

Replacing High Ties in the Sky

A S a f e t y A c t

EDITOR'S NOTE- This letter was written in March 1986 soon after the Great Flood in February 1986 and was published in the Feather River Division Chronicle. Joe Steffanic is the Signal Maintainer at Tobin.

Someone told me the other day that working in the Canyon is a real circus. I think that is the most accurate description I've heard. A Circus. A twenty ring circus! Ten acts in one ring, one section of track, one block from West Camp Rogers to East Merlin.

The work trains just have to be the elephants. Loading and then unloading the gray Tobin rip-rapp and moving slowly and ponderously back and forth. The Morrison-Knudsen contractors were the jugglers; jugglers of dynamite. The front end loaders, dangerous and strong, were the lions. The Third Sub Dispatchers were the ring leaders, unseen but in control.

With Track Inspectors, Track Section crews, Track Extra Gangs, Tamper operators, Ohio Cranemen, Engineering Inspectors, Surveyors, Relief Train Crews, Signalmen and Communication men, fiberoptics construction gangs, Mechanics, and of course, an almost infinite number of white hats... They all had a vital role to play and all were forced, by the circumstances of nature, to play in the same ring.

But stop!... Let's zoom in and have a closer view of just one of the many entertaining acts:

High, high above Rock Creek, in the middle of the Feather River Canyon, we find the most dangerous occupation of them all, the high wire act: the B & B Gang working on Rock Creek Bridge. This is an Open Deck Bridge, no hand-rails, and it runs with curve elevated track. The B & B Gang is changing ties. This is, without a doubt, the High Wire act.

Like the other performers in a circus, the high wire act performs its act time and time again. They stay in practice, they keep their balance and must consider each of their fellow gang mem-

ber's next move.

The performers in this act are:

The leader of the gang, the foreman, is Jeff Lynch. He is rather easy going but don't call him Ray. He sets the pace and keeps the act together. He knows his men and his men know him.

Next in charge is Daryl Josephson, known far and wide as "Hardrock", or even "The Rock". He is the type of guy legends are made of. Some of the tales about him are true, some are not so true. For sure, the Rock has a lot of heart.

Then there's Dave Riley. When the day is indistinguishable from cow droppings, Dave is usually able to remain above the depression. He seems to have a contagious effect on the rest of the crew...

Gary Legg is always up on history and current events, as well as the new jokes, books and even philosophies of life.

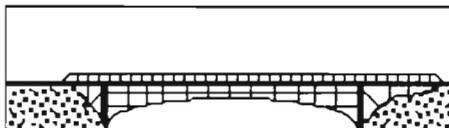
Mark Pinkard looks like a brother you never had. Even when he's not smiling, he seems to be contemplating some sort of mischief.

Gary Baland is probably the easiest to talk to and is interested in just about everything.

You may know these guys personally but in some parts of the railroad they are just numbers, numbers on a computer database. But numbers don't do work and numbers don't work safely.

These are real people doing real work in one of the most dangerous acts of all. After they leave Rock Creek Bridge a few people will look at it and say: "Hey, remember when Jeff and Rock and Gary and Dave and Mark and Gary were changing the timbers of this bridge and the middle of the circus? For an act well done with safety and class that makes us all look good... "this one's for you!".

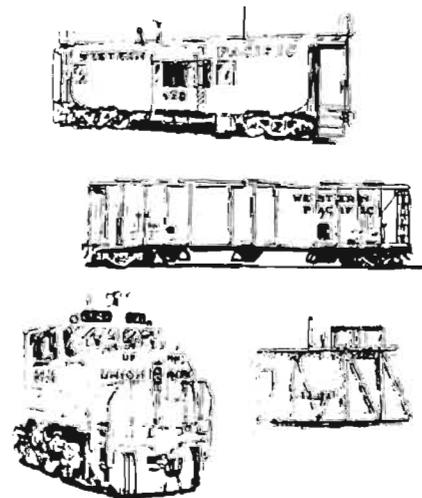
- Joe Steffanic



Sheet Four

True Tales Of the Rails

Once upon a time, Canyon engineer Buz Cronin left Portola and when the train tipped over the hill at Mabie, he lost all the units except one. It would not load, but would idle to pump air. He chose to go on and refused to stop at Keddie where the roundhouse foreman could check the units. As the third subdivision is 1% grade all the way down to Oroville, he was able to take the train into Oroville Yard without power. The head brakeman, Don Ward, ran for the switch heading into the yard, but as the yard is on a slight incline, the train stalled halfway into the clear. Buz got off the engine and walked over to the roundhouse to tie up, while Oroville Terminal Trainmaster Bob Sherwood screamed over the radio for him to pull the train into the clear.



The Train Sheet

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