

SURROUNDED by STEAM LOCOMOTIVES DURING the GRAND AGE of STEAM

Part three of the series
by John R Daly

During my service with the Western Pacific I also had the opportunity to ride with some of my engineer friends. One of the highlights was riding one night with Engineer Joe Guffra in the cab of engine 482 as the big 4-8-4 roared across western Nevada and into California with train #39. Another time I rode with Engineer Bob Cronin in the cab of engine 78 on the Oroville to Portola Feather River Express. Engineer Cronin came to the WP soon after the railroad started operating and spent almost all of his 35 or more years with the WP on trains in the Feather River canyon. He made many thousands of trips on trains #3 & 4, #11 & 12, and #1 & 2, and I was there to greet him at the roundhouse as he brought train #2 into Portola for the last time. But I was the only one there to wish him well as he filled out his reports for the last time and I felt sad as I watched him slowly walk away from the only life he had ever known.

During the war years there were a number of father and son engineers working on the Portola board. On more than one occasion both father and son went out on the same engine. Among these were Bob and Emmett "Buzz" Cronin, F.T. Wood and T.C. Wood, "Old Pon" Poindexter and Bert Poindexter, and Noble and Bob Wakefield. There were many odd nicknames among the engineers too, such as "Wheezy Wood, High Miles Nelson, Burr-Head Fuller, Shorty Groom and Burr Outlaw". I remember odd combinations of names too as one night I called Engineer Earl Fightmaster and had to team him with a new boomer fireman with the last name of

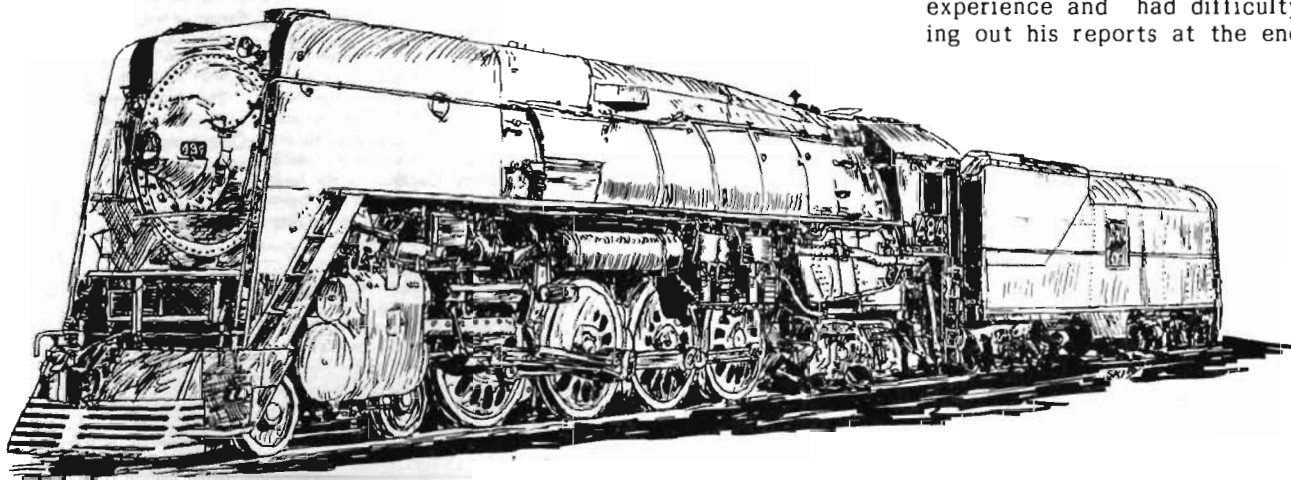
Peacemaker. And I also remember calling an eastern division crew in which the engineer was Pete Mennicucci and the fireman was named Jacobucci. Other names stand out in my memory for special praise too such as Engineer L.T. Davis who was the representative of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and later was a California State Assemblyman. Les Davis was most helpful to me in settling the inevitable disputes involving complicated union rules in regard to the handling of the men on the Portola board. Many a time I had to get him out of a sound sleep to solve a serious problem and this he always did without a word of complaint. Tom Hunter, the Road Foreman of Engines, was another real help and was highly respected by all who worked with him. Both of these men are now gone but they are high on my list of great railroad men.

Before the new Centralized Traffic Control (CTC) became operative all Western Pacific trains were run strictly on train orders issued by the dispatcher. I had access to thousands of these train orders which engineers left in my office at the conclusion of their runs and if I had only realized it I could now have a complete file of orders covering every possible condition on the railroad from Oroville to Winnemucca. Among the most interesting orders which I remember were those requesting the engine crews to be on the lookout for Japanese incendiary balloons which were then being released in Japan with the hope they would reach American shores and set our forests ablaze.

All kinds of food was hard to come by during the war years but some of the engine crews working in the canyon soon found a novel way to overcome this. The WP was carrying

many hundred of troop trains west and apparently their kitchen cars were supplied before leaving the east coast but with instructions to arrive in Oakland with nothing left over. The canyon engineers soon noticed that at a location just east of Oroville food was being dumped from the kitchen cars onto a high bank which sloped steeply into the river. The engine crews retrieved a lot of these unopened supplies by conveniently stopping at just the right spot to check on a "suspected hot box" or some other mechanical problem. I have seen crews arriving in Portola with such items as canned hams, canned peaches, canned coffee, and sacks of sugar and potatoes. We also had crews arriving at the roundhouse with deer on top of the tender behind the engine as many deer were killed by trains especially in the winter months. The engineers always expressed sorrow after killing animals as such accidents were entirely unavoidable. One night Fireman John Moore could hardly describe how his locomotive had struck and killed five big white horses which had wandered onto the main line just west of Doyle, California.

Yes, those were exciting days and I look back on them now with both joy and sadness but at the same time I am thankful that I had a part in the tremendous war effort of the Western Pacific. All of those with whom I worked were good friends and now almost every one of them are gone. Some of my sad memories come from times such as when Engineer Jack Hardy arrived at the roundhouse with engine 3 on the Reno local. His locomotive had just hit and killed three WP track workers on a hand car on the branch when they overlooked the fact that Hardy's train had not yet passed that area. Jack Hardy was truly shaken by the experience and had difficulty filling out his reports at the end of



that run. I remember also watching engine 77 being brought into the roundhouse from train #12 after it had struck and killed six teenagers in a pickup truck at a grade crossing near Tracy. The engineer on engine 77 was so overcome by grief that the train had to be taken on into Oroville by Engineer Bill Cope who happened to be riding in one of the coaches at the time of the accident.

But I also remember many enjoyable things involving the railroad and these included the fact that when our youngest daughter was born at the Western Pacific hospital on the stormy night of December 8, 1943, it was with the help of engine 33 that she arrived in this world. The schools had been closed because of a flu epidemic and late that afternoon the fierce winds blew down the electric power lines between Truckee and Portola. This left the entire community, including the roundhouse and the hospital, without electricity and so it was with the help of engine 33 which was providing steam to an emergency generator that our daughter arrived in this world. The generator made it possible to light both the hospital and the roundhouse until the big storm was over. The WP hospital was located on the hill directly above the roundhouse and although it was small it was well staffed and served Portola well for nearly fifty years until replaced by a larger non-railroad facility. In conclusion I feel very fortunate to have been in a situation where I was actually surrounded by those wonderful steam locomotives during the grand age of steam and I am forever thankful to have had the opportunity to play a part in the war effort of the Western Pacific working with such a great group of railroaders.

John R Daly
Hayward, California

We would like to thank Mr Daly for sending in this super article. He also sent this correction for the first part of this three part article. an omission.....

"In addition to these we had the

passenger crews which worked from Portola east to Gerlach, Nevada, where the passenger trains were taken over by eastern division crews, and the passenger crews working the Feather River canyon."

NEVADA STATE RAILROAD MUSEUM 1987 SEASON SCHEDULE

Open Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays and Holidays, 8:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.
May 22 through November 1.

STEAM OPERATING SCHEDULE

Saturday, May 23 and Sunday, May 24—V&T Engines No. 22 and No. 25.
Friday, July 3; Saturday, July 4 and Sunday, July 5—Engine No. 25.
Saturday, August 1 and Sunday, August 2—Engine No. 25.
Saturday, August 15 and Sunday, August 16—Engine No. 25.
Saturday, September 5 and Sunday, September 6—Engine No. 25.
Saturday, October 3 and Sunday, October 4—Engine No. 25.
Friday, October 30; Saturday, October 31 and Sunday, November 1 (Nevada Day Weekend)—Engines No. 22 and No. 25.

Feather River Rail Society
P.O. Box 1104, Portola, CA 96122
916-832-4737

MAINLINE MODELER Magazine
5115 Monticello Drive
Edmonds, Washington 98020

April 6th 87

An open letter to MAINLINE MODELER Magazine from the FRRS Membership

Dear Sir,

We have read your past editorial commentary with interest, for some time now we have requested you to include our society in your society listing. As each issue comes out the society page is checked and each time we have been omitted. And each time the magazine is returned to the rack unpurchased. We have only 600+ members of which about one half are modelers, FRRS members not buying your magazine are small in numbers but part of the whole picture. It's a disservice to your readers that may be interested in the Western Pacific not to include us. As the FRRS is filling the role of a historical society multi-dimensionally by preserving data, photos, negs, records, drawings and historical info plus preserving and restoring actual WP railroad equipment to operation and display.

We respectfully again request to be included on your society page.....
Thank you in advance for joining the other publications that support our society.

The membership of the Feather River Rail Society

New Marine Equipment

During the past five years Western Pacific has conducted studies looking toward the replacement of its present two steam-powered tugs, the *Hinnaconna* and the *Hercules*, and the two wooden barges now operating on San Francisco Bay. This equipment, used in barging freight cars between Oakland and San Francisco, is near the end of its physical life and extensive and costly repairs would be necessary to maintain the equipment in operation. The research project, which was completed last December, indicated that a single diesel-powered train ferry would be the most satisfactory solution. Approval has now been given by the Board of Directors to proceed with the construction of this vessel, pictured in the architect's drawing above.

The new vessel, to be called the *Feather River*, will by itself provide improved service, because of greater capacity; faster point-to-point speed;

and all-weather dependability, resulting from greater maneuverability and stability.

Although minor changes may still be made, tentative specifications for the new self-propelled car ferry are: overall length, 375 feet; overall breadth, 55 feet; depth, keel to deck, 16 feet; operating draft, nine feet; loaded displacement, 3,500 tons; capacity, 26 to 28 cars on four tracks, the exact number of cars depending on final on-deck truck arrangements. Direct diesel propulsion will be by three main screws at stern, each engine to deliver 700-horsepower maximum; providing a speed of approximately 10 knots when loaded.

The hull, in barge form with tapered ends fore and aft, will be of all-welded

steel construction, framed longitudinally, as a tanker is constructed. The bow will have a 200-horsepower diesel engine, driving through right-angle gears a bow propeller housed within the hull, and positioned to give thrust at right angles to the vessel for quick maneuverability. Contour of the bow portion of the vessel's deck has been designed to fit existing slips in the Bay area.

The control bridge and crew's quarters are located in a single-span bridge located amidship and over the freight cars. This superstructure will rise about 23 feet above the deck to the underside of the span, and about 15 feet from that point to the top of bridge. The engineer will be stationed approximately in the center of the engine

room, within a control room, whence he may view the rest of the engine room through large glass windows. Steering will be hydraulic, with three main rudders at the stern. Engines will be controlled from two locations, the bridge and the engine room.

The exact number of the crew is yet to be determined, depending on Coast Guard regulations and practical operating requirements.

Loading of the fuel tanks with diesel fuel will be accomplished by rolling tank cars aboard the vessel and filling by gravity flow from the cars.

The *Feather River* was designed by L. C. Norgaard, San Francisco naval architect. Cost is estimated at \$1,060,000, and it is contemplated that the contract for her construction will be signed in early May, with delivery tentatively scheduled for the second quarter of 1987.