ALVIN E. GEBARD

Larry Incollingo

Last Run On No. 72

LARRY

The October sky was waning and the world was wet and gray and from up ahead someplace a radiance lit the horizon and the man at the controls of Monon Train No. 27 knew his next and last stop would be the Golden Years.

It was Oct. 31. Engineer Alvin E. Gebard, 68, 1204 S. Grant St., Bloomington, was concluding more than 52 years of service with the Monon. His retirement was planned to take effect Nov. 1, so that in later years he and his wife, Gladys, could commemorate his retirement and their wedding anniversary on the same day. They have been married 48 years.

No. 72 was northbound from Louisville, nonstop to Bloomington. She had slowed some in Bedford to allow a visitor to swing aboard.

"This was just like any other trip," engineer Gebard was saying over the roar of the diesels, "until I got word at Salem that you were coming aboard. Now I feel pretty good, like that Indiana University football team. I like the smell of roses, too."

At Salem No. 72 had picked up orders on the fly. Unfolding the thin, green onion skin paper, Gebard read the clear black handwriting which were his last orders:

faithful service you are today handing over the touch to younger hands to run the race you so ably started on March 3, 1915. Congratulations to a well-earned retirement. The man you are and the contribution you have made to the Monon and employes has made it a better place for all of us to work."

The orders were initialed by Assistant Superintendent of the Southern Division, Richard D. Cantwell.

Gebard tightened the reins of the 8,000 diesel horses as No. 72 started downgrade with 93 loaded freight cars coming up behind.

"I still have the first set of orders I ever got," he called over the noise. "This last one kinda choked me up."

In all his years on the road, Gebard has never been involved in a fatal accident. "No one was hurt very badly either," he recalled.

"I don't regret any of my years with the Monon," he said. "It was a lot of hard work, and a lot of it we enjoyed. But, it can't go on forever and I don't want to stay on until I get down. I want to fish, and have fun."

As he spoke a section crew waved from the side of the rail bed. Everyone was waving at No. 72. She probably had the Golden-Years-Bound look about her. Her master on this last trip had begun as a roundhouse employe. The last 44 years however he had spent in firing and ramrodding engines. He took one leave of absence, 1917 to 1918—to serve with the Army in WW I.

On his feet the engineer would go about 5-11 and he admitted to about 200 pounds. Behind his spectacles, light blue eyes seemed always to be smiling and a full face lightened up when he spoke.

Gebard says he now may be able to give the North Central Church of Christ, "More of my time. Railroad men don't have much time for anything." He has, however, been serving on two committees at the church.

"I quit smoking when I was 50 years old," he answered a question. "I wouldn't be living today if I hadn't quit. It was killing me. The doctor told me to slow up. But, you can't slow up when it comes to smoking."

"We're going to take it easy, now," Gebard was saying. "When we get tired we'll go fishing. I have a good friend down in Florida, and we can spend some summers in Colorado." As he spoke he pulled on the whistle cord. No. 72 was banging into the Bloomington yards where friends would shake hands and bid farewell, and where Gladys was waiting to take him home for the last time.