

MEMORIES OF NEW BERN

WINSLOW MAGLENN EDWARDS

INTERVIEW 1505.

This is a tape made for Memories of New Bern by interviewer Bill Edwards, number 1500. The interview is with Winslow Maglenn Edwards of New Bern. This is interview number 1505. It's made on May 3, 1992 in New Bern.

WINSLOW EDWARDS: I'm the oldest son of Harry Edwards and Mae Edwards. I was born in Sanford, N.C. November 6, 1916. I went to school in Sanford and also at State College prior to World War II. When my father took over the railroad here, I had a connection there.

BILL EDWARDS: That was the Atlantic and East Carolina Railroad.

WINSLOW EDWARDS: That was the Atlantic and East Carolina Railroad. It was renamed, Atlantic and East Carolina Railroad. The first connection there that I had with the railroad, I was in the stockroom. The Atlantic and East Carolina Railroad was built somewhere in 1850, and as such, it is in a light traffic territory. The track structure was just for that. It was light sixty pound rail and no ballast. Well, at the advent of Cherry Point, which was started shortly after we took over, I think it was in September that it was started, we had an influx of tremendous amount of traffic. The traffic in one direction only, the loaded cars went to Cherry Point and the empty cars came back. I recall the first incidence we had troubles over here was when my father and I were inspecting a track somewhere around the present New Bern airport. We found that the light rail and heavy traffic in the one direction, that the tracks were crawling like a black snake. They were crooked and the ties were twisted. So, something had to be done in order to handle that traffic. So my father I think

went to the Navy people and the Navy people agreed it had to be done and the voted money to relay the rail from Kinston to Cherry Point.

That was the beginning of the real life of the Atlantic and East Carolina Railway. Well, the subject has come up here for the location of Cherry Point. I'm a small person to be saying why it was located where it is because higher authority would have to tell me exactly why. But in my opinion, Cherry Point was located on this side of the river simply because it had access to the port of Morehead City, and also the Atlantic Coastline Railroad was in here as well as Atlantic and East Carolina. On the opposite side of the river they had only one rail connection and no seaport. They'd have to go to Norfolk or come back to New Bern and go to Morehead City in order to get the troops overseas. That proved true during World War II when we shipped, at one time I believe there were eighty-five cars, pullman cars, of soldiers, of I mean Marines, that went to Guadalcanal. It pulled out of Cherry Point and shipped to the West coast. I think the logistics and geography was the real reason it was located on this side of the river. That's my opinion anyway. Since we are recalling instances that stand out in memory, I can remember the storm Ione which hit New Bern about 1955 I believe. Is that correct? '55. And it dealt us a devastating blow in the fact that we looked out the next morning and saw that the Trent River bridge had floated off and was doubled back on itself and came back over to New Bern shore at the top of the bridge. That blocked all traffic to Cherry Point and all traffic to Morehead City. My father got in touch with the Tide Water Construction

Company, I believe is the one. The Tide Water Construction Company, they rushed some construction equipment down here and we rebuilt the bridge. I believe it was about a week, wasn't it, is that right?

BE: It seems to me it was more like a month.

WINSLOW EDWARDS: A month, yeah, that's what it was. It was probably a month that we rebuilt it completely with new steel girders and new crossties, new rail, all in one months time. It was really a disconcerting sight to see that bridge lying folded back on itself for almost half the width of the river. The trains were routed around Morehead. They had to go to Jacksonville and then take the Camp LeJeune railroad back into Cherry Point. They had to be routed around there for a solid month. But that was work well done by Tide Water. I remember that well. In speaking earlier of the condition of the track, when we first came to New Bern we had an inspection of the track.

BE: Excuse me, when was that?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: We came in September 1939. I believe is when we came over. The track itself had not been maintained for a period of ten to fifteen years. Spikes could be pulled up with your fingers with no problem at all. The rail had no tie plates. They had cut halfway through many of the ties, maybe most of them. There was no ballast whatever on the track. Nothing to absorb the moisture or the rain. The rails, as I said before, were sixty pounds rail which was out of date around 1910.

BE: That was more like lumber yard rail, wasn't it?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: Yes it was. In fact the lumber company, I believe

it was Roper Lumber Company, had a train that ran from Croatan to New Bern over the same rails and they brought lumber carts up through then.

So if that road had not been rebuilt, it could never have handled the traffic generated by Cherry Point. There was all the air fields.

They had thousands and thousands of tons of sand that had to go in the bed for it, and they had thousands and thousands of tons of rock and cement. All of that had to go into building that airport. It would never had gotten there if we hadn't rebuilt the road. It was paid for by the Navy department as a war emergency. The reimbursement was back to the Navy by a surcharge on the freight that went into the Navy Yard there. The loan was paid back and was completely repaid during the life of our tenure, the lease. But the bridges and all, as I said before, we rebuilt the bridge the time the storm took it out, had timber spans; the girders underneath were timber. They came from the West coast. We rebuilt it with steel. One of the first steel trestles that was built on the railroad when we had it. That was a much needed improvement. I see now recently that's just been taken out and new steel put in. The Southern Railway took it out. I think nearly all of the trestles were rebuilt. They were built for lighter traffic, and they nearly all had to be rebuilt. Of course the heavier rail was needed and also was ballast. That was during the war and we could get no ballast other than sand. We ballasted it entirely from one end to the other with sand to help cushion the rail. In recalling some of the instances that happened during the war, it was an unusual time over here, the war. They had a number of troop trains

and we were informed there'd be others coming out of Cherry Point going to the Coastline connection in Goldsboro or else the Coastline connection in Kinston. In order to protect the track the Marine Corps had put guards at many of the trestles so that they wouldn't be blown up. There was a possibility of them being blown up by the enemy. That proved to be rather cumbersome. So we took an ordinary Ford stationwagon that was owned by one of the people of Atlantic and East Carolina and we had steel wheels made with flanges on them to ride on the rails. We took that car and led each of the troop trains through to their connection. It was used as a pilot car. I recall riding many of those. They'd all usually go out at night and you'd ride all night with them, ride part of the night anyway. I recall an interesting little sideline in the use of that pilot car that we had. In New Bern down Hancock Street, the track of course goes down the center of the street. At night particularly, we would come down that street, we'd naturally have to follow the track which is down the center, and the cars meeting us would blow horns, would holler, and whistle. We couldn't move over to the side and let them pass, so they were rather irate when they got up there and found out what it was. It was just a car running on the railroad track. In recalling many of the instances that happened here during the heavy traffic and during the transition between the better grade of track and the old track, one of the problems we had was derailments where the train would jump the track. I recall that one of them, right outside the city limits of New Bern, they had a wreck and piled the cars up and one of the cars was a carload of

eggs. The entire car turned over and was in the swamp. I don't know how many eggs were broken, but I expect the birds had a good time around there for awhile. We had other wrecks. One in Goldsboro, one west of New Bern, one east of New Bern. They're all over the place. One of the urgencies of the wreck is of course to get it cleaned up, the other one is to get the traffic moving. That necessitated, and I know of two instances and maybe three or more, where the track had to be actually rebuilt around the wrecked cars. They were rebuilt; roadbed built, track relayed around the cars, so the trains could pass through, and we later would clean it up. That was a customary system for all railroads, they did that. I left New Bern in '43 I believe and went to Georgia as an engineer for Georgia Railroad. I got a lot of first line experience from that job and the opportunity to train under a trunkline engineer. I came back to New Bern in '50, '51, back in charge of the tracks. At that time we had completed the laying of the heavier rail and the operation of the road was much easier after that. One of the problems of small railroads and the railroads of this day and time is the elimination of unused and unnecessary tracks. Studies were made to see how often tracks were used, and if they didn't serve a purpose then they were taken up. One of the tracks that we had here in New Bern served industry well through the early part of the century.

It was the one leaving, paralleling the Trent River on the New Bern side. It went and served Maxwell Company, who was a wholesale grocer.

It served Armstrong, a wholesale grocer. It served Baugh & Son, who had a fertilizer operation here in New Bern on the water. Also there

was a track over to Horner Plywood, which was at that time located right on the point. I can't think of the name of the point. What is it? That's Union Point. That track served for a while during World War II. After World War II, we abandoned the track and took it up and replaced it with pavement. But it served many years. That happened all the way through as the lumber companies would go out of business, the sidetrack that served them would have to be taken up in the interest of economy. You had to change with the business. As the business changed, new ones were built and others were abandoned, so that the railroads were abandoned in proportion to the traffic.

BE: What are your memories of some of the buildings and businesses around? You mentioned Baugh and Maxwell. What are some of the others that may not have been located on the railroad? New Bern Oil & Fertilizer Company for instance.

WINSLOW EDWARDS: That was on the Norfolk Southern.

BE: What about the Green Door? You remember the Green Door?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: Yeah, I remember the Green Door very well. I think when that was torn down, then J.C. Penney was built in the place of it.

BE: Right.

WINSLOW EDWARDS: That subsequently was torn down and it's now vacant.

BE: That's right.

WINSLOW EDWARDS: When we first came over, the trains going to Morehead City had five and six and seven cars in them. That was a



complete train.

BE: A passenger train?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: No, this was a freight train. We had a passenger train. It went down in the morning and came back at night. But also the freight trains had very few cars east of here, five and six cars, sometimes eight. I remember when the Germans went into Poland, and that was in September 1940, my father looked at the train with five or six cars in it and he says, "Well, that's the end of the A & EC Railroad. They'll be no more railroad." And things didn't change until the advent of Cherry Point. When they started building that thing, then we just had more traffic than we could handle from this small railroad. But I remembered his remark, "That's the end of the A & EC Railroad." Where the Roper Lumber Company, you know that went out of business. Maola bought that building. There were no other businesses here really. There were retail stores, but Maxwell and some of those people, Maxwell and Armstrong and Bough & Sons, they were about the only business they had here in New Bern. We didn't have any great industry, any industrial complex here in New Bern at all. In fact the first one I remember coming was Cherry Point. That fed everything. Without Cherry Point, New Bern would have suffered.

One of the instances I remember that stand out quite forcibly was the replacement of the pivot pier, the center pier in the draw bridge of Trent River. The old foundation was one of the original, was the original foundation. It was made out of light wood and put together with pegs, wasn't it? Put together with pegs. That had to be taken

out and one of concrete was poured through two tremi pipe down to the base, down to the bed of the river, and brought on up. This was all done. Had to stop the trains going into Morehead City. Over into Cherry Point and Morehead, passage over the bridge. When it came to the point of putting a center section in, revamp the center section in, it was extremely cold as I remember. We had to run a work crew up from Havelock. They came in an open motorcar. The temperature was about 18-20 degrees. They rode all the way up and had to be warmed up before they could ever go to work. The contractor put it in. We had a contractor here. It was again Tide Water. Wasn't it Tide Water?

It was Tide Water. The contractor did the heavy work, but our track crew did the other. They finally got it in after midnight or in the dawn, something like that. It was way early in the morning before they got it in to let the trains go by again.

BE: How did they get that pier under that bridge, that span?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: That was the handy work of Tide Water's foreman. He was about 62 or 63 years old I recall. He shifted the cables that were held by the crane. He shifted those back and forth until he worked that thing under the present structure that was on top of it and worked it underneath there, which I thought was a real stroke of genius to get it under there.

BE: How did you get the track up high enough to get it under there?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: It was blocked up and jacked up and he got it underneath that. I thought that was a real stroke of genius to get

that as smoothly as it did.

BE: Winslow, how did you get the draw span elevated enough that they could get that temporary support under it?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: We had to jack it up with hand jacks, railroad jacks. We had a number of jacks at each end and we jacked it up and he put the temporary span underneath it.

BE: How did you get the rail to match with it?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: How did we get it to match? Well, it came back down and we shimmed it.

BE: Oh yeah.

WINSLOW EDWARDS: We shimmed it until it matched.

BE: Put shims under the graduating shims.

WINSLOW EDWARDS: Under the center pier.

BE: The track leading to the pier?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: Yeah, that had to be shimmed too. That had to be shimmed on both sides. On the bridge side as well as the other side. When we had these tracks crawling, before we all got it anchored, the track was crawling and it was still crawling to the east. When the heavy load is going one direction, the pressure would build up.

It was held at the crossing and that would move, so it was anchored there at the crossing, grade crossing, you know, highway crossing.

But the track in between that would move. It would move until it got to the grade crossing and then it would stop. But then the pressure would build and it would buckle sideways and go out. That buckled under a train one night that I know and threw the conductor off the

top seat of the caboose and threw him down on the floor, but it didn't derail. The caboose went on over it.

BE: How far did the track go at times? Two or three feet or five, six feet?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: No, it would go three or four or five feet out. If they had nothing to support it when it went out, they would derail, they would turn the cars over. But fortunately it had enough to support it when it bucked out.

BE: What did you do to stop that or to slow it down?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: You had to anchor it.

BE: What kind of anchor?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: They had an anchor that was attached to the railing and to the crosstie. That anchored it down so it wouldn't move. That's common. All railroads use that type of anchorage. It's more effective where you've got rock ballast than it is where you've got sand ballast. So we had to put more anchors than usual to keep it from crawling. One of my responsibilities while I was with maintenance of way department was procurement of crossties. Crossties were not readily available around New Bern, mostly oak ties. This was during the war. So I had to go west of New Bern. I had to go back up around the central part of the Piedmont into the foothills of the mountains to buy oak timber. Some of people that we purchased from, at least one I know, he had a sideline, he was a bootlegger, a moonshiner. I remember one morning he came down to bring his crew down to load the ties out and they loaded about four ties and everyone

of them passed out. Had to wait til the next day to load it. But we finally got them loaded.

BE: How much did you pay for crossties then?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: I think there was a number five, which is the largest tie, was a dollar or a dollar and a quarter, something like that. Number four and number five, which had a face of about seven inches, the number four had seven inches, number five had eight and nine inches or over...

BE: Number five was the best.

WINSLOW EDWARDS: Was the best grade of tie, and that was something over a dollar at that time, when I first started buying it. Creosote ties were of course preferable, but this was during the war and creosote ties are not easy to come by. Everything was obligated to Uncle Sam, so you had to buy the next best which was an untreated tie, which is just like it's cut out of the woods. I think they were shipped by boxcar back over to New Bern and unloaded. But all of the ties were untreated at the first part of the war because that's all you could get. As well as I remember, there's 3,200 ties to the mile. I probably bought maybe ten miles of ties over in that part of the country and shipped them back.

BE: That would be 32,000 ties.

WINSLOW EDWARDS: Yeah, about 32,000, somewhere along in there. But that was during over a period of about three or four years.

BE: Didn't you also go down to Florida looking for ties?

WINSLOW EDWARDS: Yeah. I went down to Alabama. It was just

north of Dothan, Alabama. They were abandoning a railroad and I went down there to see what we could buy that was useful. They had some, what they call relay ties. They were treated ties but they had been taken up from this railroad. Now a days they use them for ornamental landscaping ties around the yard.

BE: Parking lots.

WINSLOW EDWARDS: Yeah, and things like that. But we bought several carloads of ties down there and shipped them back. Now they were treated ties but they had been in service for maybe ten years, which is probably half the life of a tie. We didn't buy any rail that I know of down there because it was all light rail too and we had light rail here. But we bought timber, and it was relayed timber. I think the branch was about forty-two miles long, and I walked the full forty-two miles picking out the ties that we would use. I would put my stamp on the tie and then we'd load it by truck and bring it on back, bring it up to a siding and load it out on a rail and ship it back in. That was quite an experience there because they had a firm from up north somewhere that was doing the abandoning of the line. I stayed down there about two weeks I think all total.

END OF INTERVIEW