Thomas Nowak Interview
Local 849 Union Hall
Ypsilanti, Michigan
September 20, 2000
Transcribed by Daniel Clark

DC: [setting up microphone] I usually start out with pretty basic questions, um, such as where were you born? I'd like to know a little more about your background and all.

TN: I was born in Detroit, Michigan.

DC: Were you? OK, you're from Detroit.

TN: Yes, yeah.

DC: And do you mind telling me when you were born?

TN: 1921.

DC: OK, wow.

TN: Quite a while ago.

DC: I guess so. Were your parents from Detroit as well?

TN: Yes, both my parents were. I think my mother, originally—there was relation in Toledo. And they had relations in Detroit, so that's how my wife, or my mother and father got together, I guess. And we lived in Horatio in Detroit. I was born in Horatio.

DC: In Horatio. Where is Horatio?

TN: It's in Detroit.

DC: But what part of the city?

TN: Uh, well I think it would be, uh, south, no it would be the west side—I think it's kind of the west side of, around Livernois. Livernois? Yeah, I think around Livernois. Because my grandparents were over in that area. So I assume that's where they were, right in there. So we—well, I was about three years old when I come to Dearborn. And my father, I think—if I remember, he worked for Ford's. I think he was either with the Fire, or with the Security people. I think. I'm not sure of that [mumbles]. And then after that, my father, he went into business for himself. He had a bar in Dearborn, and we went from Dearborn, for about, I think I was about sixteen, fifteen, I went to Belleville. And that's why I've been in Belleville ever since then.

DC: Since about 1950, you think?

TN: Pardon?

DC: Since about 1950, you say?

TN: Oh no. Before that. I would be about sixteen, seventeen years old.

DC: Oh, when you were sixteen or seventeen, OK. All right.

TN: So I'm still in Belleville, and what else can I say?

DC: Well, that's fine. Can you describe your neighborhood—I guess you moved to Dearborn when you were three, so that be—I doubt you remember where you were born—but can you remember what it was like when you were a child?

TN: Yes, some I can. It was off of Cherry Hill and—geez, I can't think of that now—it was right on Telegraph, on Telegraph. And, in fact there was only one house there for many years, for four, five, six years, and then they had about three or four houses down beyond us. I think it was Waverly. I'm not sure where it was. And in my education, I started out at the Sacred Heart in Dearborn. It's a Catholic school. And I think I was there about a year, 2 years, and I went in to Lindbergh School—I think they called it Lindbergh School. At that time, I think Lindy was [stutters a bit—seems like he wanted to say popular] I'm not saying the word yet! So anyhow, it was a big deal—I guess that was the reason why they named the school for Lindy—for One-Way Lindy—what'd they call him, Lucky Lindy? Lucky Lindy I guess they called him. That was about '35, '6, '7? I don't remember those dates. I was just a little kid at that time.

DC: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

TN: Yes I have. I had 3 sisters and 2 brothers besides myself. There was six of us altogether.

DC: OK. Where did you fit in?

TN: Well, I was the smallest—the youngest. And I had one sister younger than me. And two brothers and two sisters, they were older than I. And we stayed in Dearborn there, on Telegraph, for probably—my mind is way back—I imagine it was about 1935, we went to east, that would be west Dearborn, at that time. And that's when my Dad got the bar. He had a bar there. And we stayed there for quite some time, probably five, seven years, somewhere in there, until we went to Belleville at that time.

DC: Do you recall what it was like living in Dearborn during the Depression?

TN: Yes. It was kind of tough at times. I remember that, well, Ford was right there. The Rouge, right there. And one of the things I do remember as a kid, my Dad, he would come early in the morning—there would be five or six or seven guys that would come by,

and they'd want a shot, a beer and a shot, you know, to go to work in the morning. Can you imagine that! And about the same people would come back in the evening to do the same thing again. So they had a—it was hard, I'm sure it was. You know, labor was terrible, you know. You had to have a Ford, you know that, or you didn't drive into that parking lot. If you didn't have a Ford. And those little things like that. And the Service men, they [??]. They watched everything. And you had to have that badge on, you know, on your chest, or somewheres around there. They had to see that badge all the time. And they had all kinds of rules and regulations. And them were the good old days, when you couldn't go to the bathroom unless the boss told you to do so. Well it did do that until the '40s really, believe it or not. Shortly after that, I guess, after the union got in, let's see, at that time, I went to the Ford Motor Company in '40, or '41. I was in the military at the time—or I volunteered really. My wife and I were going together, and we were thinking about—we know that we were going to get into—I don't know if we were go into a war. We getting into military. And they said you could go for one year, and you would get your obligation good. So, that's why my wife and I, we decided we'd wait that year. And she was still in school at that time too. And I was working for Milan, in Milan, Michigan. And we figured out that the year that I would get into—well it was the National Guard, is what it was. I volunteered. We [pause] . . .

DC: Do you remember when you got married?

TN: In '42. December the 5th, 1942. And as I said, at that time there, I was in Milan, and [pause]—I got to think.—yeah, I'd say at that time, I went into the military, and the day I went in the military, my boss come along and he says that I have to—that the Rouge is on strike. Everybody's got to clear out except me. And he said I'm on military, so he would let me finish the day. He gave me fifteen minutes short—he wouldn't give me my eight hours. He cut, shut me off a little bit there. I don't know why, but he had some reason. And I remember the day I left there, he come around and he told me that he was going to shut you off a little early, because we were on strike.

DC: So you were in the National Guard, but also working in the Rouge Plant?

TN: No no. I worked—no—I worked for *Milan*. That was in Milan. I worked in Milan, Michigan.

DC: And what was that job, exactly.

TN: Well, that was coil building. That's where you build the—what else did we build in there?—it was coils, and some other thing, some little, small job we had there. You know, the funniest thing—in my mind, I still remember, before that, you couldn't go on the Ford Motor Company property if you had a cigarette in your hand. You had to shut it off before you got in the plant—it was a plant, yeah, it was our little plant there. And I remember one incident—we'd shift, the shift would change every thirty days, I believe it was, something like that. And I was on afternoons at one time, and things were slow. So the foreman, he come along—you see they had the mill, soybean mill right behind there. It was Ford Motor stuff. And anyhow, I was supposed to go help this fellow pick up, fill

up some sacks of soybeans and stuff. And so, OK, I walked over, I couldn't find him. I hollered, and I was looking around, and I went outside-and like I say, we were not supposed to smoke at that time. And this particular man, he was there. He was upstairs there, and he was having a cigarette. I could see him in the smoke you know. And when he sees me, the cigarette went—disappeared [laughs]. That's sort of a thing—I remember thinking about that, a long time ago.

DC: Yeah.

TN: Foolish thing they did, you know.

DC: How did you end up working in Milan? You were living in Dearborn, weren't you?

TN: No, no. I was in Belleville.

DC: OK, I'm losing track. Of . . .

TN: Maybe I'm getting ahead of myself.

DC: I'll catch up with you here. That's OK. So you moved to Belleville, and . . .

TN: I lived in Belleville there . . .

DC: So how did you get that job in Milan?

TN: Well, I worked for Peninsula Paper Company in Ypsilanti here.

DC: OK.

TN: And I had a little—I was in there maybe two years, or thereabouts.

DC: And when did you start that job?

TN: That was back in '39 I think it was. '38, yeah, '37, '38. I'm not sure. But anyhow, the reason I went in there, my friend and I, we had a little union activity there, and the company didn't like it at all.

DC: So what exactly did you do?

TN: Well I worked—well I was—made papers for—at that time they were making the notices for the draft, you know. That was paper.

DC: Printing business?

TN: Yeah, it was printing, yeah. And they run these papers out there, and they would cut them into size, and what have you, and they were printed for the government, is what they were. But anyhow after that time, I had this activity with the union.

DC: What was your activity? What did you do?

TN: Well, we were trying to organize the paper—what did they call us, the Papermakers? Or what was I? I can't remember what it was. But my buddy and I, we got canned. So anyhow, and I think I was on unemployment for three months, two months maybe, two months. And our parish priest—I don't know, we got talking to him one time. He was talking to me about it, and he asked me what happened. And I told him, "I'm unemployed right now." He said, "Well you know, I have a friend in Milan." The priest was from Milan at that time. And he says, "I'll talk to my friend." And he give me a letter, and that's the way we used to get employed—through somebody. A friend, or a letter, or something. And he give me this letter, and the foreman—or the superintendent, it was—he come along, and he called me, and said that, you know, I got a job if you want to go there. So I did. So that's how I got into Ford Motor Company.

DC: Let's jump back for a second.

TN: Sure.

DC: What was it about the paper job that made you want a union?

TN: Well, there was nothing there. You didn't get no breaks, hardly at all. There was nothing there, you know. And it was production, there was a production of some type. You kept going, kept going all the time. There was—like you say, the conditions were really not very good at that time. We used to have a place to change your clothes and take a shower, if you wanted, I guess. And that was a filthy place in there. They never did take care of it very good. And we never did ever use the place, just to change clothes. That's about all we did at that time there. And there were some other things there that we—well, of course, the money was not very good there either. Of course at that time there was—I don't remember what it was—it was probably thirty cents an hour, I imagine. Something like that. And they didn't give you much of a promotion at all. There was no such a thing like that. But we had to—we worked two shifts, twelve hours a day. That was before the—well, when they started to have the, what do you call it, the notices for the government, you know, for drafting—for drafts. Draft notices, is what it was. And they worked us twelve hours a day, seven days a week.

DC: Really?

TN: Yeah, they kept it going there. And that's—my friend and I, we got talking about it, and we complained and grumbled. And before long, they canned us both.

DC: Well, you would have been very young at that point in time.

TN: I was probably about eighteen, eighteen. I imagine I was about eighteen.

DC: So how did it even occur to you to try to organize a union? Had you heard of unions, or, how did that idea come to you?

TN: Well, yes, and we did know a little bit about them. Because we had—see the Papermakers—I guess they were Papermakers at that time—they were—well [?] antiunion, pretty much at that time. And most everybody was trying to get—*bettering* themselves. And get the conditions better. And managements, of course, were always against this. So that was one of the reasons we complained about, that, you know, we just didn't think it was fair that we didn't get as much, how would you say that, [pause] oh geez, I can't say the word I want to say, but anyhow, you—I can't hardly say what I want to say.

DC: That's OK. I have many moments like that.

TN: Yeah.

DC: Did anyone in your family, even your extended family, ever belong to a union?

TN: None that I know of. No. Like I say, my father, he was always a businessman, or something. And the rest of my family, my mother's, they were the same thing—businessmen. And, yeah, they were all in some business. I was the only one who didn't have any business [laughs].

DC: So then you moved on to the job in Milan, all right. And you said that was a coil-making plant.

TN: Yeah, making coils, yeah.

DC: OK. And what exactly was your job, when you first got in at Milan?

TN: Well, I was making—I'll try to think—it was strips of metal. We used to bend them, so that we could put them inside of the case of coil, is what it was. They were metal strips, and we would bend them and put them in that case there, and then they would put it in tar—I believed they used to put it—there was electrical equipment. There was wires in there. And they would seal it with tar—tar and, I think, some wax. They had some wax—I can't remember—they used to have hot wax, for some reason. And they would seal that together. I think that's how they sealed it. I don't know how they did that. But that's what it was. We used to bend these—they were like a horseshoe. And put them in there. It was so many pieces, so many strips—I think it was fourteen strips on each side there. And we'd bend them and put them in the casing there.

DC: How long did it take to learn how to do that job?

TN: Oh, I don't know, about an hour [laughs].

DC: Who taught you how to do it?

TN: Well, the utility men, they called them. I guess they called them utility. They still do, at this day, they call them utility men.

DC: Are they the ones who know a lot about a lot of different jobs?

TN: Yeah, they, yeah.

DC: They fill in?

TN: Like, say, they didn't have any breaks. When they had a break, they all had a break. If I remember, we'd have a five-minute break, and we'd go to the bathroom, whatever we wanted to do, and then you start all over again. And if you had an emergency, then you'd have your utility man come along and relieve you, or whatever you had to do. Similar to what they still do today, I guess.

DC: How did the working conditions compare with the paper plant?

TN: Well, it was much better at Ford's than it was—but they were strict too. I noticed one incident—a couple of things I'll tell you. One thing, they didn't actually said you had to be clean, you had to be clean, but you don't have to have clean overalls and stuff like that in the plant. And they would stress that it was a good job—you never did get very dirty. And one friend of mine, the boss come along and called him on the side there, and he took off for about an hour, an hour and a half. Come to find out what it was, he had manure on his shoes, and they run him out of there and he told him he had to get those shoes cleaned up. So he had to go back and get his shoes, different shoes on. It was one of those things they had to do, you know.

DC: I can imagine if I worked next to him I'd want him to change his shoes.

TN: Yeah, right! I can understand that too, see. Most of them were farmers in that area. Yeah, in Belleville, and Romulus, and in Milan, Belleville out there too in that area. It was mostly all small farms in there. That's why—they had a lot of cows there, so that's where the manure come from. So I remember the one incident, they told him he had to take off, he says, and get them shoes cleaned up. The job was clean. It was pretty good. And we used to switch every thirty days, I think it was, from the afternoons to days. Well I had different jobs. I was a checker, what they call a checker. I would stamp—it was OK if the thing wasn't leaking or anything. They would stamp it—a while ago they called me—I guess it was a checker. I think they called me a checker at that time. And I would check that to see that it wasn't leaking—the tar wasn't leaking out of there or anything like that. And then, all the—what was it—the terminals were on there right. They had threaded terminals up in there—yeah, I guess it was a threaded piece up there where the connections from whatever part of the engine the ignition went through.

DC: Did you find many coils that were faulty, that you had to turn back?

TN: No, not much. No, the only thing you get some leak—you would see some leak in there once in awhile. And I don't remember how they did do that. I think they would tear them down again, and then start it all over again. I'm not sure. But that was the biggest thing. There were some leaks. There always were some, you know. Sometimes the casing—I think it was Bake-o-lite. I think they called it Bake-o-lite at that time. It was a brown-looking thing there, and it would crack once in awhile because of the heat. I think it was the heat, or something, and that's why the tar would leak out of there.

DC: Sure.

TN: So we'd check that out, and I think they would take and strip it down, and salvage what they needed to. And then they would start all over again.

DC: Yeah. Back when you were bending the metal, and all, how were you paid on that? Were you paid by the hour?

TN: Yeah, it was hourly.

DC: Hourly?

TN: Hourly, yeah.

DC: And how long were your shifts?

TN: Uh, eight hours. Eight hours. Yeah. Always eight hours.

DC: So this would have been after the Fair Labor Standards Act, and all that.

TN: Yeah, right. One thing they did used to do in Milan, they would let us—well they wouldn't let us—we'd have a half-hour lunch, and we'd have to run to the bank, which was about three blocks down in Milan there, to the paymaster, and they would have—your money would be in an envelope. And you'd have to look—you know, after you got the money, they would put whatever your hourly rate was there, and you would have to check it out. But you would have the paymaster, he would check everybody out that you had your badge on, and all that, sort of like that. So that was one of the things we had, but it was on our own. We had to do that on our own.

DC: Now was this to collect your pay?

TN: Yeah, to get our pay, yeah. I think it was on Ssss—yeah Friday. Friday? Pay was always on Friday.

DC: So you'd run out of the building and go down to the bank.

TN: Yeah, yeah, go to the bank. We would line up and get our—it was all cash. And they'd always give us—and I think they used to always get a $2 bill in there, for some reason. It was pretty popular, they had the $2 bill.

DC: Now would that be at the very end of your shift, or would you go out during lunch hour?

TN: It would be lunch. Yeah, lunch.

DC: So would you still have time to eat?

TN: Well, it was the only time, because after that, why—why, I don't know how, if you went there, how they ever got your—the paymaster was only for an hour, or something, or a half hour. I don't know what it was.

DC: Yeah.

TN: And if you went there next week, you'd have to get your money back, or wait for your money. I don't know how they—I can't remember whatever happened. We were always on line. I know that. We got there in line.

DC: Was it a long line?

TN: Well, there was probably fifty people—about fifty to sixty people, something in there. It was an odd thing, I remember that. We used to run down. Rain or snow or whatever, you run down there, and then your lunch, and away you'd go.

DC: So did you move from that metal-bending job to the checker job?

TN: Yeah, it was one of those jobs. Well, whatever was needed, or what job you needed. They had no specific—like they did now, where you have a certain task that you do and that was it. Now you took anything—whatever the foreman told you to do, that's what you did. And that's how you did it.

DC: Did you like—or, how would you compare the checker job with the first job? Was it a better job for you?

TN: Yes it is. It was. It was. I didn't have to cut my—well, when you first started, you cut your fingers, you know. You learn how to do those things there. And after awhile, you toughened up your fingers, and all that sort of stuff. And then after awhile—it was a simple job. All I had to do is see that it wasn't leaking anyplace, and if it wasn't leaking, I'd put a stamp on there. I put a little stamp on there that they were OK. And they'd move it along there, and if they had a bad one, he would, he wouldn't stamp it, and it would go down into the—where was it?—it wasn't the scrap. They didn't scrap much of anything at all. It was reject. It was a reject.

DC: OK.

TN: So they would just put it on the side, and then the repairman—I guess he was the repairman, he would repair whatever they had to take care of it, or whatever needs to be done.

DC: So how did you go about getting that checker job? How did you go about moving from one job to another back then?

TN: Foreman just come, and one day he says, "This job over here. Come on and take the checker's job."

DC: So he told you what to do.

TN: That's right.

DC: All right, yeah. Were there other jobs you had your eye on in the plant?

TN: Well, no, you never did—well, there was, what they call—what did they call them? Winders? Yeah, they were winders. They were the higher-paid ones. And I never was, never was considered as one of them myself, because they had—they were all men. There was no women there at that time, by the way.

DC: OK. No women in the plant at all?

TN: No women at all in that place. Not at all. And there was probably fifteen of these winders. And they were the better job. They had more pay. I was just an assembler, is all I was. Most everybody was, all assemblers. But if you got a little better job, like—I think I did get a little pay increase for checker, as a checker. I think got three cents or four cents more an hour, something like that. And I do remember that, yeah. Yeah, they did. I guess they had more expensive [laughs], or more experience. I was worth a little more I guess, or something.

DC: So were you in the National Guard at this point as well?

TN: Yes, I was.

DC: You were.

TN: Yes. I think I went in—see I went in there for a three-year hitch. I think they still do that. And, I don't know, I was young—and in fact, my brother, he talked me into it really. And he thought it was a big deal there. So we went to Grayling, and we went to Wisconsin—first time I was ever in a train in my life, we went to Wisconsin. And so we—it was, well—how did you do that—once a month we would—yeah, once a month we would meet in the Armory in Detroit. It was on Bush and Pequot [sp?], I think, if I can remember. And then, say right after that, the war started—well, they were talking about the war, and so on and so forth. So all of a sudden we come to find out that we're

in the Army. And I went into—where did I go?—Kentucky. Knox. Ft. Knox. I went there. And after that, I went to [Fort] Leonard Wood, in Missouri. And I spent the rest of my time, off and on, there, training in there.

DC: Now did you have to leave your Milan job to go off to Ft. Knox?

TN: They uh, yes. They, well at that time, they give me my leave from Ford's—my military leave. Like I said, the day I left, it was the day that Ford went on strike, in Rouge. And Walter Reuther and—I can't remember his name here—he was a member on the Overpass there [that was '37]. Well, I seen them pictures after that, but you know, I was in Milan at that time. That was when they went on strike.

DC: I was going to ask you whether or not you were aware of any organizing activity in your Milan plant.

TN: No. Never thought about it.

DC: OK.

TN: No, not at that time. I thought—I think I got my message you know [laughs].

DC: But at the same time, you were working for Ford just a few miles away from the Rouge Plant, where this was going on.

TN: Well, Rouge was twenty-five, thirty miles difference.

DC: I guess that's a long way back at that time.

TN: Yeah it is. Yeah.

DC: But you were aware that Reuther and Frankensteen and these folks were . . .

TN: Organizing. Yeah, we knew they were organizing, yeah.

DC: What did you think about their efforts?

TN: Well, I thought it was good too, because at that time, I think there was another—thing they were having, the unions were getting stronger, and I think, what's his name, the United Mine Workers?

DC: John L. Lewis.

TN: Yeah. He had things going on. And everybody's anti-union, you know [??]. Like I said, I was too young to really think too much more about the union, or anything at that time. The only thing I had was at the paper company, that I had that thing there, and it didn't work out so good.

DC: Right, right. So you left for Ft. Knox, and the National Guard got called up just as things were heating up at the Rouge Plant.

TN: Right.

DC: Did you pay any attention to events in Milan, or at the Rouge Plant, once you were off at Ft. Knox?

TN: No, I didn't. I didn't really think about it. No, we were kind of busy at that time, you know, trying to learn how to be a soldier, or whatever you were going to be there.

DC: Were you engaged at that time?

TN: Yes.

DC: But you weren't yet married, though, were you?

TN: No. At that time—that's why I was going to go in there, because my wife—she was in the 11th grade, when we started—we were going together. And at that time, it was, oh, maybe not quite a year, and we were pretty set, decided that we were going to get married. We don't date or anything, but we knew that I was going to be in there for a year—what they said, it would be a year—and my obligation would be over with, and then we could go get married, and you know, happy after, be happy all the way. So, it didn't work out. It started as a year, and it was four and a half years when I got out of the military.

DC: What was your wife doing, or your fiancé-then-wife doing during those years?

TN: Well, she worked for a company, cleaning company in Ypsilanti for awhile. And then of course the war started coming along, and the bomber was being—as a matter of fact, at that time I remember, at the paper company, they were clearing out woods and stuff at the Willow Run Plant. They were cleaning it all out. They shut off a whole bunch of roads in through there. We used to go around there, around Ecorse. And I knew, at that time, something was telling me in my mind that there's something going on for some reason. And they knew there was going to be an airplane manufacturing place. We didn't know what it was, at that time, but that's what it was—Willow Run was being made right at that time. And my wife, she worked at Willow Run for about a year, almost. Of course, after I got married, why then my wife, she would follow me around. I went to California; I went to Louisiana; and we went to Carolinas, and then we went up to New York. Yeah, that was the last one I went to, New York. And then I shipped out overseas.

DC: Where did you go overseas?

TN: I went to Europe. I went to Europe.

DC: And when was that? At what point in the war?

TN: Must be '43, '4, somewhere in there. God, I can't remember. I can hardly remember that.

DC: So, do you remember how you felt heading over to Europe?

TN: Well, at that time, I was very sad, because—I'd say, my wife and I, we went to New Rochelle, New York. And I knew—I didn't know, but we knew, eventually we were going someplace. We knew that. We were on an island, you see. Ft. Sloman [perhaps Ft. Slocum?] in New York. And I had—like I say, I had called my wife—it was in the winter, and my wife, she come—well I went back to Michigan, and I picked her up. In fact, she had just changed a week before that from California to the East Coast, and just changed clothes real quick, and went back—well, it was overnight. Yeah, just overnight. We were on a train, we come back, and I found an inn in New Rochelle, New York. And we stayed about ten days I think. It was about ten days. And one day, it come along, and I come to find out that, no more passes. I didn't know what to do. I didn't know, but there was one lady from the PX there—she worked in the post there—and she lived in New Rochelle. And I got talking to her, I said, "My wife," you know, "Can I get a message"—you couldn't get no messages, you know. So I says that, you know, she wants to—that I'm going to ship out, and go on back to Michigan. And she—I give her a little letter for her, this woman. And it was real nice. They come to find out that very fortunately, my wife got pregnant that weekend.

DC: Oh, wow.

TN: I didn't know about that either until quite sometimes. When I was overseas, told me that "I think you're going to be a father."

DC: Wow. So you had to leave your wife and at that point you didn't even realize that you had a baby on the way.

TN: Yeah. Yeah.

DC: So did your wife go back to Michigan?

TN: Yes she did.

DC: And what did she do back there?

TN: Well, she—I think she went to the bomber plant there for awhile, because at the time she was pregnant. And I think it was a matter of, maybe, a couple of months, that she quit. And her sister, the same thing. They were pregnant at the same time. So she stayed home on the farm. So she stayed there all the time.

DC: So her family had a farm?

TN: Yeah, they had a farm, yeah.

DC: Where was that farm?

TN: It was on Willis, in Willis, Michigan. You know, it's down there. Yeah, they had—the place is still there. The old—the father now is long gone, and he passed it on to the son. And he's still working the farm.

DC: Is that right?

TN: Yeah, he's still doing good.

DC: So, your brother-in-law.

TN: Yeah.

DC: Is your wife still living?

TN: No. About a year and a half ago she passed away.

DC: I'm sorry.

TN: Me too. I wish you wouldn't say that [crying].

DC: I'm sorry. We'll stop for a minute. [turns off the tape recorder]

DC: [after a break] I want to talk, or ask a couple questions about your service, in Europe. What did you face when you got to Europe?

TN: Well, we were—I landed in Scotland, and we went over the Irish Sea, went overnight, and we wound up in Belfast, Ireland. And I went to a little town of [Moi?]. Moi, Ireland, is where I was at. I was stationed there. And it was in December. My birthday is—and I was overseas at that time. I was in ocean, right there. And we stayed there in Ireland, I think, let's see, December, January, February, March—four months. A little over four months. And then we moved over into, to England. And we were there another two months almost. Let's see it would be March, April, May, June. Yeah, about two and a half months, and then the invasion come in in December, I mean in June 6. June the 6th.

DC: Were you a participant in D-Day?

TN: Yes I was.

DC: You were.

TN: Well, I didn't go on D-Day. I was on the 15th.

DC: OK.

TN: I was fifteen days after the invasion. As a matter of fact, I was there this year. My son works for Ford Motor Company, and he's in Germany. And my wife and I wanted to go back to France, on the beach, where we went down the beach, and all that stuff. And I had a good buddy of mine—he's buried right now in Luxembourg—[Ham?] Luxembourg he's at, right now. He got killed right alongside of me. And I wanted to see him. And my wife and I—we wanted to do this several times. We never did do it. So we had this opportunity. My son was there, and my daughter, and we went to Normandy. And we went down the same roads, just about, where I went—that I could remember. You know, I couldn't remember all those things. So we wound up in Luxembourg, where my buddy's buried there. So that was the main reason I wanted to go to Europe, to see him—of course I wanted to see the family, the kids. You know I've got two grandkids—or nieces I should say—no, they're grandchildren.

DC: Yeah. So you were in combat.

TN: Yes. Went through the Bulge—the Battle of the Bulge. Well, I was two villages just before that. And that's where I—I was wounded up in that area there. And this is where my good buddy died right alongside of me. So it was a sad day there too.

DC: Absolutely. We're touching on many such moments.

TN: Yeah, I know. It was a terrible war. I think that many, many times, these young fellows, eighteen, nineteen years old, didn't have a chance. Didn't have a chance, you know. That was it. Life was gone. I was fortunate—I was wounded, but for some reason or another, I don't know, someone's watching over me—my wife, or somebody. She was watching me or something. And that was—a lot of times it come pretty close, and all.

DC: What happened after you were wounded?

TN: Well, they put me in a hospital there, in Metz, is it Germany-France, I think it's in France. I don't know. Or is it Belgium? It's right on the border there. I stayed there—well, the surgeon took care of it. Just a little shot in here. I said that time—I knew my buddy—I talked to him just a few minutes—and the medics come along and said, "Hey buddy," he says—they moved me over someplace else, and at that time I didn't really realize it, but I do know it—this is when my buddy died that day. I know that. Because I was talking to him. His name was Ken. Anyhow—they [?] me out of—well I was wounded—I guess they called me walking wounded.

DC: Did you know Ken before you were in the service?

TN: Yes. No I didn't. No I didn't. No, he's from Chicago. It's just—we were from all over the world here, I mean all over the United States. And he was a good friend at that time. He was a good buddy. So anyhow, I was there about three weeks or so, and then they

moved me back into combat again. Same unit. So we went back, and we finished the war over there.

DC: Where were you when the war ended?

TN: I was in Luxem—Czechoslovakia.

DC: Really.

TN: Trying to think of the doggone town. It's almost got a Jewish name, but it's not Jewish. I should always remember that doggone thing. It'll come to my mind. We were there after the war. That's why I was—Czechoslovakia.

DC: Where were your grandparents from?

TN: Well, I think they're from Poland. I'm almost certain that they are. Now, I know that some of my other relation, they were from Poland. I know of course we're Polish, we were. And I don't know what town, or anything where it was at. But I don't remember if my—I'm sure they must have talked Polish, because my parents could talk Polish. And I couldn't. When they wanted to talk something, if they wanted to say anything, I couldn't understand what they were saying. So anyway, I couldn't communicate with them.

DC: So you ended the war in Czechoslovakia. So when did you come home?

TN: Well, I come in '45. The—let's see, it was over in May. Yeah, it was over in May. June, July, August. June.

End of Tape I, Side A

Begin Tape I, Side B

TN: . . . the war to me, was all over in June, I think it was about June. Because the war was over in May, so it was probably about three weeks, or thereabouts—it was about three weeks. At that time they allowed us, they'd give us, points, they had. If you were in the military so long, and so forth. And anyhow, they count—they added up all these points, and I was short three points. And the reason—I had them, but they didn't have a record on it yet. I got a medal, is what it was. And it was a couple points there. It was the points—I should have been the first ones shipping out of there. We were three or four weeks later. They were flying most of them back to the states.

DC: Flying them? Not on ships?

TN: Yeah. Most of them. The first, the early ones. And after that, we were on a ship. We were on them—Kaiser's things, what do you call them.

DC: Did you come back on a ship then?

TN: Yes I did.

DC: OK. What was it like heading back?

TN: Oh, it was anxious. Anxious. You know. At that time I knew we had a son coming along, you know, and everything.

DC: Your son would have been, what, a couple of years old at that point?

TN: No, no. He was a year, just over a year.

DC: Just over a year. That's right. You left in '42. OK.

TN: And so I was anxious to get back there. And as I say, it was hot, and we had the winter clothes on yet, you know. Man, we were sweating. I came back—oh, what do you call it—they discharged me through [??] Pennsylvania. And I shipped out, and I wound up in Detroit, and my wife and my sister-in-law—and [???] and they brought me back to Belleville. They had a car. Well, she had a car. So they took me back to home.

DC: How did that feel?

TN: Oh, it was great. It was just so great. Especially that son, the little guy, you know. Yeah, it was a great, it was a great feeling. Yeah. Yeah, it was great. You don't have to worry about the war. Well, at that time I was a lineman. A telephone lineman, is what I was. With the switchboards, and some of that. That was part of my job.

DC: Was that something you just started at that point? Or had you done that before?

TN: No, no. I worked for Ford's at that time.

DC: Right.

TN: I hadn't done anything about that. My military skill—what do they call it—my military specialist, a lineman, is what I was called. A telephone lineman.

DC: OK.

TN: And that's where I learned how to do that. When right after the war, at that time, I had to make a decision, whether I wanted to go to the telephone company, which they were asking me to go to the telephone there. Everybody's looking for work, for help. And should I go back to Ford's? And at that time I said, well I don't want to go to Ford's. I don't want to go to a plant. I want to go outside, and work for a telephone company. So I made—I don't know if I did or didn't—but I really should have, or shouldn't—but

anyhow, I wound up being with the telephone company. And I think it was a bad mistake for me at that time. There was no money either. You couldn't get a rate—take it month to month, it would take you six or eight months to be considered for a promotion, I think. Plus, I went on the GI Bill, so that helped me too. I learned to be a lineman. And so I'm . . .

DC: Did you like being outside?

TN: Yes I did. That was the best, the big thing I liked. I liked the outside. I enjoyed that.

DC: How long did you do that work?

TN: Six years. About six years, yeah. Then I went to a construction outfit in Wayne. They were building the Mercury plant in Wayne at that time, and I was with a construction outfit there. Well I worked for Kaiser for about a year, and Kaiser went out of bust—they went bust, you know.

DC: Was that after you worked as a telephone lineman?

TN: Yeah, right. I went from the telephone company, I decided to go on and go back to the Ford plant. So I went to Kaiser. I worked for Kaiser for about a year and a half, two years. And then they went broke, or whatever they did. And then I went to—oh I've got to take that—also I went to Industrial Wheel, a small job in Wayne.

DC: Was this before you did construction?

TN: Yeah, yeah. Then the construction was after Kaiser, and Industrial Wire in Wayne, they called it. The call them—I think that back then—it wound up being Purolite. Purolite, I think they were.

DC: Well let me back up for a second here, because you just mentioned about four different jobs.

TN: Yeah, right.

DC: That's OK. I'm trying to stay with you here. I want to talk a little bit more about the telephone linesman work. How—what did you do on a day-to-day basis with that?

TN: We run wires, and we'd put telephone poles up. We'd line them up there, and we'd run them wires up over, hang up, put the crosswires. It was construction, is what it was.

DC: So you were laying out big lines.

TN: Yeah, right.

DC: You weren't working in homes and businesses?

TN: No no. No. On the line.

DC: On the line.

TN: Yeah, on the line.

DC: Different kind of line.

TN: Yeah, right.

DC: How big of a work crew did you have?

TN: Well there were three, the foreman, and a driver. There was five of us altogether. And that was one crew. And they would give us what our tasks for that day we had to do. Or if we had it, say, for a week or two where we had stringing the line, say—see there wasn't too much construction before, during the war, because there wasn't anybody there, I guess. So after that, really, it really was booming there. And we had to take—actually from scratch they started, because they weren't—we put our own poles in, and hang the crosswires, and pull our wires and everything up there. And we done everything, just one crew. Form time to time, if we had a big deal there, it would be two crews getting together. But as a rule, it was just one crew. And that's the way we did—we operated that way.

DC: Were you providing phone service to areas that were just being built up?

TN: Yeah, it was rural. All rural.

DC: Rural. OK. So these were people who did not have phone service.

TN: Yeah, didn't have phones at that time. Most of them didn't. Or if they did, they were few and far, you know.

DC: Were you around this area, for the most part?

TN: Yes—actually, I started out in Ann Arbor. And then they had to get—they got more crews together, they moved us to Wayne, Michigan. We had two crews at that time. We operated from Wayne all the way to Farmington—not quite to Farmington—mostly downriver, around Flat Rock, up in there, that's where I operated, mostly up in that area there.

DC: Yeah.

TN: Yeah, and where else did we go. Mostly in that area there. And through the Belleville area, and operated all the way through Wayne, and part up in there. And that was our area most of the time in there.

DC: Did you enjoy that work?

TN: Yes I did, for most of the time. I did. But there was no pay, hardly at all. And I was trying to build a house at that time too. And I had another child, of course.

DC: When was your second child born?

TN: He was born in forty—she, was a she, what was it '45, '46. In '46, shortly after I got discharged. So it was about a year after I was, yeah.

DC: How did you get along with your work crew and your foreman?

TN: Pretty good.

DC: Yeah?

TN: Yeah, we got along pretty good. The only thing is, the problem we had, this one foreman we had—and I don't want to say his name or anything—but he would listen—we were all ex-GIs you know, and we had something in common. Some were from the Pacific, and some from someplace else. And I was in Europe. And we'd talk this, that, and the other. And the foreman, he would—oh, he'd get upset all of a sudden. "Quit talking so much about that all the time!" About the Army.

DC: Was he a GI?

TN: No he wasn't. See, he was an older man at that time. And he got irked pretty many times about that.

DC: Why do you suppose he was so irked?

TN: I don't know, but for some reason, he just—we talked too much about military, about our experiences, what have you, and he didn't like that. So he would—sometimes he would take his lunch and he'd go someplace else, you know. I says, "OK." [laughs] Didn't want to be with the guys there.

DC: What did he want you to talk about?

TN: He wouldn't say—"Don't be talking about the military all of the time!" About all those things. It was our business. We had an hour for lunch. We always had an hour lunch. So we would either talk about this, that, or the other. Once in awhile, we'd have a pinochle or something going on there a little bit.

DC: Was it dangerous at all?

TN: Uh, not too much. [affect makes you think it might have been] If you watch yourself, you were all right. Out there in the winter, they had a real storm, and all the lines in Flat Rock, I remember—I was starting over there—and there was probably an inch of ice on the poles, you know. And I come down one of them, doggone, they were—we were constructing, we were changing some new wires from—new poles to old poles. And some were rotten, and what have you. And I cut out one of them one day. I fell down on my back there. I says, "I'm going to get up and get up and do it again." And I did.

DC: How high were you when you fell?

TN: Oh, I was probably, 30, 20 feet! At least 20 feet, because 30 foot was about the top.

DC: Was there any snow on the ground?

TN: Yeah, there was snow there. But there was about an inch and a half of ice in there. It was a rotten pole, is what it was. That's what it was. It cut out for me, and I just—[whoosh sound]—went down.

DC: What a surprise!

TN: But I got up, I says, "I'm going to start all over again." So I went on the other side—see either way—there's a right way and a wrong way of going on top of, of mounting a pole. If you go this way—this is the way you go up. No this is the wrong way—if you go, say you're going straight, you go straight up. If you have a crooked one that's going away from yourself, see, you would, your hooks would go up that way [giving demonstration], so you wouldn't fall underneath the thing. So there's a right way and a wrong way, see? If you're going this way, this way you'd fall down. If you went this way, you'd come down—this is the bad way. So it's the wrong way. I learned something about that really quick! [laughs]

DC: I guess so. [laughs] But you stayed on that job for six years.

TN: Yeah. It was the money, is what it was. The big money.

DC: Did you ever look around for opportunities to make more money while you were doing that job?

TN: Well, we did. We talked about it several times. As a matter of fact, they were talking—if I had the opportunity, my good friend of mine, we went into another construction outfit—we could have went—I think they called it the Buckeye, or something there. And they were recruiting linemen, all over. And they wanted me to go—I and my buddy—to Florida, to the Everglades. They needed a lot of work over there. And it was giving us premium pay, is what it would be. But I had two children. I said, "I just can't do that."

DC: Right.

TN: But, I'm glad I didn't. I probably would have stayed in Florida all my life.

DC: What was your wife doing during those years?

TN: Just homemaking.

DC: With the kids, yeah. Two young kids

TN: Yeah.

DC: That's a load.

TN: And then we'd have another one, you know.

DC: When was your third child born?

TN: Let's see, it would be '45, '50, '46, '47, somewhere around there.

DC: So then you moved on to Kaiser?

TN: Yeah, I worked for Kaiser.

DC: And what did you do there?

TN: I was a repairman. What they call it, not body—trim repair! Trim repair, that's what it was, yeah. Trim repair.

DC: And how did you go about getting that job?

TN: [pause] Hmm. How did I get that job. I jut put in an application, I guess.

DC: OK.

TN: Just an application. And at that time, see, they had—they called it the "Iron Curtain"—they had automotive—you know they're still building airplanes. And Kaiser had the other half of it there.

DC: OK.

TN: And we had—well we were transporting cars. We would spot them in a big lot—like you've got at Ford right over here. They would drive them someplace. Well, we were doing that for quite awhile. And Kaiser—I had a gold badge. If I had the gold badge, I could go through automotive, or aircraft, either one. But the other ones were restricted. But I had a gold one, so I could go both plants. So I would go through there quite a bit and see them people working on the airplanes, quite a bit.

DC: So did you work on airplanes at all, or just cars?

TN: No I didn't. I just worked for Kaiser. Just for Kaiser.

DC: But you were allowed to go through there?

TN: Yeah, I was allowed, because of my badge. So I was allowed to do that. So that was a little over a year, about a year and a half.

DC: Did you like that work?

TN: Yes, it was all right. It was real good. The money was good, and the union was in there at that . . .

DC: So did you join the union then?

TN: Oh yes, first thing. Yeah, sure. As a matter of fact, actually I was really starting to get active with the union. I was on the Veterans Committee, is what I was with. One of the guys got talking about, and we would talk about ex-GIs and whatever, and so forth. And he was the same thing. He was an ex-GI. And we got talking about it, he says, "Look it. I'd like to put you on the committee." And I said, "Well, I don't know anything about it." He says, "Well," he says, "you'll learn." And I would go in the plant in case they have some problem on their benefits, or something like that. Well I went there several times and would talk to them and see what—and we went to Battle Creek one time to se the GIs out there. So we had a trip over there. Kaiser gave us a day off, and so it was a nice thing to be out there.

DC: I forgot to ask you if you had a union with the telephone company.

TN: Uh, no. No. They were anti. Yeah, they were pretty much. We were trying—we talked at that time too. Actually, they did have a union, but it was so weak it didn't mean anything. We had a committee—what was he—was he a—I guess he was a committeeman. I think he was a committeeman, or something. And, but they would never talk about the union or anything. They were anti-union, pretty much.

DC: But you had a . . .

TN: Yeah, there was one.

DC: Do you remember which union it was?

TN: Communications—what do you call them—Communication Workers of America?

DC: OK.

TN: Yeah, because we went on strike. That's right. We were on strike for quite awhile.

DC: Tell me about that.

TN: Yeah, now I remember that.

DC: OK.

TN: That was in '46, '? And the—all the women—were all women, of course. They were the telephone operators, were women. And we went on strike. I remember that. And we were gone. I was in Wayne. And I had my turn on the picket line [stutters a bit, and laughs].

DC: Picket line.

TN: Every three days, I guess, we'd go there. And then we'd go to the hall there and see if there's anything changed, or anything, what have you. And [??] they'd give us sausage, or bologna, and sandwiches, and coffee, and stuff like that. We had all that sort of stuff there.

DC: Were you supporting the women then? Was that how it was working?

TN: Well, it was for the telephone company.

DC: Was this Michigan Bell?

TN: Bell Telephone, yeah. Bell Telephone, yeah.

DC: Yeah, yeah. I guess they hadn't split up yet at that point. It was Bell Telephone.

TN: Yeah, that's right. Yeah.

DC: So what were the issues? Why were—what was the strike about?

TN: Well labor—labor, yeah. Wages, mostly wages. Because, like I said, there was no money in it. And my wife, we'd talk many times about it. I says, "Geez, we're just barely making it. Just barely making it." And at that time I was starting to—yeah, at that time I was starting to build my house, in Belleville. I was at Wayne at that time. And I was strapped and trying to—my father-in-law wanted to give me an acre on the farm there. And that's where I was going to go there. And that's another story. My father-in-law, we didn't get along. My mother—my wife, she told me, she says, "You know, you Dad's never going to get along with you. You're not going to get along together." We never had no big arguments or anything like that. It was something that didn't match, see. And she told me, she says "Don't do this. I don't think you'll . . ." "Oh no," I says. "We'll be OK. We'll build a house over there, on the farm there. And do our thing there." So anyhow, it didn't work out. I had the material there and everything there, in this barn and everything. So I sold it—I sold it to my brother-in-law. And so I had a

piece of ground on Sumter—on Willis Road there. I got a piece of the ground in there. Well, it's not quite an acre. So that's where my—my home's still there. It's still there. So anyway, it was one of those things. I was warned, by my wife. She knew better than I did.

DC: So were the operators and the linesmen in the same union?

TN: Yes. Communications Workers of America, I think they called us.

DC: So what was the outcome of the strike? Do you remember?

TN: Well, we were out over a month. I know that. I think we did get a few dollars. I'm pretty sure we got a little better. And I think conditions got a little better. But you had to take care of your own clothes, and everything like that. You know, they never furnished you anything, other than the tools that you needed. So it was—you were on your own. I know we used those Red Hawk—or Red Heart, bib overalls. We used to have them. Everybody used those things. And we had—because they were quite expensive at that time. I think at that time they were probably about five to six dollars. You know, at that time it was pretty expensive.

DC: How long would a pair of overalls last you?

TN: Oh, probably, maybe six to eight months.

DC: OK.

TN: Unless you tore them up, or something, you know. So I had two pair. I remember that. I used to have two pair. Especially in the winter, you had them. Now in the summer, it was a little better. But in winter it was kind of hard.

DC: I'll bet, out there on the line in winter.

TN: But I had quite a few experiences.

DC: Well, back to Kaiser then. We took a little detour on you there. Back at Kaiser, you were actually a committeeman then.

TN: Well, uh, yes I was. You could call me a committee—I was on the committee, of the Veterans Committee.

DC: The Veterans Committee, that's right. Let's see, you were a trim repairman at that point in time. Let's see, you said you liked the job, but you only stayed about a year, or a year and a half. Why did you?

TN: Kaiser?

DC: Yeah.

TN: Oh, they shut if off.

DC: They shut it off, OK.

TN: They went broke. I don't know broke. I guess they did.

DC: OK, so that went bust. And then, is that when you moved on to the Industrial Wire?

TN: Right. I went to the wire.

DC: OK, Industrial Wire. And what was that job like?

TN: Well, it was, it was stamping. Mostly all stamping. Big sheets of metal. We'd make—we made oil filter, yeah, oil filters. Big ones. For Ford, you know. All of them had—over the carburetor, you know, over the top of the carburetor, you had a big one. We'd make them. We'd stamp them things out. And that was it. And then there was other jobs we had that we'd—they would press them in. Radiator, what do you call them, radiator—the fillers, where they had the water. Sort of around where you . . .

DC: The caps?

TN: Caps. Yeah, the caps. Well, we'd stamp them out. Or whatever the job was.

DC: What specifically did you do in the plant there?

TN: Uh, press maker. Press maker—not press maker. I was a press *operator*. Press operator. Press operator. They stamped, you know, different things out. That was the job I would have.

DC: And how did you like that job?

TN: It was all right. After I learned, it was good.

DC: Was it harder to learn this job than some of the others?

TN: Oh yeah. It was fast. Real fast. It was like this [motions indicating speed]. They had safety things on the [?], like you'd put here. And when you stopped the press, everything went back this way. And make sure that it was—now you had, your dies were over here. You know, this close you were working, sometimes. And the thing would pull you back this far. And a couple of times, they would miss, and they'd hit your corner once in awhile.

DC: What would happen then?

TN: Well, you'd nick it. I nicked it right there one time [laughs].

DC: Did anybody lose their fingers?

TN: Oh, one fellow, a brand new guy, he was there maybe a week. And we were putting—there were screens for Chrysler—you used to have air ducts that come over the top, you know. Your . . .

DC: Intake.

TN: Air intake, yeah. It was up there on top. Well then, he would—they would have three pieces up there. And he would stamp it together. And he would lay it on there and he would hit it, see. And he done, he took his safety off one day, and he held it, and he hit it—and oh, geez, it took his fingers right off. And there was four girls sitting right there.

DC: Ooh.

TN: Yeah, poor guy, cut it right off like that. I said, "Jesus." That was terrible to see that.

DC: So he just decided not to use his safety then?

TN: Yeah, he just ignored it, I guess, or something. I don't know what it was. It was a miss. I couldn't say that for sure. I wasn't there. I don't know. But something happened. I know that. Whether it—the timing was missed on his, or he unhooked it, or what he did. But he done something wrong, and it didn't work.

DC: Did you have a union in that plant?

TN: No.

DC: OK.

TN: No, no no no. They had [laughs]. No, there was no—they were pretty much anti-union, pretty much. We had a few—well, we had one problem. I know I had a little problem. We were lifting up some, two boxes of these radiator caps [mumbles a bit]. Anyhow, there was three of us going to lift it up. It was heavy stuff. It was brass. All brass. We lift them up, and he says, "Let's go!" And I started forward. And he left it go, the one guy. And geez, it hit me in the back.

DC: Oh.

TN: And I got a—well, I shouldn't say. But anyhow, and I had to go—oh, it hurt for the longest time. And they took me to the doctor. And checked me out there. Sort of a hernia, is what I had. And this friend of mine—I knew him pretty good—and he was sort of the plant committee safety man, or something, he was. I don't know what he was. But

anyhow, I had to write up a big accident report, and all that sort of stuff—what happened, so on and so forth. But nothing ever happened to it. It was just a lot of paper.

DC: Jumping back for a second, how much notice did you have about the closing of Kaiser, before it actually stopped production?

TN: Well, I guess they knew it for quite some time, maybe a month, or even longer. And, yeah, it must have been at least a month or so. And I was one of the last ones—my job happened to be there—and I was about the last fifty people, or maybe a hundred people that was there. It was one holiday we has there, is what it was. But anyhow, they come down, they says, "Well," he says, "this is the last job." And they had that little joke—they put their shoes or something, their old shoes on the last car or something, saying "We're going to Kentucky," or something like that, you know.

DC: Is that what they were doing? Were they moving their operations someplace else?

TN: No. Kaiser went down. They shut if off, yeah.

DC: Did you feel under any pressure then to get another job right away?

TN: Well, I did. Really, I did, because I had children. I had to get hustling there. And if I remember, yes I did—I went to Wayne, Mercury, yeah Mercury, what do they call it? Anyhow, what they were—actually, what they were constructing at that time, it was what was a paint house, is what they were making. And I think I went there ten, fifteen times, waiting for a job. And the foreman come along, and he would—and here's another thing too. At least ten times I went there. And I had one or two other friends that went there, and he was working on another job there. And then we got to see him. And this foreman—well, he was a steward, is what he was. He was a steward. And I guess he looked at me one time, or something, "Have you got fifteen bucks?" That was for the union dues, I guess, is what it was. I'm sure that's what it was. I says, "No, I haven't got it, but I can get it to you in about five minutes." I says, "My buddy's right over . . . " He says, "You be back in five minutes . . . " He says—and he'd give you a slip, with your name on there, see. And my buddy was up on the hill, up on the roof there. And I come down and I told him, I said, "You got a couple of bucks? I haven't got enough." So he had it, and I gave him the money, and that's how I got my job.

DC: OK. That was at the construction?

TN: Yeah, that was through—I'll think of it—[Dettler?] and somebody was the construction—they were working for the Ford Motor Company.

DC: But that would have been after you left Industrial Wire.

TN: Yeah, that was after Industrial—right after the Industrial, yeah.

DC: When you were looking for the job—when you were looking for a job after Kaiser closed, did you look around at a lot of different places?

TN: Oh, I went all over. There wasn't anything.

DC: There wasn't any work.

TN: There wasn't any hardly at all. Nothing. Everybody was looking for work there too, and there was nothing there. So I was pretty fortunate too. And after I got in there, in the construction there, this fellow—he was my foreman, is what he was—and we done different odds and ends, and what have you. Whatever they had to do they had to do, in construction. So one time we were going to run a line, a chalk line down. And we were going to put a couple stakes down, so it would be a straight line. And this foreman, he come along, and he wanted to pull that line up in there. And he'd go like this, and he had a [big belly on him all the time?]. So he's—I watched there for a few minutes—his name was Jim. I can still remember that. He says, "I'll tell you Jim, I'll show you how to do that." And I made a hitch, what do you call it? A half hitch? Two half hitches, so it would be real taut, you know. "How'd you do that?" I showed him. He was my friend from there on. [laughs]

DC: Ahh. So, I'm trying to get the chronology down as close as we can. I realize it's kind of hard when it's that long ago. But it sounds like you got that construction job in about 1953 or 1954, somewhere in there. Does that sound right?

TN: Probably. Yeah, probably.

DC: Was it during the Korean War?

TN: No. I don't think they had the war at that time.

DC: Do you think the war was over?

TN: [pause] Geez, I don't remember now.

DC: Oh well.

TN: Probably even before, really, I think. Yeah, I think it was a little before that.

DC: Well, if you worked for five or six years for Bell . . .

TN: The Telephone Company. Then I went to Industrial Wire. From Industrial Wire I went to Kaiser. And Kaiser I went to construction.

DC: OK, I've got the order wrong then. Um, I thought you went from telephone to Kaiser to Industrial Wire.

TN: No, no.

DC: No. Telephone to Industrial Wire, to Kaiser.

TN: Yeah, there.

DC: Yeah, OK. Now I'm with you. And how long were you with Industrial Wire?

TN: About four years.

DC: About four years. OK. Well, there's a difference.

TN: I worked there four years.

DC: So it would have been the mid-1950s by the time . . .

TN: Yeah, because it was when my father died. Right in that area . . .

DC: . . . you got the construction job. OK, and when did your father die?

TN: Oh, I can't remember.

DC: I'm just trying to get the general . . .

TN: Yeah, I know what you mean . . .

DC: . . . signposts here. [pause] All right. We could figure it out pretty easily by figuring out when Kaiser closed. That's the key thing. I can find that out. Well, let's get back to this construction, then. You were working on this Ford plant, or constructing the Ford plant. You told me a few of the things that you did, but what was your range of responsibilities when you were doing construction?

TN: Well, really, whatever they assigned me.

DC: OK, so you did whatever they told you to do. You didn't have one specific . . .

TN: I would have, yeah. Well, it depends, I guess. Say my friend Jimmy, he come along, and we were—it was starting to get cold. I know it was getting pretty cold at that time. And this guy—he was the crane operator. And Jimmy called me, he says, "I want you to . . . " What did they call me? A grade man? Telephone wires, or anything up there, so the crane would come around, you know. My job was to watch him, so that he gets the signal to, how do you call it, it would be, to *change* it. To change the pitch of the machine—I'm trying to think of the darn word. Crane. The crane. So that was supposed to be my job. So that this guy wouldn't get executed, electrocuted, or anything like that. So that was the job I had. And that was a good job there, you know. I'd just stand and watch the job, you know.

DC: But you had some responsibility. To keep the guy from getting killed!

TN: Anyway, that was my job there, and I would have them—"Good job there Jimmy." And I would—he would always give me a pretty good job. I still don't know why, but the only thing, I give him that little tip one time, and that's all I done.

DC: So is that what it amounted to, just a tip, that fifteen dollar tip. [interviewer confusing union dues with tip about half hitches]

TN: Well it wasn't a—it was just showing him how to do the job!

DC: Oh, I'm sorry. The knot. The two half hitches. Yeah, I got you.

TN: Yeah.

DC: So how long did you work that construction job?

TN: [pause] Let's see, it must have been, probably, six, seven, about six to seven months. And then I had an opportunity—when they got through, they give me an opportunity—I could go up in northwest Michigan, state there, construction [?] a big [?] was going in there too. The same outfit—[Dettler?] the name is. And Jimmy told me, said if I want to go, he says, "I'll put you in."

DC: Was that in northwestern Michigan, you said?

TN: Yeah.

DC: Traverse City, or somewhere . . .

TN: Somewhere out there. Some big thing was going on there.

DC: All right.

TN: Anyhow, I had an opportunity. I could go with them. But here I said, "I've got children, and I'm not going to do that." So I . . .

DC: So what did you do then?

TN: So I—where did I go? I think I went to Ypsi at the time.

DC: That's when you came here?

TN: Yeah, that's when I come here to Ypsi.

DC: OK. All right. Did you look around again?

TN: Oh yes, yes. But things were pretty tight, you know, at that time. Yeah, things were kind of tight. And—wait a minute. I take that back.

DC: All right.

TN: [pause] How did I get in at Ford's? So it must have been six to eight months that we were constructing, the construction was in Wayne. Yeah, it must have been, because I hired in at Ford's at Wayne after the thing was completed.

DC: At Wayne? OK.

TN: Yeah, yeah. That's what it was.

DC: So once you built the plant, you got a job inside it!

TN: Yeah, I got a job!

DC: Yeah, all right. Interesting.

TN: Oh, I worked—take it away. I'm backing up again.

DC: That's fine. That's OK.

TN: I went to Kaiser's, that's what it was. Then I went to the airport, to American Airlines. A friend of mine over there, he says, "You want a job?" he says. That was the next day we shut off Kaiser. And I talked to my friend, he says, "Hey," he says [has a cramp] "and"—how'd we do that? We went to American Airlines. That was only about three months long. And I worked two jobs. I worked for the Airlines, and I worked for Mercury.

DC: The construction job?

TN: No. With Ford itself.

DC: Was it when you had finished completing the plant?

TN: Yeah.

DC: So you finished the construction, then you were working . . .

TN: I went to American Airlines.

DC: OK.

TN: And in between that, that's when they built up—they started hiring at Mercury, in Wayne.

DC: And was that the plant that you built?

TN: Yeah, right.

DC: All right. I'm with you now. So wow. This is a busy time in your life.

TN: Yeah it was.

DC: Young kids and two jobs.

TN: I had to hustle for my kids. You know I've got another kid coming along.

DC: Oh my. Would that be your fourth, at that point.

TN: Yeah, my fourth, yeah.

DC: OK. So what did you do at American Airlines?

TN: Uh, just baggage. Tagging the bags and stuff.

DC: Hauling baggage?

TN: Yeah.

DC: What shift did you work there?

TN: Uh [pause], days, because I was on afternoons—yeah, I was on afternoons all the time for Mercury. And I was on days at the other one. Finally, after awhile it had got to a point where I couldn't see going back on my job back home. I says, you know, I run off the road a couple of times, I says . . .

DC: Falling asleep?

TN: Yeah. "I'm going to kill myself one of these days."

DC: What time did you have to show up for your American Airlines baggage job?

TN: It would be about forty-five minutes difference on the shifts. That's why it was so hard to do. And I couldn't get any lunch, hardly, and I'd have to wait for lunchtime, you know, at your—four hours, I would go to the café, or the cafeteria and get lunch there. And I was getting too tired. And I almost killed myself. I says, "That's ridiculous."

DC: Did you ever see your wife or your kids at that time?

TN: Not very often. Not very often. Well, we was trying to build a house. I was building a house, and-another thing that started right after the war, I was in Wayne, I say—well, I was in Belleville for awhile there, for a year. And then I worked for the telephone company, and I went to Wayne at that time. And I was at the construction, in the—what the heck do they call it?—Wayne? Wayne? [stumbles for it]

DC: You got me on that one.

TN: But anyhow, we—what do they call them?—I was still working for the telephone company at that time, and I started to build my house. That's what it was, yes. That's what it was. And, of course, like I say, I had another baby coming along. And so, I had this piece of property in Belleville there. I decided I was going to build a house over there. So I went to Wayne, Bank, what do they call it? Standard Federal Bank? Whatever was there. As a young GI, said, "I'm going to go down and see if I . . ."—and my wife, she was very thrifty. She put about, I think it was over $3000 in the bank. And we decided we'd start building a house. So I went to Wayne to see about getting a loan. Says "This is what I want to do. I've got $3000, and I need about another $3000 to complete the whole thing." He says, "There's no way I can do that." He says, "You've got to have it completely, or nothing at all." So of course me, I'm going to do it my way, you know. So I'm going to do it my way. And I did. It was the hard way, but I did it. We went on our own. And we started to build it. My first—like I say, my parents, or my father-in-law, wanted us to have that piece of property there. But we decided not to then. So the material I already had in the farm, in the barn there. So I sold it all off to my brother[-in-law]—I think I told you about that. And so, now I said, "Well, I'm going to go on my own." So we went to Wayne, and I had a friend—he was a carpenter, and all that sort of stuff. And he and I, and then my two brother-in-laws, helped each other. We helped each other. And we started to getting together. And 90 percent of it, I think, or 80 percent of it, I'd say, myself with my wife, and I, we done it all ourselves. So I done it the hard way, in a way, but it's still there. It's still mine. I never had a mortgage! That was the point. There was never a mortgage on that property.

DC: But you had to work a lot of jobs.

TN: Yes I did. I had to hustle there.

DC: I don't know how you'd find time to work all those jobs, and build a house on the side.

TN: [laughs] Yeah, and then running back and forth to do the work, you know.

DC: I trust you were at the airport then. Was Metro Airport there at the time? Is that where you were?

TN: No, no. It was not Metro. It was Willow Run.

DC: Willow Run, yeah. Right. I'm giving away my age [laughs]. Yeah, Willow Run, so boy, that is shuttling. Was there—did you like the American Airlines job at all? The baggage job?

TN: It was all right, yeah. It was pretty good. It was not what you call real heavy work, or anything like that. But when your airplane had a termination there, you had to hustle and get the airplane serviced. They only had twenty-five minutes, or whatever they had. Then you had to really hustle, and make everything . . .

DC: So did you do service, or were you handling baggage?

TN: Well I had both. You'd take whatever.

End of Tape I, Side B

Begin Tape II, Side A

DC: . . . You just told me that you went inside the planes . . .

TN: Yeah, and whatever they had to do, you know. We didn't clean the inside of it. Somebody else was in charge of that. We would take the luggage, the baggage out of it, mostly. And then we'd, you know, put it in the belly of the plane and everything, you know, coming back again. So that's the job. Mostly we had over there, we done that. We didn't take care of gasoline, or anything like that. We just took care of that sort of stuff—the luggage, that's all it was.

DC: Yeah. Did you have a union at that job?

TN: I don't think so. No, I don't believe so.

DC: So how long did you work for American Airlines?

TN: About three and a half months. Because I couldn't . . .

DC: You burned out.

TN: Yeah, burned out. I was burned out. That's right.

DC: So you kept the Mercury job, though.

TN: Yeah.

DC: What was your job at Mercury?

TN: Well, I was an assembler, and then, after eight hours they needed help. And I had the experience as a repairman, you see. I said, "Well, I had a little experience with it." And he says—and overtime, that's when I was making some good money. I'd put another three or four hours in, as a repairman.

DC: So you'd work your assembler job . . .

TN: Then I'd go overtime, whatever they needed. They'd call—we'd be in the hole. They was in the repair hole. They'd put it—if something was damaged, or something—had to repair it, do something—well, that was a job I would have.

DC: Would you be repairing machines? Or would you be repairing finished parts . . .

TN: No, No. Mostly inside, like moldings, and things like that. Things like that, that's about all. Uh, like nuts and bolts were stripped, or something, you'd have to redo that.

DC: OK.

TN: Whatever, little things like that. Like there were straight—maybe some paint damage. You would have to note it so that the repairman would come along and paint it. You had to repaint it, or whatever you had to do to that. So we'd watch all that sort of stuff. That was a—it was a good job, and I made good money, because of overtime. It was time and a half, all the time. And that's where I was thinking—making a lot of my money for my house, you know.

DC: Right, right. So were you making as much money as you did when you had the American Airlines job as well, by working this overtime? Or how did that work out? [pause] Do you know what I'm saying?

TN: Yeah, I know.

DC: You had two jobs for awhile to try to make ends meet. You gave up the American Airlines job, but you got this—working overtime at Mercury—did that counter . . .

TN: Mercury was better. Much better. Much better, yeah. It was much better. Yeah, I enjoyed that job.

DC: So what about the assembler part of your day. You worked as an assembler. How was that job?

TN: Well, when I first started, I was in the hole all the time. The foreman, he told me, he says, "Hang on," he says. "You'll get it sooner or later." And I told him—and I was trying to be honest with the guy. I says, "You know, I'm giving you a lot of trouble." I says, "I can't keep up." He says, "You will." And I did, believe it or not.

DC: What were you assembling?

TN: Well, I was putting the state of the—emergency, emergency *brackets*. Yeah, that's what it was. The brackets. That was part of the job. Well, I had four little bolts—two bolts. They had four, another, bolts, or something else up at the top there I had to get. And, you know the line is moving along all the time. And I tried to keep up, and I told the foreman, I says, "Geez, I'm putting you in the hole." He says, "No, you're OK." So I did it. But anyhow—then after awhile I got a little more skilled with it. I could stay even with the line all the time. And after a little while, you had a little break. You'd wait—one car would go by, you can catch both of them. Yeah. So we got skilled a little better.

DC: You got better at it.

TN: Yeah.

DC: So, did you ever have any conflicts over how fast that line moved? Or did you just adjust to it?

TN: Nnnno. The foremen, he controlled that.

DC: OK. He controlled that. Did you have a union at Mercury?

TN: Yes. Oh yes.

DC: Did you ever have any interactions with your committeeman, or have any need to use the union?

TN: No, I never had. No, I never have. No. Not that I can remember.

DC: Not that you remember, OK. So how was your boss on that job—that assembler job?

TN: He was quite good—the guy from Mercury?

DC: Yeah, Mercury.

TN: It was good. He was a younger fellow too, and he told me, he says, "Hang on," he says, "you'll get it." And I felt so bad for him, because, you know, he was in the hole all the time. And I'm trying to catch up, and he says, "No," he says, "you'll get it." In about a week, time [snaps his finger] . . .

DC: OK, so in about a week you were able to keep up.

TN: I was doing pretty good.

DC: Yeah, yeah, OK. So what did you like best about that job?

TN: Well, I guess it was—everything was all right, as far as that goes. I had another little job there, that the—in fact, they gave me kind of a better deal. They put me on a side—it was I and two other fellows and a toolmaker—they hauled outriggers, they called them. When they put the metal floor, the flooring, the panel, the whole panel—they had, oh what the heck did they call them—they would have to align those holes to put the frame of the car, the basing of—and they'd get knocked out of the way, and all. So they had to make them all lined up—there's holes like these. They'd put them in there, so that—oh, that's for the weldings. So they'd put the weldings things in there, where they'd weld there. Well, we had to do—those outriggers would get damaged sometimes. And get out of line. So what we had to do is loosen them up, then set them where they're supposed to be all the time so they'd be true, wherever they wanted to put that metal sheet that was in there. Well, that's what—we had that job. It was a good job for quite awhile. After that, and—that took me off of the assembly line.

DC: OK, so you moved from assembly to that.

TN: Yeah, went to that job. So that was a little better job.

DC: And how did you get that job?

TN: He just come along and told me, "Come along," he said, "I got a job for you over here."

DC: So there wasn't any kind of bidding process, or anything like that?

TN: No, nothing at all. No, nothing at all.

DC: OK.

TN: He just come along.

DC: Did you have any seniority by virtue of having worked in Milan?

TN: I never even knew about it at that time, about Milan, Ford's, or anything like that. I didn't know about it, actually, until when I got in to committeeman here in Ypsi. I learned about all those things, about seniority, you know, and the other things about the contract, and all that stuff.

DC: So we're heading that direction. How long did you work at Mercury in Wayne?

TN: Just a year. A little over a year.

DC: Little over a year. All right.

TN: Yeah, a little after a year, and then they [pause]—things got bad at that time.

DC: What happened?

TN: Everything went down slow.

DC: The economy?

TN: The economy went bad. And I was off, probably [pause] two months. Roughly two months. And it was another case where my—he's not an uncle, he was my mother-in-law's brother, I think it was, yeah—and he was the security here at Ypsi. And we happened to go to Wayne, to a wedding one time, with the family. And I got talking to him about it, he asked me what I'm doing. And I said, "Well, I'm laid off from Mercury" for a couple of weeks or a month, or something. And after awhile he come back, he says, "You know, they're hiring at Ypsi," he says. He says, "You want a job?" I says, "Why not?" So he says, "I'll tell you," he says, "I'm on the security deck"—where was that? What did they call it? His security duties that Saturday—that Monday, he'd be there. Yeah, that next Monday. He says, "Come down and see me," says, "you'll see me." His name is Ike. He says, "You'll see me." And Ike was there. He says, "Just a minute." See, he talked to a fellow in the office there, and he come back, he says, "Come on, let's talk for a minute." So he says—he liked my record. He had my records and everything. He said, "I see you worked for Mercury," and so on and so forth. He says, "We got a heater job going down, and we're going to start it going here at Ypsi," he says, "and we're putting some people on. You want to go to work?" I said, "Why not?" And so I went to work there.

DC: So that's how you got here. OK.

TN: That's how I started.

DC: I'm guessing this would have been the late 1950s, at this point.

TN: Yeah, it must be, yeah, right around there. Right in there. Yeah, right in there.

DC: So you moved over to Ypsi. You seemed to always find somebody who had some knowledge about a job, somewhere.

TN: [laughs] Yeah! Well, I was hustling all the time.

DC: Yeah, OK.

TN: I had enough kids there, I had to keep going, you know.

DC: All right, so you were putting out the word that . . .

TN: Yeah, you betcha.

DC: Did you get any kind of benefits when you were laid off? I mean any kind of supplemental pay, when you were laid off at Mercury?

TN: Yes we did. Yeah, we did. I forget what the contract was about. I know one thing, it was getting kind of thin—as a matter of fact, if I can recall that, we run out of our—what did they call it at them times?—we had two days, two weeks. We had it paid ahead, and then they would—then the state would—what the heck, unemployment. Yeah, unemployment.

DC: Your supplemental unemployment was up.

TN: So we went on that, and I forget what the period was, but it was getting pretty close to where they would have to make an extension—extension for that. And I was getting on that week, or the next week that I was going to get it. And that's when I got the job at Ford's at Ypsi. So that was one of them lucky things too, I guess.

DC: Down to the wire there. Yeah, yeah. So did you move at that point, or just commute over here, or . . .

TN: Pardon?

DC: Did you move at that point, or did you just commute over to Ypsilanti?

TN: Well, they just transferred me over to Ypsi.

DC: Transferred you. OK.

TN: Yeah, to Ypsi.

DC: So tell me more about the job that you took when you came over here to Ypsi.

TN: [pause] OK.

DC: What job did you have exactly when you came over here?

TN: Well, we were making heaters.

DC: Yeah.

TN: And, uh, I was an assembler. And, uh—what was I trying to do?—oh I was just—they were stamping a corner, or a, like a funnel, for the air ducts. And I'd have to stamp, or had to make a—what do they call it?—staples, yeah. Staples. Around that big they were. And they were staples, so that the air would flow right—so it wouldn't go straight, but there would be a different—I guess that was really because of the flow of air, is what it was. Veins! They call them veins.

DC: OK.

TN: Veins. And I had that job for, well, a couple of weeks or so. And the foreman come along and took me on another job, and we were having problems at the dampers on there. They had a felt damper on it. They were supposed to move freely, and they wouldn't. They would bind a lot of times. And my foreman and I, we were trying to repair the things a little bit. So I give him a suggestion one time. I says, "Listen, I got a big pair of nippers in there. Can't we just open them up a little bit?" And by God, they worked! So about a week or so later he says, "You're going to be a repair man now."

DC: Ah.

TN: So I was a repairman. That's what I wanted in the first place.

DC: So you moved up pretty quickly.

TN: So I made up—yeah, I went into that. So I was that, and then I would do other odd jobs, whatever had to be done.

DC: Now were there other people who had been there longer who wanted to be a repairman?

TN: I really don't know if they did or not.

DC: OK. All right.

TN: I know they had people ahead of me, you know.

DC: But you got the job.

TN: But I got the job. And then there was another fellow, he went on the other line, he done the same thing. They—I don't think created the job, or what it was. But there was two of us had the repairmen—the repair jobs.

DC: So how did you like that repair job?

TN: Real good. I liked that. Yeah, that was good.

DC: What was good about it?

TN: Well, you had your own time, you know. There was no production there at all. You did the job, and when it was completed, and that was it. So you moved along to the next station, or whatever it is.

DC: Did you ever have anybody looking over you to get you to hurry up on the job, or anything like that?

TN: No, no, no, no, I never done that.

DC: Wow.

TN: So far, it's pretty good. Like I said I did other jobs there. We packed stuff if we—you know, they needed help. Why I'd pitch in and help out a little bit. And—I don't know, I got along with most all of the time with them there. The only problem I got, is—what was, what was the name he used? The Russian overflow, overflew?

DC: Oh, oh, Gary—Francis Gary Powers?

TN: OK. At that time, whenever that time was at . . .

DC: Early 60s, yeah.

TN: Well, the committee—and I didn't think they were doing a good job, really, at that time. Uh, they would have you doing five or six times, that we felt—a lot of people didn't feel that it was our job. So we had a lot of discussion about that. And at that time, I was reading the contract pretty much—I was watching it pretty good, so. At that time there I would have an argument with some of the other committeemen there. And so what I did, I run for committeeman, is what I did. And I didn't make it at first. I got alternate. I was an alternate. And well—it's a long story—I shouldn't say that. There was some people who were cheating in there. I knew they were, because I knew some other friends, they told me that they were cheating. And so anyhow, the next time . . .

DC: Cheating on counting the votes?

TN: The votes! Yeah, on the votes, yeah. So I know the guy real good, and he told me, "I seen"—well two of them told me, says, "I see that they would . . . " You know they'd make four and one is five, you know, four and five. Then all of a sudden they'd put it on the wrong line there. I says, "Wait a minute." So, actually, the second time I run for committeeman, I got closer, as a few more. And I think about the third time—I was an alternate. I was an alternate—and then finally I was full-time committeeman.

DC: Well tell me again what motivated you to run for committeeman.

TN: Well, I didn't think that the—the committeemen weren't doing a good job on it, as far as I was concerned.

DC: Now what should they have been doing that they weren't doing?

TN: Well, they were crossing over our—what do you call the darn things now?—our [pause] classifications. Our classifications. They would do—in other words, they would just ignore us a lot of times. We weren't supposed to be doing that—we were allowed to do that, so we would complain about it. Take it to the committeeman. And they would ignore us, a lot of times.

DC: So are you saying that people would—or the foreman, or whatever, would make you do jobs that you weren't supposed to do?

TN: That weren't actually in our classification. Not—like I say—wasn't our classification.

DC: And what should have happened here?

TN: Well, they should have had another man, another person in there doing that.

DC: Got you. Were they just adding work onto one person?

TN: They were adding some of it, yeah. Do this, and do this, and do this, and do that. And that's—like before, you're not going to go to this point there, but there were certain classifications that we were supposed to have, and we didn't have them. So they just ignored us, a lot of us.

DC: Did you think they needed to hire more workers, or did they just need to keep people doing . . .

TN: No, I just think—I felt that the committeemen were not doing the job.

DC: OK. All right.

TN: And that was what I was complaining about.

DC: And so, did people actually file complaints with the committee?

TN: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

DC: And what did the committeemen say?

TN: We were ignored.

DC: Oh, you were ignored.

TN: Mostly ignored. That's why I started—why I wanted to be a—I started reading the contract, getting some of the rules and regulations down there.

DC: OK.

TN: And of course, [?] the committee, or the chairman of the committee, bargaining committee—yeah, he was bargaining committee—he went to the foreman, and the guy asked if he could cover for him. And another fellow said, "Wow! This looks mighty crooked to me." [laughs] And it was.

DC: OK. But as a repairman, did you ever have additional duties added to you that bothered you?

TN: Oh yes. Oh yes.

DC: So this affected you personally as well.

TN: Yeah, yeah, right. We'd have to go on the dock sometime, and change stuff like that. Things like that.

DC: Would that prevent you from doing the repair work that you needed to do?

TN: Well, after the job was there—say, maybe an hour, forty-five minutes, something—they were on the dock, or whatever it was. Then I'd have to go back and catch up them parts over there.

DC: So OK. It would make you fall behind.

TN: Yeah, it would take care of my time, see. So that was—like I said, that was the reason I started complaining about the committeemen over there.

DC: Then you noticed these committeemen were . . .

TN: A couple of them were getting promoted, all of a sudden, it was, "Wow. Something's going wrong here."

DC: OK. Did others share your opinion?

TN: Why sure. They all did. A lot of them! Because they voted for me, so [laughs] they must have.

DC: Were there other candidates for committeeman as well who had similar ideas?

TN: Oh yes. Oh yes. Yes, yes, a lot of them.

DC: And when they voted for committeeman, was it everybody voted plant-wide for committeeman?

TN: Yes.

DC: Or just by department?

TN: No, it was plant-wide.

DC: Plant-wide. And how many committeemen were there?

TN: [pause] I think at that time it was about eight. Eight, and two bargaining committeemen, and four—who else was there?—two bargaining committeemen, and one was the plant chairman. Plant chairman, yeah. And there was about eight, I think, committeemen.

DC: And how many workers were there at the time in the plant?

TN: Well, it started off at about, about a thousand, a thousand fifty, something like that. And then it went into—the highest—and then they had, I think we had, I think it was nine, or ten, ten committeemen. We had over 3,000 employees at the time. We had the air condition, and we had the heater job. Then we had several—and the coil—wait, we always had the coil. We had the shocks, and one or two other jobs there. The—what were those things?—anyhow, they had a lot of employees at that time. For quite some time. And—oh, I think this was probably in about, let's see it would be '71, '72, '73, '74, '75, about '75, '76, almost in there, I think it was. Because our population was over 3,000. Well over 3,000.

DC: So how long were you a committeeman?

TN: Well, from '79 or '80—wait, '80? Wait, wait, take that back. It would be '71, '76, about '76 to just before I retired in—about 11 years, I think it was about 11 years.

DC: OK, so when did you retire?

TN: In '76? '86, it must be.

DC: '86?

TN: '86.

DC: So I'm a little bit . . .

TN: Wait a minute. That's not right either.

DC: That's not right? How old were you when you retired?

TN: I was about forty or fifty-four or five.

DC: Oh, so that would have been '76. Oh. OK. So you would have been—that helps explain a little bit of my confusion. Because it sounds like you became a committeeman in the 1960s. Is that right?

TN: Or '70.

DC: Or '70.

TN: About '70. I think '69 or '70.

DC: ’69 or ‘70. OK.

TN: Somewhere in there.

DC: OK. All right. I’m going to have to . . .

TN: See, the—when Powers went over, that’s when . . .

DC: The U2?

TN: I was having the problem with the committeemen at that time.

DC: OK.

TN: That I didn’t think they were doing a good job.

DC: That would be about 1960.

TN: ’60? I think it was later than that. ’60? ’70? You see, a year after that I run for committeeman. I don’t know.

DC: It could be.

TN: I know—I think it was ’71 was about the first time I really decided I was going to do something.

DC: About ’71. OK. All right.

TN: I think.

DC: Huh. OK. Well, it’s tough to remember . . .

TN: Oh God yes.

DC: . . . all those different things. Were you a repairman up until you became a committeeman?

TN: No, I—well, they had a cutoff. We were off about three, four, five months. We were off. And then I come back—I was an assembler on the generator, yeah. Generators. And then I went as a checker again. I went there too this time—to check—well then I went on—oh, then I went in for quality control.

DC: Quality control.

TN: Yeah, and I was in there all the time, after that time.

DC: Until you became a committeeman?

TN: Well, I was a committeeman almost—well, either I was an alternate or a full-time committeeman . . .

DC: When you were a full-time committeeman, did you still work in the plant?

TN: No.

DC: Committeeman's a full-time job, right?

TN: Yeah, it's full-time.

DC: Yeah, right. Right.

TN: We'd have three shifts.

DC: Right. OK. Let's see. It sounds like you had a bunch of different jobs within the plant. I'm trying to get back into the 1960s, if I can, but I'm not sure how precise we can be here. Trying to follow [pause]. Um, do you have to head out for lunch or anything?

TN: Anytime you're ready.

DC: OK. Yeah, it may be that we could quit, and if I come up with some other questions sometimes . . .

TN: Refresh my mind. There's some big gaps—that I'm sure, there's some kind of gaps in there.

DC: Well, maybe we can get together again sometime for a little bit, and try to fill in some of those gaps. I'm a little bit confused about the actual timing in here, but we could probably figure that out together. Are there—well, let's see. How about this? Here are some questions I can ask you right now. Can you tell what it was like to be a committeeman? Can you remember what kinds of cases you've worked on?

TN: Well, there's some good times, and there were some hard times in there. It was—it was real good if you won a case, or whatever. Or reviewed something and they had to change it again. Which was real good. There were a few that I'm sorry they did what they did. One particular time—and I feel bad about the guy even to this day—he was probably fifty-five years old, and he stole a generator right out on the highway there—not the highway, what am I thinking?—on the road there. And he went under the thing, he threw them there. And the security people were watching him, right at the time. And the guy had all kinds of seniority, you know. And I had to represent him, and I tried my darndest to give him thirty days, or a year off, or something, so he wouldn't lose his job. And he lost it. And it was one of the worst things I ever seen. The guy had so many years, you

know. He lost the whole business. It was just his own fault. It was his fault. I know that. But—and I've had some others where I've seen where there's theft, and I—I don't want to say I *beat* them—but I convinced them that it was all right. But most of the time I was pretty much satisfied with my job. And there were a few—I say, I had some bad ones that I'm sorry about that ever happened.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

TN: Especially the person that had a lot of seniority in it. And it was a shame to do it. It was *dumb* to do that. A lousy thing—it's about fifty bucks, or thirty bucks, or whatever it was, twenty dollars. That's his whole life. It was gone. And of course the big thing that come along, when we had this—oh, oh, what do you call it?—anyhow, we were hiring quite a few more people there—minorities, you know. They were getting a lot of minorities at that time. Before, they had—of course they had, but not like they had before. And they had that—geez, I can't even think of the word. I've used the word a thousand times. Uh, minorities, not the minorities, but the, like the quotas.

DC: Affirmative action?

TN: Yeah, there you go.

DC: OK.

TN: That, I didn't think was right. I didn't think it was right, myself.

DC: Tell me how that worked.

TN: Well [pause], they felt that [pause]—how am I going to say that?—they felt that they wouldn't get a fair share, is what they figured—a good shake, is what I guess you want to say. They felt that they were discriminating all the time. And we weren't. We weren't. I just bent over backwards to try to be honest with everybody. As much as I could. And they would call you all kinds of things, whatever.

DC: The people you were representing?

TN: Yes, right. Some of them I worked with. No matter what I said, they were wrong—or I was wrong, and they were right. It was a contract. I'd tell them, "This is a contract, we got. We can't be a—we can't change the contract here. It's written. That's the way we have to do it." Well that's not the way it's going to be. So I says, "Well, what can I do?"

DC: What kinds of issues were they bringing up?

TN: Well, mostly about discrimination, about not getting enough—or doing more job than supposed to be getting. Or stuff like that. Various things like that. And most of it, I'd always tell them, it was always, "You're discriminating [against] us." And I never did. I never wanted to.

DC: Were they arguing that you weren't filing grievances?

TN: That I wasn't—indeed—that I wasn't doing the job. And I was. I thought I was, doing the—I was going by the guidelines that we had, and that's what we had to go by.

DC: Did you find white workers complaining as well about committeemen not acting aggressively?

TN: I imagine we have. I can't remember any. I can't remember. I'd see quite a few—it was before this affirmative action come along. So I says, "Well, I like my job," you know, and especially when I won the grievance, but . . .

DC: Can you remember any grievances that you won?

TN: Oh, yes. I'd say the one here, this guy, they caught him in the parking lot, and he had some shocks in his hands. And the foreman—not the foreman, but the security come by, and see him, and he's putting them in his car. And it was in the snow. I remember that. And as far as I was concerned, he found—somebody found them, is what it was. That's his story, now. And I had to go along with that. And so the security helped to catch him. And I won that won, because the fact that they didn't have enough evidence at all. Because the foreman—the security guy was watching him. He seen him right on the—he said he picked them up right off of the ground there, see, by the snow. So that's what won the case. Because the fact he seen it, and he picked it up. There was one or two others that I had. I had another one, there was one skilled tradesman, he had the same thing there. He had a problem. I can't remember what it was about. About—hmm, I can't remember. But anyhow, it was a skilled tradesman. We had the skilled trades and the hourly people in the same. And then we had, oh gosh, there were so many I can barely—a lot of them were small stuff. But they were important to the people. And—I'm trying to think—oh, I had one there too. He was an employee. He had long seniority too. And he was off three days—he was in the hospital, I guess, is what it was. He was sick, and he was in the hospital there. And, I'm trying to [remember] what the precedent was about. But anyhow, I had to go back to the book and look it all up and see what it was about. But anyhow, I finally won the thing. He was—oh, he was a utility man, and they were going to cut him down from assembly, instead of—so he'd lose his money and take that five cents, or ten cents, whatever it was that they were going—but anyhow, it was a precedent, and I went through the books and I found out, and finally I got the—who was it? I'm trying to think who it was—anyhow, I won the thing, the fact that—the point I think of it was, he was gone three days, and he didn't call because he was in the hospital. And he tried to tell them what the problem was, and the foreman said no, this and that. And because—the reason, because he's a utility man then—so they were going to promote him, or deport him, deport him, yeah [laughs], demote him. And so anyhow, we won the whole thing there. We come to find out what the doctor—we went to the hospital and found out the doctor, said that he was in the hospital, so on and so forth. And he couldn't communicate, or something or other. So anyhow, we won that thing there. And I felt it was a good victory for me. Well, there were a lot of good ones, and

there's been a few, like that one there, particularly, in my mind, where he stole that generator, or starter. Starter, it was a starter.

DC: Now did you have women and men working in the plant?

TN: Yes, we did.

DC: Did you notice any pattern with the grievances and all? Did women and men have virtually the same grievances? Or different ones? Can you remember?

TN: Pretty much the same. Yeah, pretty much the same. You see, the thing of it is, you had a lot of precedents because of the fact that you had buddies that were—not a committeeman, or you wanted to be a committeeman—and you had problems like that all the time. It wasn't—they weren't honest about it. They was just mean about it, I'll say that. You know, they were trying to embarrass you, I guess, anyway they could. And like I say, honestly, I tried to be as honest as I possibly could. There were sometimes when you just didn't realize it—maybe you weren't doing it right—but you—the intent was to be honest about the whole thing, as much as I could. But, you know, it's not a perfect world.

DC: You mentioned tensions between, or about affirmative action and stuff. What were relations like between white workers and black workers when you were a committeeman?

TN: The younger ones, they were hot. They were angry. The younger guys, I mean the older guys, they were much better. They were much better. But the younger—young bucks, I guess, or whatever you call them—they were, they had a chip most of the time. Most of them did. So, you'd do the best you could, you know.

DC: Were there any black committeemen?

TN: Yes there was. Yes, there was a couple of them. And the thing of it is—you see, it's another thing too. We had one for sure—now did I have two or more? I know we had one for sure. And they would always want to be represented from him, by him. By anybody else, but it wasn't right. Everybody's supposed to have equal. And there was discrimination right there. You could see that. If I had a case of black and white there, the younger bucks, they'd say, "No, I don't want him. I don't want him." Not me, but a lot of them. They don't want him. They'd want this one black fellow. And that wasn't right either, see. We were all the same union.

DC: Yeah, yeah.

TN: And we had some of those like that. We never had—well, I shouldn't say that either. We had enough problems. You had all kinds of problems. We had all kinds of problems.

DC: Did you—oh, go ahead.

TN: A lot of times you would—people were working out of their classification, you know. And say that they were working one job, and it's supposed to be a higher pay. We'd see that once in awhile. And what we'd have to do is get compensation back again for them, because they lost so much time—let's say they worked two hours there, or three hours on that job there, on this job. And it was lesser pay. And I'm doing the higher job, or vice versa. If it was the higher pay—if you had a higher pay, and the guy was doing a smaller, lesser—they wouldn't complain about it when it was going the other way! [laughs] They'd let you know about it!

DC: Did you have many of those situations?

TN: Not too many. But most of the time, I would generally get compensation from the company, because they were pretty easy cases you could win. Because, you know, they were black and white, and that was it, you know. That's all there is to it.

DC: Did you pay much attention to national union politics? What the international union was doing?

TN: Oh yeah, I used to watch it. I'd keep—as much as I could, yeah.

DC: What do you recall about that? What did you think about what the international union was doing?

TN: Well, it was about the thirty-and-out, and things like that, you know. And different issues we had there about—what was the big one—we had the strike on there several, once—what in the heck was it all about?—I know, thirty-and-out was one of the biggest ones we had. And then on health and safety, was a lot of them. We had a lot of those. Then OSHA come in. Things got a lot better there. And little things like that. The International was—what the heck, it's been so long I can't remember anything about it.

DC: Did they offer much in the way of assistance or advice, whatever, when you were handling cases as a committeeman? Or did you handle those on your own?

TN: Well, I would go on next to my superior, which would be the Bargaining Committee, or something like that. Or the plant chairman, he would—Bill White, he was a great one. He was all fire there [laughs]. He was a committeeman. And then he went on up to Bargaining Committee. He took care of us, our guys. If we had a problem, he would—he'd get right in there. And he would probably put the fire away, you know. I got to take a break.

DC: You know what, I think we're probably about done. What do you say?

TN: OK, sounds good.

DC: Does that sound OK?

TN: Yeah.

End of Interview