



# THE Lehigh Valley IN three acts

From college years to a military hitch to the eve of Conrail, I gained different perspectives on a fascinating railroad

By Jeremy Plant • Photos by the author

**F**or me, the Lehigh Valley was like three railroads rolled into one, corresponding to the three states it served: New York, Pennsylvania, and New Jersey. As time went by, I had the opportunity to photograph “the Valley,” as many called it for short, in all three states, and I got to know and appreciate the railroad in each of its three clearly defined areas.

I got my start photographing the LV in spring and summer 1967 as I was finishing college not far from the Valley’s lines in central New York and northern Pennsylvania. My brother Jeffrey was studying at Cornell University in Ithaca, N.Y., right on the LV main line, and together we explored the Valley’s lines there in New York’s Finger Lakes region. Naturally, we also concentrated on LV’s hub, the signature railroad town of Sayre, Pa., nearby, just south of the New York state line, where LV’s big backshop and a busy yard were located.

After completing my undergraduate work at Colgate University, I left Lehigh Valley territory for a couple of years to attend graduate school in Virginia. Then, after being drafted into the Army and finishing my training, I was assigned to the Military Police in New York City and New Jersey. The Lehigh Valley was not far from our base, and I made many trips to the Bound Brook, N.J., area where LV was in close proximity to the Reading and the Central Railroad of New Jersey. It was at Bound Brook where I met another LV enthusiast, the late Richard Steinbrenner, who became a close friend and regular traveling partner as we photographed our favorite railroad. (Dick Steinbrenner died at age 79 in January 2016 as this article was being prepared for publication.)

After a six-month stint in New Jersey, the Army reassigned me to Fort Indiantown Gap, in eastern Pennsylvania, about an hour from the scenic Lehigh River Gorge and the busy rail scene in LV’s namesake area. Thus I was able to complete the

cycle and spend time in all three regions served by the LV: the lakes area of western New York, urban and suburban New Jersey, and finally the Pennsylvania mountains.

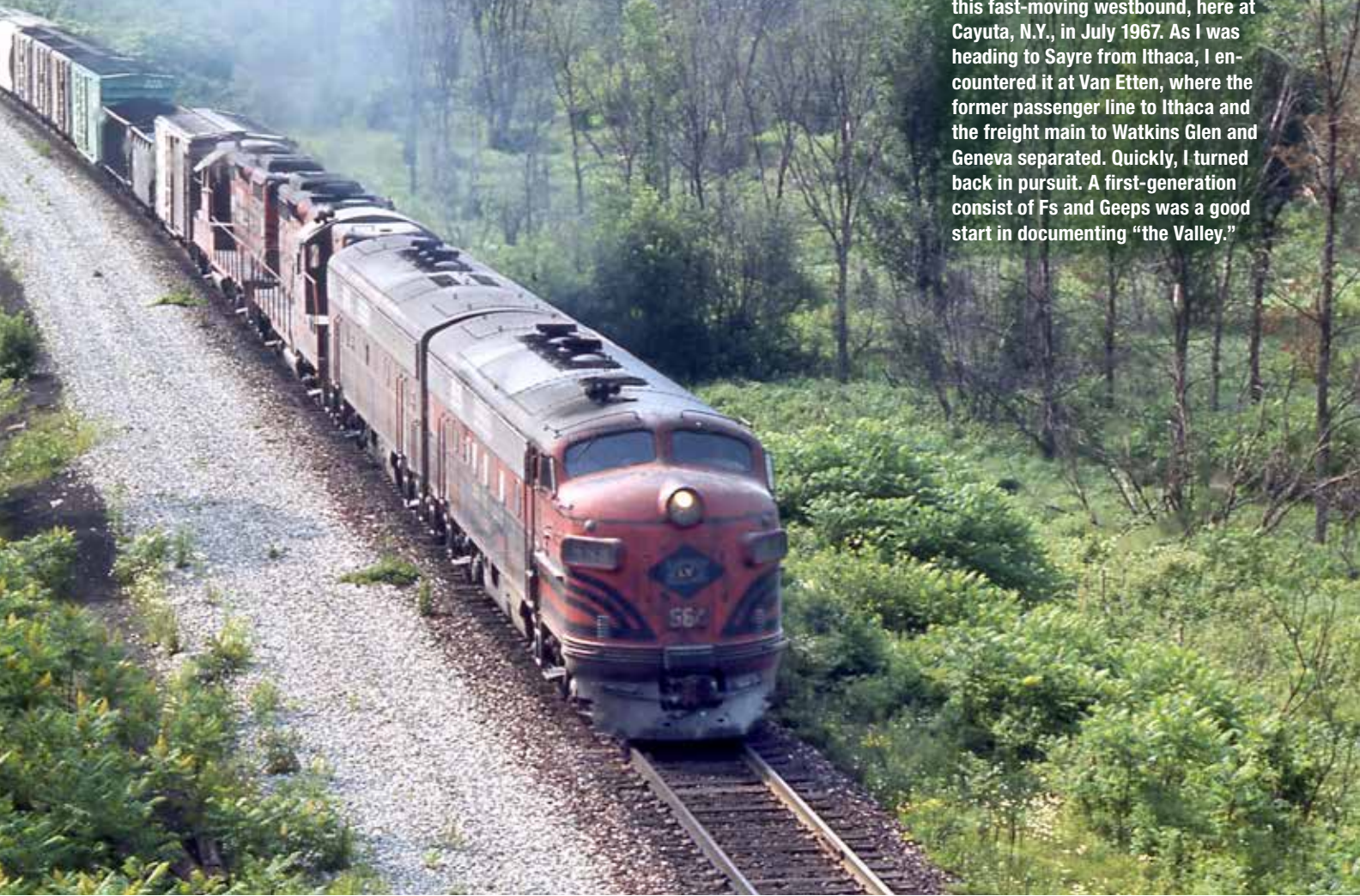
Once out of the Army, I returned to the South, but in summer 1974 I took a job in Albany, N.Y. Although New York’s “Capital District” was not close to the LV proper, the road’s colorful diesels at that time were showing up on an almost daily basis, in run-through service on Delaware & Hudson freights NE-87 and NE-84 between New England and the Mid-Atlantic region. Both roads liked Alcos and favored C628s for these trains, so although I was off-line, again I was able to savor the sight of LV Cornell red and Snowbird white big Alcos in action.

By 1975 it was time to begin recording the last images of the Valley before it was swept away in the Conrail startup. Once again I teamed up with Dick Steinbrenner, now accompanied by his young son, Ted. Even after Conrail took over, we were still favored with a taste of the Valley, as I was in the right place to see the final chapter of LV identity in the form of locomotives transferred to the D&H (expanded as a condition of Conrail’s formation), as Alcos and GEs paraded by, still wearing the colors of their former owner.

Come along as we sample some of my many visits to the fabulous and well-remembered Lehigh Valley.

**First into Sayre in July '67, I discovered the so-called “railfan bridge” over the tracks, by the depot and above the engine terminal. Illustrating the Valley’s variety, on consecutive days I shot a set of elderly Fs at the sand tower and this pair of C628s in the black-and-white “Snowbird” scheme sharing space with former Pennsylvania RS11s.**





My first chase of an LV train was of this fast-moving westbound, here at Cayuta, N.Y., in July 1967. As I was heading to Sayre from Ithaca, I encountered it at Van Etten, where the former passenger line to Ithaca and the freight main to Watkins Glen and Geneva separated. Quickly, I turned back in pursuit. A first-generation consist of Fs and Geeps was a good start in documenting “the Valley.”



This C420 trio rolled by the Jersey Central station at Bound Brook, N.J., with a westbound train in June 1970. LV’s 12 420s came in this “Yellowjacket” scheme, unique on the road and a marked departure from its standard colors of Cornell red and black. In 1965 LV had loaned the Ann Arbor Railroad three 420s so LV could try out three GP35s from AA’s fleet. After the PC merger, LV traffic diminished. One learned to be patient — on one full day, I encountered only one train.

April 4, 1972, was more like winter than spring, with snow on the ground and temperatures below freezing. Making the day more bearable was this westbound freight approaching Sayre at Athens, Pa., behind two of LV's last operating F7As, 562 and 572, sandwiching an RS11 and transporting an RS2 and two switchers for shop work at Sayre.



After finishing a visiting professorship in North Carolina in May 1973, I headed north to visit my parents in New York state. Stopping at Sayre, I found this westbound about to leave and chased it in fading early evening light to Lockwood, N.Y., for this shot. Lead unit GP38AC 313 is still new, looking sharp in Cornell red.



Lehigh, Pa., was near the beginning of the most scenic stretch of the LV, through the gorge of its namesake river. Rolling under the former CNJ bridge and past a pair of unusual semaphore dwarf signals on a cold and dreary day in early spring 1971, this eastbound has a pair of C628s, their white helpful for photos in dark weather. LV first applied this scheme to its nine C628s bought from the Monon.



Alco fans were at home on the Valley, which had at least 120 total Alcos of a dozen-plus models. Heading into Sayre in April '72 are two of LV's latest Alco acquisitions, ex-PRR RS3s 212 and 211, returning from Binghamton, N.Y., with freight received from the D&H. Rear unit 211, built as PRR 8445, is a "hammerhead," the short hood initially housing a steam generator and apparatus for dynamic brakes.

**On an October 1973 photography trip with Dick and Ted Steinbrenner to shoot the Lehigh Valley around Wilkes-Barre and Pittston, Pa., we first got this quartet of C420 Yellowjackets coming down Wilkes-Barre Mountain at Laurel Run and then rolling west of Coxtton (right).**



**On the same day we chased the four C420s westbound (top), we encountered NE-87, which, with mixed power, had come down from Mechanicville, N.Y., and was about to leave the D&H and head up LV's Mountain Cutoff at Avoca, Pa. Pushing hard on the jade-green LV caboose is C628 637 as the train climbs the grade at Laurel Run, Pa.**



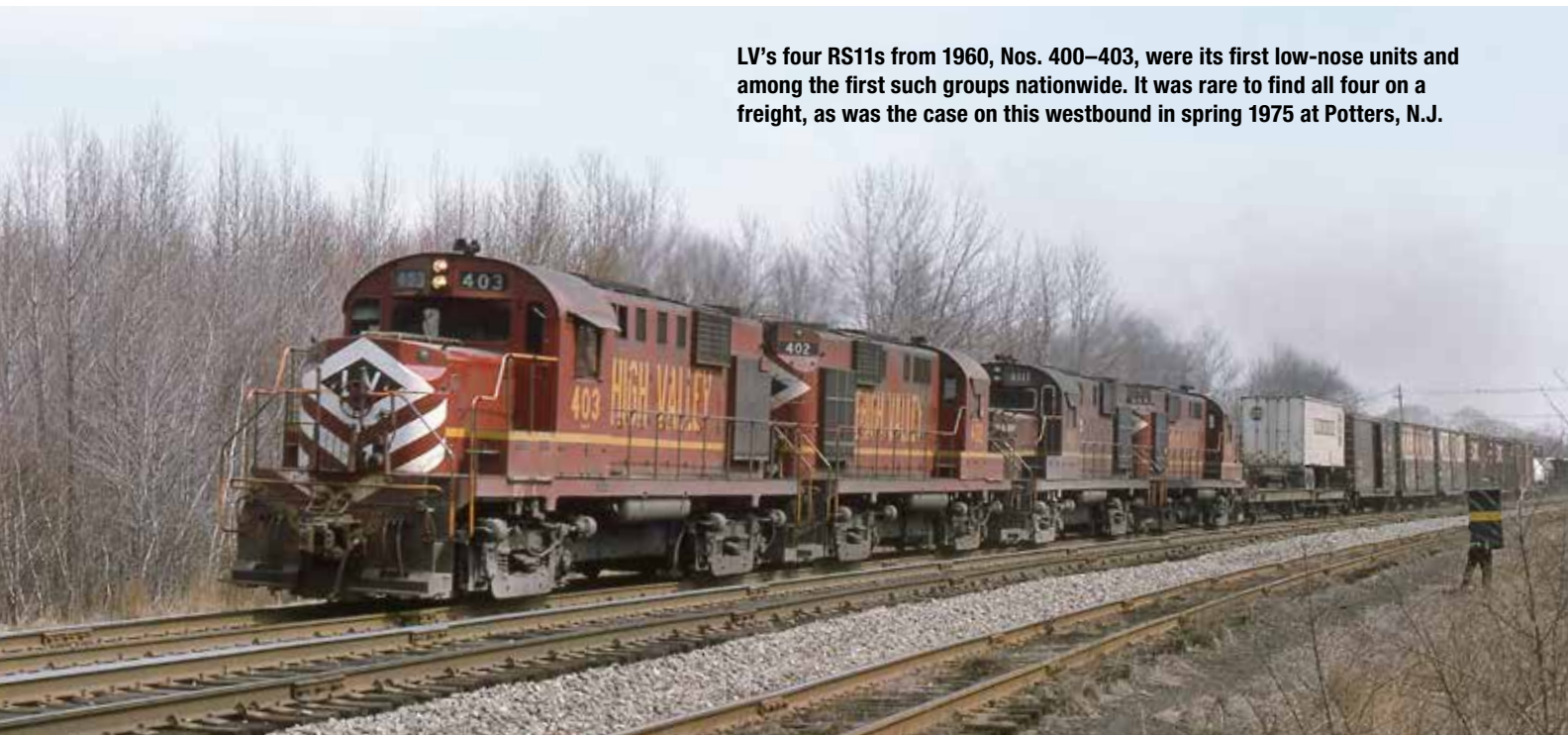


Another NE-87 drifts through Uniondale, Pa., on the D&H's Pennsylvania Division in January '74, behind three LV C628s, all in the Cornell red that succeeded those in white. Pure sets of either D&H or LV power were normal on this train.



The Valley's newest EMDs were the 12 GP38-2s received in January 1973, which had a rather ferocious-looking front end with white and black "scare" stripes, different from otherwise similar GP38ACs. No fewer than six GPs, with 321 in front, lead the westbound *Apollo* through Bethlehem, Pa., in May 1975.

LV's four RS11s from 1960, Nos. 400-403, were its first low-nose units and among the first such groups nationwide. It was rare to find all four on a freight, as was the case on this westbound in spring 1975 at Potters, N.J.



LV's smaller Alco road-switchers seemed to congregate in the road's namesake Lehigh Valley region, mostly on locals and transfers. In May '75, two of LV's seven ex-PRR units, RS11 7648 and RS3 211, lead a PC transfer at Phillipsburg, N.J. "Hammerhead" 211, which got an EMD engine in a Conrail rebuild, is preserved at the Rochester & Genesee Valley Railroad Museum near Rochester, N.Y.



The winter of 1975-76 was cold and snowy as the final months of the Valley counted down to Conrail's April 1, 1976, birth. Two months before the end, NE-87 heads east through Treichlers, Pa., on the former Jersey Central line that LV assumed after 1972, when CNJ pulled out of the Keystone State. Instead of the usual C628s, this day's train has four-axle Alcos, two RS11s and a lone C420.



It's a sad yet exciting few days after the Conrail takeover. Much of the Lehigh Valley west of Sayre is out of service, and two dozen LV units have been transferred to the D&H to help that expanded railroad compete with the new blue giant of the Northeast. Five former LV units, four EMD GP38-2s and an Alco C420, show varying states of identification as they head south at Seneca Street in Schenectady, N.Y., on the D&H. It would be years before the last evidence of Lehigh Valley ownership of the transferred GP38-2s and C420s would be erased. ■

