because you was out there on your own. You had trouble, you had to fix it, you know, unless you had like a derailment or something, and then you had to call for help, but air troubles and stuff like that, you'd. I've changed air hoses lots of times and knuckles, pulled a knuckle out, you know, and one of them knuckles weighs eighty-five pounds. You carry that fifty, sixty carlengths in hot weather, and you know you done something.

926 **GS:** A knuckle? Is that a part of the coupler?

OR: That fits in a coupler. Yeah. It's the part that grips.

GS: Okay. Yeah. Of course, I worked in a coal mine with the little, tiny cars.

OR: Yeah, same difference, it's all alike.

931 **GS:** I've asked all the questions I want to ask, but if you want to say anything.

OR: Well, I'm windy enough the way it is. If you've got all you want, why, I'll quit.

GS: Well, any of those, like you telling the stories and stuff, yeah.

OR: I don't know if Tom would want to come over. He might not have too much. He'll have enough to say.

GS: If he'd want to. I could get him while I'm here.

(Pause.)

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GS: This interview was taped on October 23, 1995, with Mr. Orville Rogerson. The interviewer is Gordon Swartz.

942 **OR:** This is a story about a couple of old fellows that worked on a railroad long before my time. They were old time conductors when I was braking for them, Eddie Adams and Guy Thomas. They were both from out Littleton, and Guy Thomas was one of the best conductors I ever worked with and one of the nicest fellows I ever worked with, and Eddie Adams was a good fellow too, but he didn't run very many turns. He worked passenger some, but they tell the story about Guy Thomas and Eddie Adams. They said they both started from Littleton at the same time to go to Benwood to get a job on the railroad. So somehow, when they got to Cameron, Eddie Adams got mixed up, and he got to working in Cameron in the shop on the railroad in the shop in Cameron, and Guy Thomas went on to Benwood, and Guy always said that Eddie thought he was in Benwood all that time he was working in Cameron, and Guy got marked up on the seniority roster ahead of him.

GS: He thought he was in Benwood.

OR: Yeah. So there's a little story you can tell. He said Eddie didn't know where he was for a year.

(End of interview.)