

GASTON MEADOWS

Interview 165a

April 11, 2005 at his home in Lufkin, Texas

Jonathan Gerland, Interviewer

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Jonathan Gerland, East Texas native Gaston Meadows reminisces about his career working on the railroad. Mr. Meadows spent 41 years working for the Southern Pacific Railroad on the Houston East and West Texas line, mostly based in Lufkin. His career saw many changes in the railroad industry, and he comments particularly on the change from steam to diesel locomotives, the evolution of freight cars, the practice of piggybacking, and the evolution of train communication ó from very little communication to radio communication within the train to radio communication between train and station. Mr. Meadows also mentions many of his fellow railroaders, like Fred Street, B. B. Scott, Connie Nunn, and George Pouras. He also talks about the terrain and the types of trips he took between Houston and Shreveport on the HE&WT, especially mentioning the hills and spots that took extra effort to travel through.

Jonathan Gerland (hereafter JG): My name is Jonathan Gerland and I am visiting with Mr. Gaston Meadows here in his home. Today's date is April 11, 2005. Mr. Meadows, if you could, just tell me when and where you were born?

Gaston Meadows (hereafter GM): I was born in Angelina County just out of Lufkin back when we still had home deliveries, July 24, 1920.

JG: 1920. And who was your mother and father?

GM: My father was Tom Meadows; my mother was Ethel McCoy Meadows. She was a McCoy and a Nerren, well known families all over Angelina County now.

JG: What did your father do for a living?

GM: He farmed in my early part of my life there. That was back in the Depression, which you wouldn't know about. I was born in 1920 and the crash of 28-29 there was pretty severe. But living on the farm we had plenty to eat, a few ragged clothes to wear and didn't know the difference what we were living with and didn't.

JG: About where was the farm located?

GM: Out east of Lufkin in the Moffett Community. That is where I was raised.

JG: Did you go to Moffett School?

GM: I did, until the high school was transferred to Lufkin, in fact, I believe in 1937.

JG: 1937.

GM: Played basketball on the team out there. That was about the only sports we had. Had baseball but it wasn't organized. A lot of people in Angelina County remember the log gym we had built out of logs. It lasted there for several years. The first year we had it, we won the county championship in Angelina County, beating Zavalla for it by one point, in that same gym in Lufkin.

JG: Did you play basketball?

GM: I did, I played one year for Lufkin after I transferred up here.

JG: What year did you graduate?

GM: 1939.

JG: 1939. I know you started working for the railroad in '42 you told me, what brought you to the railroad?

GM: Jobs were pretty scarce when we came out of high school. I worked for Mr. Ed Holloman at the Ruby Café there waiting tables and serving.

JG: I'm sorry where was that?

GM: The Ruby Café.

JG: The Ruby Café.

GM: One of the oldest and best restaurants in Lufkin at that time, later worked for Spears there for a little while. I married my wife, Jackie King, during that time. She was working at the Eat-a-Bite, a drive-in restaurant across the street there on the corner of First and Frank. Shortly after we married we leased the Eat-a-Bite up on North First from Mr. Griffin and we ran that for about a year and a half. About a year before the war started the rations started and made things pretty short for small businesses. Lots of the railroad men ate with me when I worked at the Ruby and several of them when we had the Eat-a-Bite up there and getting to know them they encouraged me, and I was thinking about getting out of the restaurant business and they encouraged me to go to work for the railroad and I did, January of '42.

JG: January of '42.

GM: She ran the Eat-a-Bite Restaurant there for about two months after I went to railroading with what help she could get. We let the lease go back to Mr. Griffin. We moved to Shreveport there and stayed about three or four months. I ran the midnight

switching up there. You know we worked seniority then on the railroads before I could hold a job out of Lufkin. We came back to Lufkin then as soon as I could hold a job there.

JG: So what did you do in Shreveport?

GM: I was fireman on the switch engine there.

JG: On the switch engine.

GM: On the midnight job up there.

JG: Switching the Shreveport yard.

GM: Switch there in the yard, right on the banks of the Red River.

JG: Any interesting stories or characters from your first couple of months of working that you can recall?

GM: Lots of interesting characters, some of them I wouldn't want to talk about too much.

JG: Okay. (laughter)

GM: But for the most part I was raised up to work all my life. As long as you did your work and tried to do the best you could, most of the engineers all liked you if you did that. I didn't mind working. I got along good with all of them. In our work we all have favorite people we like to work with. I did that. We can go back to a lot of the fellows after I moved back to Lufkin. We lived in a little apartment on North First ó corner of Fred and North First there. It was about three or four of my favorite engineers that lived right down Fred Street there behind me. A man by the name of B. B. Scott, one of the oldest ones there, Connie Nunn, George Pourasí

JG: What was that last name?

GM: George Pouras, he was a Swede about six foot six.

JG: He was an engineer?

GM: Yes, you might remember some of his stepchildren here. He married a woman with three or four kids there. Derwood Witherspoon had an insurance business here in Lufkin. That was one of his stepchildren, had another one named Lamont. [unintelligible]

JG: So then after about two or three months then you got to come back to Lufkin?

GM: Come back to Lufkin. When World War II was going on I was in the draft age. I got two or three deferments ó the railroad did for me, I didn't ask for them. The railroad got them. In the later part of 1943 I was in the military service. Stayed in the Pacific almost two years and went to finish basic training and was discharged February 1946.

JG: What did you do in the Pacific?

GM: I was in the Seventh Division, Seventeenth infantry fighting Japs from one island to the other, Philippines, Sai-Pan and Okinawa. After, took about a month off after I come back out of the service, went back to the railroad and went to work. I stayed right there until 1982. I was promoted to engineer there then I think in 1947, of course I stayed on as a fireman there until they need you as an engineer. In the meantime we started the diesel electric service in place of the steam engines. Of course we hauled a lot more freight and did it more economically and things. Being the young person there, the diesel wasn't too hard for me to transfer over to. It was a lot worse on the old people. Kind of like computers today, the young people learn how to use a computer and use them a lot easier today than older people. And it works the same way transferring from steam power to diesel electric.

JG: Before we talk a little bit about that transition can you tell me a little bit more about the days of steam? What do you remember about that, the class of engines that you ran? Were you in freight service and passenger service?

GM: Freight and passenger both. Of course the passenger jobs, on the passenger train you worked from Houston to Shreveport all the way. On the freight job you had to turn from here to Lufkin that you traded off, exchange them. When I could I worked between Lufkin and Shreveport practically all the time when I could, because you were home more.

JG: What would a typical day's work be as a passenger engineer?

GM: A typical day of work on the passenger train started out about 8:30 in the morning and you ended up in Shreveport and got through with your engine inspection and everything probably around 4:30. It ran pretty much eight hours. The night trains would

JG: So you would leave Lufkin at 8:30?

GM: No you would leave Houston. The passenger train ran all the way through, you didn't change.

JG: So you were actually based in Houston then?

GM: Yes, based in Houston but a lot of the time I stayed here in Lufkin, the evening passenger train come through here about 12:30 or one o'clock going to Houston. I would catch it and ride to Houston and get ready to go to work that night at ten o'clock on the night train. Coming back I worked the night train. Went back to Shreveport, leave

Shreveport that night about eleven o'clock heading to Houston, eat breakfast, change clothes, and catch the day train back to Lufkin and get off. I would be here in about twenty-six hours. I didn't get to be home that much, about twenty-six hours.

JG: So your job then was going from Houston to Shreveport and Shreveport back to Houston.

GM: I was just what they called dead head from here to Houston. I lived in Houston about two years during that time.

JG: And those were trains, 25 and 26?

GM: 25 and 26 were the day trains, 27 and 28 were the night trains.

JG: What locomotives did you run in the days of steam on those passenger trains?

GM: The steam engines, when I first went to work we had mostly the 900s, which we called the F-1s. They had a 800-class engine and I believe they called them C-5. I'm not sure.

JG: Did you all run them on passenger trains?

GM: No, the 800 was the freight locomotive.

JG: And the 900 was also, wasn't it?

GM: Yes, freight. The 8- and 900 were freight locomotives. They went up into the larger numbers such as the 900, which they called an F-5. They were a little larger freight engine than the F-1. The F-1s, we liked those engines. They were good freight engines.

JG: Those had ten drivers didn't they?

GM: Yes, ten drivers; so did the F-5s. In the passenger service they run three different classes. They had what they called the T-6, T-9 and P-13s. P-6 engines run from six hundred I believe to Dallas, six ten twelve. That was the smaller engine that they used over here most of the time. They would run some T-5s, just run up from six twelve to six thirty something like that. And the P-13s was on up a little higher in numbers. All of those as you got higher were a little larger engine.

JG: Did you have any preference of those particular engines? Which ones did you like? Did you have a favorite?

GM: I liked the little P-6 engines, it was good riding engines and we didn't handle big trains over here on the night run. It was the only one I could hold most of the time when I was a fireman. They rode real good. It was just a nice little engine for the size train we

had, anywhere from 6 to 9 cars. That would be about the largest train we had on any night.

JG: What about the day train, how many cars were those?

GM: The day trains were three or four cars.

JG: Just three and four. Was the night trains, was a lot of that mail cars?

GM: Yes, old mail cars and you had a sleeper Pullman on the night cars too. You had an extra mail and baggage car on the night train and a Pullman.

JG: And then on the freight engine you liked those pretty well?

GM: I liked the nine-niners, the F-1 class that we had. They were good riding engines. Didn't handle quite as big a train but back in the freight days there, steam engine days, we had two hills between here and Shreveport. One right out of Nacogdoches one called church hill and then just before you go into Garrison, one called Fitzzy hill. A lot of times we had to double those hills for these trains. The reason we called it doubling, it was more than you could pull and we would just cut it half in two and carry half of it up there and come back and got the other half and put it together and left again. Sometimes you had to double both of those hills some days, going and coming.

JG: Church Hill andí

GM: Church and Fitzzyí F-i-t-z.

JG: Fitzzy, F-i-t-z.

GM: That is just this side of Garrison. On the highway you'd notice a pretty good hill on the highway. The railroad track was over just east of the highway all the way from right out of Nacogdoches to Garrison.

JG: Any particular stories that you can recall from those steam days? Maybe anything unusual that happened ó a certain run, a special run or anything like that?

GM: It was something unusual that happened on a run any day of the week. That is one thing about railroading, you go up and down the same track that you work everyday but it's a little different. There is no train that handles the same way. Not one of them that you do conducts the same way every day. You have to kind of judge what you've got and handle it accordingly.

JG: At what point could you tell, through experience of course you would know, but since you mentioned that each train was different, but after a certain point that you knew

what you had and knew what you needed to do to make a certain bend or hill? About how long would it take you to get a good feel for it?

GM: Well it took different times for different people. Of course that happens in every kind of work that you do, you realize that. Some of the older engineers that I worked with, by the time they got to the Angelina River they knew what kind of train that they had, how they was going to have to handle it. Some it took a little longer, the majority of them knew what they was doing when we was handling 35 to 50 cars back in the steam engine days.

JG: The freight train?

GM: On the freight train, when we went to diesel it was much different.

JG: What all kind of loads did you carry?

GM: The engineer didn't know about everything that he had back there in those cars. We handled any kind of freight they could put out there. They run some trains back in those days that was all what we called PFE's, refrigerated cars

JG: Pacific Fruit Express?

GM: Pacific Fruit Express out of the valley. I have seen them run five and six of those trains in the mornings. That was the train we called a hundred and forty four. It was going east I guess from Houston to Shreveport. It was a time when the vegetable business was good down that a way, they would run four to five sections of those trains, solid PFE's which, at that time had a compartment on each end of the car that had ice in them. Later those cars had their own refrigerator unit on them to cool that car which they still use. You'd see a lot of those cars. They have got a refrigerator unit on there that cools the entire car on there when they haul something like that. As you notice there now a lot of it is tank cars. All of those oil and gas and lots of chemicals is handled out there out of the Gulf Coast down there. You are aware of that, one of them blew up down there a couple of weeks ago. Some of those things if you had a wreck they would do the same thing with them out here on the railroad.

JG: Anything you remember specifically about those last days, of course now we are getting into some of the diesel era, but the last days of passenger service? Were you running passenger trains in those very last days, the last few months and weeks?

GM: I never did hold a regular job of running them. We called the running as being the engineer. I was a fireman most of the time for the passenger trains. I was the engineer in emergencies, engineer laid off, and I was called in as engineer and qualified at the time I was firing on the passenger. You had to have so many years in service before you were qualified to operate the passenger train. But, I caught my own job there one night and was

the engineer on it. I had a new fireman and I was the engineer on it, back in the steam engine days. That is the only trip that I made as the engineer on the steam passenger train.

JG: Was it to Shreveport or Houston?

GM: To Shreveport to Houston and back. When you went one way you took the next train back. You made a round trip on it.

JG: You made a round trip. I guess they had converted to diesel by the late forties, huh?

GM: Well I believe it was up in the fifties now.

JG: Early fifties.

GM: They started with using some switch engines in the yard on diesel I believe pretty soon after I come back out of the military service. That is where they started first with the diesels was in the yard engines. Then they used them first out on the West Coast, California area, out in there. As they fired more diesels they come west. I guess it was in the late fifties before they were completely all diesels. It might have been the early sixties. I'm not sure.

JG: I think the passenger trains though they were diesel by the last days weren't they?

GM: Yes.

JG: About '54 or '55.

GM: I expect it was, started along about then. They had a smaller engine, passenger built engines. They had a little steam generator in the nose of them there because you have to furnish heat on them trains, on the passenger cars back there, heating and cooling both. You had a steam generator there in the front of them that you fired up to heat your cars with back there on the passenger engines. The smaller engines, two something, I forget the number of them. I don't remember exactly, but I worked with several engineers there on them. They would run it half way and I'd run it the other half. It was their fireman just helping them out.

JG: What was it like to be a fireman on a diesel?

GM: Well you had to keep the engine in operation and like I was telling you had a steam boiler there that you had to take care of too. And, that engine sticks out there in front of you and that engineer can only see down one side of that road and you are his eyes on the other side. There is a lot takes place on both sides of that railroad.

JG: You talking about the high nose, more like the freight unit?

GM: Yes, that is what they were at that time. It was as much as a safety precaution as anything because you know something could happen to one person at any time up there by himself. They operate some of them today with just one man up there but two was there most of the time because your conductor rides up there all the time, now it's just two people and two sets of eyes but all together it's different, I haven't had to operate them. Now we operated them before I retired quite a bit without a fire but when you did the brakeman or the conductor was up there and your second eyes.

JG: I know you commented a little bit about the transition to diesel for some of the older fellows had a harder time making the transition but anything, can you say something specific more specifically about maybe the first time that you and your co-workers started seeing diesel? What was the thought and ideas about this new technology coming?

GM: We looked forward to it. It was going to be a challenge but it was going to be much easier work conditions, a lot cleaner, cooler working conditions. When you were on the steam engine there you had a big fire in that firebox, you were burning oil, it was nasty. You was having to stop two and three times on every trip to take a tank of water and you had to sand out the flues and all that was nasty and it was hot. I sat down on that engine out there at your place the other day, and looked down at that firebox and said, "How did we do that back in July and August?" We had a tremendous fire in that firebox.

JG: It was nice during the wintertime but not during the summer, huh?

GM: Well they even put air conditioning on them diesels. I don't know whether TSE had any that was air-conditioned or not but those big freight engines there they put air conditioning on there. About half the time they weren't working but they had air conditioning on them and it made a lot of difference. Back in the steam engine days we all wore overalls, shirts, jumpers and what have you. We got the diesels there and I got to wearing clothes just like I got on right now. We didn't have a lot of these at that time unless it was khaki clothes. I wore a lot of clothes that I took to the cleaners. You wear the clothes today, hang them up and wear them again a couple of days there. You didn't get dirty and nasty like we did on steam engines there. You started out with clean clothes on and ended up the same way.

JG: I've heard some stories about how dirty some of those engineers and fireman would get.

GM: It depended on what happened on your trip. If you had to go for whatever happened because when you left here you were expected to get that train to the next terminal. That is what your job was, and safely.

JG: And on time.

GM: Well a lot of that on time stuff was for the books, but a passenger train was supposed to run on time, and which they did. Freight trains they run them when they got

the freight loaded. I was just liable to go to work at two o'clock in the morning as I was at eight, one o'clock at night or three or four in the morning. We worked in what they called a pool. They regulated the number of crews they had according to how they worked. We made just about every day to try to keep them regulated and you worked in the pool. If they run some extra trains you got in and out a little faster. I worked with your mileage too, 3800 miles was the maximum miles a person was supposed to make. You laid off and let the extra boy work, they came in on the extra board just to do the extra work. We worked seven days a week, three hundred sixty five days a year. Now people can't work all that much. When I went to work at the railroad we worked seven days a week, three hundred sixty five days a year and didn't even get a vacation. I went to the railroad in 1942 we didn't even get a vacation. They signed the agreement about the time I went into the military service, so many years, I think it was five years you got a week vacation. I was at Camp Walker, Texas at my basic training there, got a weekend pass there and we come to Lufkin. I had a week's paid vacation and a check waiting for me here. That was more money than I had seen in three or four months at that time. But, when I retired in '82 I was getting five weeks vacation. Of course I expect people working down there at Diboll weren't getting vacation at that time too in 1942.

JG: I don't think so.

GM: I believe it was 30 years service qualified you for the maximum of five weeks vacation. I got that about the last 12 years that I worked.

JG: So if you needed a day off you would just go and ask your supervisor if you could have the day off and it was just granted but without pay.

GM: Granted without pay, if you laid off you got the extra to work.

JG: Go to a funeral or doctor, take a family member somewhere or something like that.

GM: Absolutely, if you wanted time off you had to ask. And it was still like that when you retire. Talk about having a regular job, you had a regular job on the pool but you liable to go to work today at four o'clock and tomorrow you liable to go to work at eight the next night. It seems like these log roads they had a set time they went to work every morning. Of course they might work a little later to get the train back in there. They would go get a load of logs and bring it back. I watched those trains with TSE. They operated on our track from Diboll there down to oh I can't remember the name of that switch there, just beyond where that farm road crosses the track there, ACOL, the track that ran out there.

JG: ACOL, now that would be the Angelina County Lumber Company.

GM: Well that is what that was, but Diboll had one out there too. And the A&NR operated out there too and over across the river in Nacogdoches County. They operated on our track.

JG: Do you remember the 110, Angelina County Lumber Company's engine that is at the zoo now that ran I think from Potomac?

GM: Yes, that was the name of the siding down there.

JG: Yes, was that where the switch was that went to ACOL?

GM: Yes. Well there was a sidetrack there too and then they had a switch that went through the woods out there to ACOL.

JG: That was in the late fifties I think, wasn't it?

GM: They didn't run them any after that I don't think.

JG: But you or maybe it was even earlier than late fifties, but did you actually see them?

GM: Oh yes, they might have been in the sidetrack down there waiting for us. They had to have train orders and after it was to operate from Potomac to Lufkin and the same way I forget the little switch across the river in Nacogdoches County, they used that over there some. That was their railroad out by the papermill. That is the reason, Mr. Kurth owned that and that is the reason the papermill is built on the railroad out there.

JG: Did you know any of those guys that were engineers for the Angelina County Lumber Company or Angelina Neches River?

GM: Yes, I knew them at that time but I can't give you no names now.

JG: Okay.

GM: There was a fellow Brookshire, one of the Brookshires was an engineer on the A&NR out there for a long time. Old Jay Morrison he came up here and went to work. Jay I believe he was conductor on there when he came up here and went to work on the A&NR.

JG: He started in '56.

GM: He wasn't running the engine was he? I think he was the conductor after he came up here.

JG: He ran it some but I know he was conductor for a long time too.

GM: Jay started out I was telling you about him working. A friend of mine's daddy down at New Willard, he worked for what lumber company was down there?

JG: Thompson Tucker or Long Leaf.

GM: Long Bellí Texas Long Leaf.

JG: Texas Long Leaf.

GM: Texas Long Leaf Lumber Company that is what it was. That is where Jay first went to work and a good friend of mine that worked over here on the SP come down there. He first started out down there for him, but his daddy was at New Willard. They did the work on their engines. He said his daddy had to tear that engine down every Sunday. That was back in his early days and he was trying to court and his daddy had him out there helping work on that engine. (laughter) Jay started out down there at New Willard there with Texas Long Leaf and worked for old man S. S. Barnett, Bub Barnett they called him.

JG: Do you remember the M.C.& S.A. coming in to Moscow there?

GM: Oh yes, we would sit out cars there and pick up cars that they brought in - they liable to be sitting there waiting on us. I told them that was the only railroad I knew that the state highway dept would build an overpass over the track that they didn't run but one train a day over. They still operate down there don't they?

JG: Yes sir.

GM: Well we had a little railroad too that come in somewhere into Livingston, W.B.T. & Anderson.

JG: Oh yeah, Waco, Beaumont, Trinity and Sabine. You remember when it ran?

GM: Well we, that wasn't what we called ití but I'm prettyí

JG: Wobbly Bobbly Turnover and Stop.

GM: Wobbly Bobbly Turnover & Stop now that is what we called it there. You had the correct name for it.

JG: What do you remember about that?

GM: I just remember it coming in there is all.

JG: Do you remember for a while they ran an old 32 model, Model-A car with flange wheels on it and they had a little homemade trailer that they pulled behind it.

GM: Well did they carry mail on it?

JG: In the forties, well they carried passengers and mail as well. Did you ever see that?

GM: I never did see that. Now I've ridden on one of them. They had one down there at ACOL. A good friend of mine around here is not in very good shape right now, McMullen, Julius McMullen. Jack McMullen, you knew Jack because Jack head[ed] the A&NR up out there for a long time and his son did it after him. Julius was his older brother and Julius's daddy ran the ACOL Camp ground. He ran the store out there and handled all the business for the lumber company. He had a little shack down there that he lived in. Julius and another friend of ours we went down there one Saturday afternoon and spent the night at the camp. They took us in that old model T, it might have been the Model A or something but we rode that from where the camp was down in the river bottom and the next morning we went hunting down there. I rode that down to the bottom and back.

JG: Was that at the ACOL that was in Polk County?

GM: That was at ACOL.

JG: In Polk County? Because they moved the camp around at different times and that is where it was last located.

GM: Well it was it was straight out in there in part of what is the papermill pasture, what they call the papermill pasture. That is where it was.

JG: Let's see, you retired in '82, can you talk, we talked about the diesels and things like that, any other changes in your railroading career that you can comment on just changes in the way the railroad did business? That is 41 years right?

GM: Yes, your big changes was when the diesels first came here they were all these big cabovers that you see which I forget what we called them anyway, the same size all the way through.

JG: The bull nose?

GM: Yes, that is what they used and mostly three units on them. Each unit on the head end was called "A" units. The one in the middle with no cab on it was the "B" units. You could operate them three or four or one or two either way you wanted to. When they went to the other style engines, which they got larger, when they started out with those engines they were 1500 horsepower. When I retired we were running engines 3600-horsepower. That is how much larger they got. Of course, we talked about them as diesel power but you just had a big diesel engine in there that ran a generator. The power was all-electric.

JG: What about your three axle units and the two axle units? You were all running two axles I guess.

GM: The older ones, the first ones we got were all two-axle units. As they got larger they went to three axles. I think that is about the most that I noticed. Each one of those axles now had a traction motor around it. That is where your power was. We called them traction motors, went around each axle then there was a gearbox on the axle there. Each one was separate power. All your power was coming from the same main generator.

JG: Besides the locomotives what would be some of the big changes in railroading that you would say were some fairly big changes? What about the piggy back, did ya'll do much of that?

GM: Piggy backing started off very slow in this part of the country. It was trailers on flats, is what they was, called TOFø I believe. From that we went to handling lots of automobiles but the automobiles had a regular rack car that was built for it. I can remember when we hauled automobiles in boxcars. They had racks built in boxcars. You might have seen some of them. You had a special ramp built there where they could unload those, and it would probably take them all day. Ford Motor Company and General Motor or wherever they came from, it would probably take them all day to unload four cars out of them boxcars. When they started building those automobile racks they drove them up on there and drove them off. Just how long it take to load them Ií the first one that came out I think the cars had about six automobiles on it. I haven't paid any attention to them now but they were handling nine and twelve automobiles on all the cars when I retired. That is how much progress has been made on them now. We were handling lots of container cars, which were shipped from foreign countries by boat and barge or what have you. It was lifted up the car and just sat on those flat cars. I forget just what they did call them. They built a regular yard where they could load and unload those in port; the Port of Houston was built to handle that. We have a lot going to the West Coast and coming away from there. They could not just from books and stuff a lot of your industries started shipping freight like that too. They could ship that to a merchant here in Lufkin or anywhere else and one of those containers, they used to could stack four of those on a flat car and they were tied down or strapped down. Maybe one container went to one manufacturer another container went to another. There could be four or five different merchants or manufacturing plants that got a container off that one car which made it much more efficient for the shipper and for the merchants óa lot of the business that trucks was handling.

JG: What about communication with radio? What kind of impact did that have?

GM: Well that was just as much different as setting your TV there and you watching your program and you listening to it on the radio.

JG: When did ya'll start using radio?

GM: I can't remember the exact date on that. I caní for the last ten or twelve years that I worked, say from '72 to '82. You first started out you had radios on the engine. You communicated from one train to the other train. Then they put one on the caboosé, it operated from the generator that operated off of the axle. You could communicate from

the head end to the rear end of your train. Then they got the walkie-talkies, that the brakeman, conductor or whatever if something happened to your train and you had to walk it to find out what it was in your train there, you had a walkie-talkie with you and when he found it he would tell you what he had. If you got to turn a car a loose you can do it right there without him having to come back up there and tell you what he was going to do. The same way with the flagman, you know when the train stops out there on the main line there is another train somewhere behind you. The flagman has to go out to protect the rear end of that train to keep one of them from running over the other. The block signals taken care of a lot of that but they didn't have block signals all the way. We had block signals from Lufkin to Garrison, where the hills were so bad that is all we had when I was working. I expect they have got them all the way now, not sure but they are operated from controls and the dispatcher. You had to have train orders for them. They operate them now strictly by radio. I think they are all operated that way, your dispatcher can communicate with the train crew at anytime any place. It wasí it was a great step in the railroad industry. Just like it is in the military there the commander can talk to his men out there on the front lines; tell them what they are doing. It's just that much difference as it was on railroading.

JG: You were talking about the number of cars that the steam freight trains had, 35 to 50, what wasí again typicalí I realizeí .

END OF SIDE ONE.

JG: Lets see I was asking Mr. Meadows about maybe what an average train length was when he retired in '82 with at that time the modern diesel electrics verses what it was in the steam days about 35 to 50 cars. Do you remember about what length the train would be? Ya'dl were running a hundred or more cars weren't you?

GM: Oh yes! The train actually doesn't consist of just the amount of, the number of cars you handle it goes by the weight, so many tons here. If you have a lot of empties, I have handled as many as 165 cars at that time. I think they have cut it down, I don't think you can handle as long a train as we used to handle. I've noticed a few of these trains go by there; of course they don't use any caboose on there anymore. You have no communication what ever from the front to the rear and if anything happened I guess somebody would just have to walk back there to see what it is. (laughter)

JG: So that is why they made the trains shorter. (laughter)

GM: I would think that has helped some.

JG: Well they have got the cars a lot heavier now too.

GM: Well the capacity of cars, when I went to work a ten thousand gallon tank car was a big tank car and there wasn't many ten thousand gallon tank cars. You see tank cars running up and down now with about thirty thousand gallons, I mean when I retired.

There is probably some a lot bigger now. I was pulling thirty thousand gallon tank cars. That is the potbelly ones that you see. The cars are a lot longer. Most of your boxcars were full off when I went to work.

JG: Probably most of them were still wood, huh?

GM: You got steel frames, you got steel frames and all of them are wood lined and I guess still are. Most of them are plywood I think is what they line the inside with.

JG: Well I'm just trying to think of any, we haven't talked much about different people that you might have remembered.

GM: Well that is what I told you. Get that book and I'll go through that and I

JG: Tell me about that Mr. Hanks, General Hanks.

GM: General Hanks was a local man. I don't know where he was raised but he ate with me a lot of the times when I was running the restaurant there. He was a regular engineer on the 144 and the 143.

JG: Now what are those numbers?

GM: The 144 and the 143.

JG: Oh the freight train numbers.

GM: That was the number of the train. The 143 coming back this way, the 144 left out anywhere from 8:30 to 10:30, usually around 8:30 to 10:30 in the morning. The 143 come back out of Shreveport the following night around 6:30. Joe was made traveling engineer, which I think they changed the name of the job to Road Foreman of Engines. They did before I retired out of the ranks there. And he held that job for quite awhile until the first strike they had and Joe wouldn't run an engine for the company during the strike so they demoted him back to engineer but that didn't last but about six months. They rather promote him back to engineer on a traditional job rather than have a lot of labor trouble. Of course that didn't last long. He wasn't treated very well then and he come back to running the engine and retired working the daylight switch engine right there in Shreveport.

JG: Who we are talking about is

GM: I made my first student trip on the road with him when I started out.

JG: With Joe Hanks.

GM: When I started out he come by the, he come by up there that morning and I had me a pair of overalls and a cap on he said, "Where you going?" I said, "I'm going with you."

Of course he had already talked to me about going to work for the railroad. I made my first student trip with him. At the time you see you had to learn the railroad, learn how to do that job on your own. Today they pay you to do that, but I worked about two weeks for free, paid my own expenses when I hired out. That was making your student trips. I made two round trips on freight, two or three switch engines in every yard, one in Lufkin, Shreveport and one in Houston.

JG: So you had to be hired to be able to do that, but you just weren't paid.

GM: That is right.

JG: Who we were talking about is Joe Hanks. He is in a time book that we have, the HE&WT, the Houston East & West Texas time book from 1921 and looking here they were fireman at that time in '21 who may have been engineers by that time.

GM: By the time I went to work there.

JG: There is a J.W. Ashley, here is it these are all fireman here.

GM: F. M. Bates.

JG: F. M. Bates and what did you say about him?

GM: Well he was at the time I hired on I think he was a fireman at that time. He was promoted to engineer and probably went to running 'cause that was the time the railroad business started picking up quite a bit.

JG: Yes, right at the beginning of the war, huh?

GM: Right at the beginning of it. J. C. Bethel, I knew him. I never did work with him much; he worked switching most of the time. Charlie Bickford, I knew him. He lived here in Lufkin and raised a family here. Charlie was a little bitty short fellow, didn't live very long after I worked. J. C. Blackwell, he lives in Houston works down there in switching practically all the time that I knew him.

JG: Burkhalter, Burrows.

GM: Indian Burrows, his family he was raised here in Lufkin. By the time I went to work he was in Shreveport there working switching engines. He had a brother that worked here at the railroad, was a clerk there after I went to work. He had a sister that graduated from high school here a couple of years before I did. I knew her, Gladys Burrows. C.C. Carter he was an engineer that lived in Houston, I worked with Clarence Carter there for quite a bit there on the passenger train. He was, I believe I was firing for him when we got diesels on the passenger train. What is that name?

JG: Cheatham, Cheatham?

GM: I didn't know him. Clay, I knew Frank Clay a little bitty fellow that worked out of Houston practically all the time. He never did work up on this end that I knew of.

JG: There is a Clingman.

GM: I knew him.

JG: Cochran?

GM: Ray Cochran, is that who that is?

JG: Well there's a couple of them, there is a Dave and R. H.

GM: Well Dave Cochran didn't work for the railroad. He quit the railroad, Dave Cochran worked for I knew Dave Cochran. He worked for Humble Oil Company at that time. I heard a lot of stories about Dave Cochran, most of them wouldn't be good to tell back in those days. R. H. Cochran, don't think there is any relation. Ray lived and finally retired in about '75. He got three or four birth certificates and different ones running his age back there for years. You wasn't suppose to work past 70 years old but Ray got two or three different birth certificates.

JG: Well this is '21 here so he retired in '75 that would be 54 years.

GM: Well that is what I say, I'm not sure, I'll say he was about that old when he retired because I knew he had two or three birth certificates that he got. At that time I was the local chairman and I kept check on him pretty close. Ray was a good fellow there and he was a good engineer.

JG: Davis, two Davis's, DeFriend, a Gann.

GM: Eli Gann, he worked out of Houston after I went to work here. I don't know how long he worked that job, hired out several years though. I made a student trip with him. A fellow by the name of J. Q. Holland was hired too. I made a student trip with him when I was breaking in.

JG: Gillispie?

GM: Gillespie, I didn't know him. Now there is Joe Hanks. E. P. Hanner, a fellow we called Doc Hanner there. He was raised down in Leggett for all those years. Owned his place out there at the time he died. When he retired he went back down there in them woods.

JG: That is Hanner, H-A-N-N-E-R.

GM: Hanner and that is his name. He had a son that worked out there at the papermill with my brother. I made my first paid trip with him after I got qualified to go onboard as a fireman, I did and I made my first trip with him. We called him Doc; they called him Doc when I first went to work. He lives right up there off of Hoskins Street, about three or four houses off of Timberland Drive there.

JG: There is a Hays.

GM: I don't know him. Now you said those fellows there, that was made in 1921.

JG: Yes sir, January of 1921.

GM: That is twenty-one years later than when I went to work.

JG: These are fireman in '21, so they might have been engineers by the time you came along.

GM: Oh they were, all of them were engineers.

JG: Henry, and Hunt and Hutchins.

GM: Kennerly, go down to Kennerly there. I know him, I knew him. He lived right down there on Lake Street on the edge of the railroad track. He married into the Moore family. You'd get down there 'till you see some Moore names there, George Moore that was his brother-in-law. Kennerly his son worked out there at the papermill, he worked out on the railroad a little while, not very long. He worked out there as a switcher around the papermill. Floyd Kennerly he was about my age. Kennerly has still got two or three daughters that live around here.

JG: Mantooth.

GM: Ed Lyles, I heard a lot about Ed Lyles. Tom Mantooth he is one of the original Mantooths around Lufkin. You've heard about a lot of them. He is one of the original Mantooths. Do you know Massingill that has the meat market? Ed Massingill, his wife was Tom Mantooth's sister. I bought lots of meat from Ed. We raised a few calves there and he would kill them for me, processed them and all. His wife is Tom's younger sister.

JG: Marcus, McCarthy, Melton, Mims.

GM: Mims, I knew Mims. Forest Mims, he worked out of Houston practically all the time but he had some relatives here in Lufkin too. Edgar Moore, there were several of these Moores. Edgar Moore was one, Edgar was I believe retired when I went to work, but a G. Moore and then we had a George Moore that was still firing here and fired a long time. He was an old fireman that turned down promotions for engineer and he fired all his

life. A fact of business he fired for me quite a bit there in his later years. You can't tell which one of them I don't believe George was on there in 1921. But I heard lots of stories about Edgar Moore and Moughon. He was an old engineer when I went to work went on the switch engine here pretty soon after I went to work, lived right up here on North First all his life. Newman is that who that is?

JG: Yes, Mullins and then Newman.

GM: Mullins, I knew Mullins and Newman. C. Nunn is that who that is? Nunn, Connie Nunn was one of my favorite engineers.

JG: Yes, C. Nunn, Connie Nunn.

GM: Connie Nunn was one of my favorite engineers.

JG: Why was he your favorite?

GM: Oh he was a good engineer and he liked me that had a whole lot to do with it. We were both Masons and I joined the Masonic Lodge over there and he was a good Mason. I don't know what you know about the Masonic Lodge; probably know a few people that is in it.

JG: I know Mr. Burke.

GM: And you know Carl Lively too. Carl Lively got his fifty-year pin last year. He lived when I was telling you about living in that apartment on North First right there on the corner of Fred and North First, the lady that owned that. I had one of them apartments there when I went in the service. We sub-rented that out to another couple. It was our furniture. I sub-rented it out to them until I got out of the service. They moved out and I moved right back in to the apartment where we lived before I went in the military. See I was real close, we went to work up there at the round house up there. All units worked right there, wasn't 300 yards across there to go to work from where I lived. That is the reason us old fellows lived in that apartment complex.

JG: And you were talking about going on freight service you never knew when you would be called. I guess you'd be called, they called you by phone or would the guy come around.

GM: If you didn't have a telephone if you lived within a mile from the roundhouse they would walk to your house and give you a personal call. There was somebody that is all they did. We didn't have to have telephone, but most of us did. You didn't have a telephone they would walk and come to your house and give you a call within an hour.

JG: Let's see we got Paine, Paxton, Peppard.

GM: I knew Walter Peppard, that is who that was Walter Peppard. He was local chairman for the fireman when I went to work. Your local chairman represented your class of service that you were in there.

JG: What does RRB stand for? See how they have that little stamp RRB? Is that the Railroad Brotherhood?

GM: Well, that is what I am looking at.

JG: Not all of them have it.

GM: Walter Peppard there was the local chairman. Sid Robinson is that who that is?

JG: Sid Robinson.

GM: I knew him well, I knew him well too, worked with him a long time. He was famous for blowing the whistle on the steam engine, he would blow that whistle and could do a pretty good job.

JG: How would he blow it, can you describe it?

GM: Well the amount of steam that he put through there would make different sounds along. Nearly everybody that blew an old steam whistle had their own way of doing it.

JG: But he had a very distinct one?

GM: Yes, he had a distinct blow that you could tell Sid Robinson was coming through. Andy Robinson was his son; I graduated from high school with him. Arnold Tompkins, did you know Arnold Tompkins? I worked with his daddy, Jim Tompkins, out there.

JG: Now did people like Sid Robinson, say the old time steam engineers when you first started working did they pretty much have their particular locomotive or did they just decide to work what ever.

GM: They worked whatever come in.

JG: Whatever came in, they didn't really have it

GM: That is what you got; you didn't select your engine.

JG: Not like in the very, very old days.

GM: Well in the old days people when the log crew they had their engine and they called that their engine. But, when you were working for Southern Pacific railroad you work what ever they send up, whatever they send out there.

JG: Whatever they give you. So he had to do his whistle on different whistles all the time.

GM: Well the whistles didn't it was steam. It depended on the amount of steam.

JG: Right.

GM: There was no distinct

JG: Well and ours as Mr. Jay tells me we don't have much that much range.

GM: The range is

JG: You got to have a range there.

GM: I expect Jay could blow a whistle on them old steam engines. How old is Jay?

JG: He is ninety-two.

GM: I seen him the other day, I knew Jay was a good bit older than I, of course you know eight years is a lot of difference and back there years ago but it's not that much difference now. Ninety-two.

JG: ninety-two, he'll be ninety-three in September.

GM: I'll be eighty-five in July. I retired at 62. You can retire with a full pension then if you had 30 years; of course I had 41. Lots of changes in the railroad and I had been gone away from home. I worked road jobs as much as I could. I worked until I retired. Lots of change in the operation of the railroad in the later five or six years that I worked. They didn't care if a person had very much experience in the railroad business. If you had a college degree, they didn't hire somebody that knew what they were doing, they just, about like it would be if I come down there and try to tell you how to run that place down there. Get over to these Runnels there.

JG: Yes, quite a few of them. I think there's some more Runnels in some other departments. This is just

GM: There wasn't but one Runnels still working when I went to work. This was Cy Runnels is what we called him.

JG: Yes, you told me that O. E. Runnels was Pete Runnels dad.

GM: O. E. Runnels was Pete Runnels daddy, the baseball player. O. E. had retired just before I went to work. I knew him and went to school with his daughter. He had a son

named O.E. and had a son named Dave. He had a daughter named Louise and Pete was the youngest one in the family. Of course Pete went to Rice University after high school in baseball and football both. But I think he put in two years down there and signed up with the Red Sox. He didn't finish at Rice but he did go to Rice. He had a scholarship to Rice. Even back in those days that was some pretty good baseball in Abe Martin. There you are there, L. G. Tompkins. That is Arnold Tompkins's daddy. Arnold was a pilot and he worked for Diboll down there. He was copilot quite a bit with that boy you talked about the other day.

JG: Breckenridge?

GM: No.

JG: Lindsey.

GM: Lindsey, Billy Lindsey, he co-piloted with Billy a lot. Arnold's got a sister and he lived up around North First Street. I went to school and graduated from high school and worked with his daddy on the railroad down there.

JG: Did ya'll have any children, you and your wife?

GM: Yes, had a daughter and a son.

JG: A son.

GM: My daughter was down there with me the other day.

JG: That is right, that is right.

GM: I think you met her, didn't you?

JG: Sure did.

GM: My daughter is 61 years old, last weekend was her husband's 45th graduation and they had that here last weekend, that is what they were doing here. Not last weekend, the weekend they were down here. His name is Maxey. They lived right up the street here on Tom Temple. He was raised up there around all those railroad men on Fred Street back in there.

JG: What about your son?

GM: My son is 57 years old, 58 years old last Sunday a week ago. He was in music most of his life, ministry of music. He was a foreign missionary for five years in Japan, he and his wife. His son was born over there. At two years old they found out he was a diabetic and they couldn't handle that over there. None of the food was labeled and they suggested

he resign and come back to the states, which he did. He came to Clovis, New Mexico as minister of music out there at the First Baptist Church in Clovis, New Mexico for seven years. About eight or nine years ago he came back to the First Baptist Church in Burney, right out of San Antonio. They called him to their music ministry. He was minister of music there up until three years ago. They have had lots of change in music in the last few years. He didn't study that type of music in school and an associate of pastor job came open and he took that. He was called as their associate pastor. That is what he is doing right now.

JG: He didn't take an interest in it I guess what I'm getting at, did he have any interest in railroad since his father worked for the railroad?

GM: I didn't insist on that. It takes you away from your family a lot. We insisted that our children go to college, and it never was any problem. It was just like public school they wasn't through with schooling until they went to college. They both got a master degree in their field. My daughter is an artist. She goes all over the world teaching seminars.

JG: Did she paint those paintings up there?

GM: She painted those paintings. There are some back there in the other rooms. That is a place that we had out in the mountains in Arizona. I lived out there with them two or three different times, felt funny. He wasn't really interested in working railroads and I sure didn't encourage him. He was called to be a full time Christian service at an early age when he was about 15 years old and that was his goal in life. He was called into foreign mission field. He had to give that up and came back and went right back in his music. As I say, he is the associate pastor up in Burney right now and is suppose to retire there. He built him a nice home about six or seven years ago out in one of the larger ranch areas that they took in about five thousand acres out there and they sold three to seven acres lot. He has a three-acre lot and a nice home out there. That is where he hopes to stay.

JG: Well all right.

GM: My daughter and son-in-law he has worked in the aircraft industry most of his life. They cut out that aircraft that he was working for in Phoenix and he went to work selling aircraft engines for a company out of Czechoslovakia. He is their sales person here in the United States. They have their own plane, a little cub; they fly in here most of the time when they come down here. It's a long way to Phoenix, Arizona.

JG: Well all right Mr. Meadows I sure appreciate it. I'll turn off the tape now. Thank you very much.

GM: Well you are welcome.

TAPE STOPPED

TAPE RE-STARTED

JG: I was just asking Mr. Meadows if he was in any collisions.

GM: I had one pretty bad collision. I was fireman on the local at the time up at Paxton, just east of Paxton there on the main line; the local had stopped on the main line there. They didn't have a flag out but about a hundred yards and we ran into the rear end of it. Tore up things pretty good.

JG: Were you able to slow down any at all?

GM: Very little, very little. I jumped off, I didn't ride it into it because about two thirds of that caboose was right up in my seat there by the time I

JG: A steel caboose? Was that a steel caboose?

GM: Yes, broke my arm and tore up all the ligaments in this right shoulder. I was in the hospital about three weeks there in Houston. We still at that time had our hospital down there, well I was first in the hospital here in Lufkin and the ambulance brought me in here and then transferred me down there. It took me about 3 years to get completely over that. I had to go to a special doctor down there that put me on some exercises to limber it up. I don't have good use of it up there.

JG: Where you jumped what was the terrain like?

GM: I went down the ladder, it was on one of those old type diesels we had. I went out the door and out on the side and got off pretty fast.

JG: So it was a cab unit that you jumped off of. But I mean was it on a high field or did you have to fall a pretty good ways?

GM: No, I hit pretty quick. I went down the bottom of the ladder just like you climb up on.

JG: About what speed were you still going?

GM: I expect we were going 20 miles an hour when we hit. I have no idea.

JG: Any collisions with automobiles or trucks?

GM: We had quite a few. All together the entire railroad life, you get hit by a few automobiles. There was a lot of people that try to out run the trains. If they are trying to out run you if they don't lose their nerve they are going to make it. If it's a tie they always lose.

JG: In any of those cases did the automobiles actually run into you?

GM: No, most of them that got hit on there they didn't even see you. If they see you and try to out run you they are going to make it. But, most of your automobiles that you hit they don't ever see you.

JG: What about animals or anything, did you hit any cows?

GM: Oh yes but that is no problem, just the animals on there the ones they lose, the cow catcher there moves them off the track.

JG: While we got the tape going, anything you care to share about the union, just your experiences of working with the union?

GM: Well the union and your representative can deal with the railroad companies a lot better than any individual can. The railroad companies would rather deal with them like that through collective bargaining and it works out better for the employer and the employee. We kind of got behind in salary wages during the war because the railroad unions didn't push the government during the war. They were working moving merchandise. They didn't receive any raises there. Hard working conditions didn't improve for about 4 years during the war.

JG: Now during World War I the government took over the railroad so they may not have wanted to push things maybe.

GM: Didn't want to push it that much and they didn't want to cause any transportation problems because we had too many men overseas. Lots of difference in war today than it was with war then. It took a while for us to catch up with wages and working conditions there after the war. It worked out pretty good, like I say, it ended up I was getting five weeks vacation and didn't get any when I started out. Wage conditions helped a lot too.

END OF INTERVIEW