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My Life On Mountain Railroads

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were ninety-seven or ninety-eight loads in that train when I took charge. Mr. Vaughan and several Rio Grande officials were there as well as a half-dozen car men.

I started out bravely. That train came off the Summit without any trouble at all. I expected to have trouble with it, but I was agreeably surprised. It handled nicely all the way to Provo. When we pulled into the Provo yard, you could tell that Mr. Vaughan was relieved. He never did try to take one hundred loads in a train again, although we did handle as high as eighty-five on a routine basis.

I think I can safely say that up until the advent of the diesel locomotive I handled the heaviest train of coal that ever came down that mountain. And I smoked one of Mr. Vaughan's good cigars while doing it.

I remember a time when the coal miners at Spring Canyon were on strike. At that time McKelvy and McPhie were working out of Martin on a hill crew. I believe it was the only time the Utah Railway had a hill crew. In my opinion it could better be called the ping pong crew.

One morning they were called at Martin without being told where they were going. Mr. Vaughan appeared on the scene, and they received orders to go light to Castle Gate. Number 5 came into Castle Gate from the east and set out a coach-load of Mexicans.

Bill McKelvy grew suspicious, and upon inquiring, learned that the Mexicans in the coach were strike breakers destined for the mines in Spring Canyon. He refused to move the engine. McPhie and the rest of the crew joined him. Finally Mr. Vaughan fired them for refusing service.

A Spring Canyon mine guard named Webb, who happened to be an ex-Rio Grande fireman, volunteered to fire the engine. Mr. Vaughan thought he could run her himself, so they took off for Martin. At Martin, Mr. Vaughan tried vainly to get another crew to take that coach up to Spring Canyon, but no one seemed interested. He and Webb then decided to tackle the job. With Mr. Vaughan at the throttle and Webb at the scoop they took off. Upon emerging from the east end of tunnel number one, all hell broke loose. There must have been twenty or more striking miners with rifles blazing away at that engine and coach. From all accounts of the fray, when those guns began to bark the mine guard dropped his scoop and with his gun in hand started to climb the coal pile to return their fire. He never got off a shot, so the story goes, before a bullet went through his heart, and he was dead.

Mr Vaughan kept right on going. Instead of stopping to head up the Spring Canyon Branch at Jacobs, he went on up and stopped in the middle of tunnel number two. Leaving the engine and coach there, he walked to

Wild Cat and phoned for help. How he escaped being hit by one of those wild bullets is a mystery.

No one was ever arrested that I heard of in connection with this incident, and if anyone ever knew who the riflemen were that did the firing they kept it very quiet. The train and engine crews were not reinstated for several months. Meanwhile the National Guard was brought into Carbon County.

It was during the presence of the National Guard in the county that the Utah Railway had its nastiest wreck. Charley Johnson, with a train of coal, was coming down into Martin westbound. The Spring Canyon crew was pushing a train of empties with the caboose on the point up through tunnel number one. Charley, with the 102, met the caboose in the middle of the tunnel. The tunnel was timber lined and supported at that time. The caboose caught fire, and a serious fire raged in the confined space of the tunnel.

Tommy Burke, the conductor on the Spring Canyon job, was injured seriously. He never did fully recover. A brakeman on the same job was badly burned in the resulting fire. In fact, all they ever found of this brakeman after several weeks was a piece or two of charred bone.

Charley Johnson could hear Tommy Burke calling from his trapped position in the wreckage of that burning caboose. Amid all the smoke and steam that was making an inferno of that tunnel he walked around the wreck until he found Tommy, and then carried him out more dead than alive. The gas and smoke in the tunnel affected Tommy's throat and lungs so that he died several months later. I have often thought that Charley Johnson's persistence in that tragedy was one of finest acts of heroism I have ever known.

The fire in the tunnel continued to burn for several days before it was put out. It was feared the 102 would be damaged beyond repair, but she went back into service after a very short time in the shops.

During the time that the tunnel was blocked all trains to and from Hiawatha had to be detoured over the Rio Grande and down into Helper. From there they went up the Spring Canyon Branch to a place where a spur connected the Rio Grande with the Utah Railway mainline. There being room above the tunnel for about seven cars and an engine to clear the spur, all trains had to be cut in many pieces in order to get by the blockade. For a couple of weeks or more we juggled trains from one track to another in lots of six or seven cars.

The Utah Railway train dispatcher at that time had his office in the depot at Hiawatha. He had put out the orders that caused these trains to

come together in the tunnel. Each crew had orders authorizing it to proceed. Neither train was informed of the other, nor a meeting point for them designated. When this dispatcher learned of the wreck he immediately packed his bag and left the country. After a few weeks he was located somewhere over in Colorado and brought back for the investigation.

The first thing the Utah did after this wreck was to install block signals on each approach to both tunnels. Block signals would have prevented that wreck had they been installed earlier. After that it surely felt good to come down toward Martin and see a big green light on the approach to those tunnels.

Business was getting better all the time on the Utah Railway. In the wintertime all the mines were working at full capacity. In the spring and early summer, activity would fall off a little, but toward September business would be booming again. In the winter you could go into the little call room at Martin and see boomers from all over the country waiting for a call.

Our master mechanic was a little Italian American named Jack Somo. If there was one thing he understood thoroughly it was engines. Our engines were in as nearly perfect condition as they could get. When business started to fall off in the early spring, he would take those engines in rotation and put them through the back shop. When business picked up in the fall all our power would be in good shape to battle through the winter.

Rio Grande engines in contrast would go up the canyon enveloped in a cloud of leaking steam so dense that it was hard to see from the cab to the pilot in the wintertime. By contrast, our power would be tight as a drum against steam leaks.

This reminds me of a story that I heard in my early days as a fireman on the Rio Grande. There were a bunch of us firemen in the call room at Salt Lake sitting around shooting the breeze. There was talk of the Rio Grande getting some of those double-jointed mallet engines for the Bingham branch.

One fireman asked, "What the h—— do they look like, anyway?"

Hardly anyone had ever seen one. One little Irishman named Pat Fay spoke up. "I'll show you what they look like," he said. He picked up a piece of chalk and went over to the black board. He smeared the black board up so that it resembled a big white cloud. He turned a sober face to the gang.

One guy spoke up and said. "That looks like a big cloud of steam. I can't see an engine in there."

"Well, you will," said Pat. "Just wait 'til the engineer shuts off and that steam drifts away; then you'll see the engine."

That's just about the way it was too. When those Rio Grande mallets were working you could hardly see the engine for the steam leaks.

Although we on the Utah kicked and belly-ached about steam leaks, we had nothing to worry about compared to the Rio Grande men. Our power was always in good shape. Our officials saw to it that they got the last pound of power working through their engines.

As I said, during those years our coal tonnage grew by leaps and bounds. Our railroad did too. We had at that time three big mines in the Hiawatha district, as well as Wattis. When the Great Depression of the 1930s hit we were running more trains of coal over the joint track than the Rio Grande. One of the Rio Grande officials made the remark that if it wasn't for the track rental that the Rio Grande was getting from the Utah Railway the Rio Grande would fold up.

There was a time in the late 1920s that the Rio Grande, being in bankruptcy, was sold at auction. At that time the Utah Railway was the highest bidder for the trackage between Grand Junction and Ogden. That was all of the road they wanted. But the bankruptcy court at Denver conducting the auction would not sell it piecemeal. It had to be all or none. I have often wondered what my destiny would have been if this sale had gone through.

Our railroad, and the mines it served, never did recover their former vigor after the depression. One by one our mines folded up due to the decreased demand for coal in competition with natural gas. A mountain slide closed the Panther Mine, and the rails to it were torn up.

When United States Steel located at Geneva near Provo there was no coking coal on our side of the coal fields in Utah. That hurt us, as the coking coal on Rio Grande trackage took away a lot of our business.

Since the Utah Railway never did recover from the depression the way the Rio Grande did, I have often wondered what would have become of me if I had stayed on the Rio Grande. I might have been better off in those later years—if I had survived.

As the Utah Railway business was ninety-nine percent coal, the introduction of natural gas for domestic heating made a big difference in our tonnage. On the other hand, the Rio Grande, through a program of extensive rehabilitation, gained a lot of through business. It is and has been for some time a real modern railroad. When I was on the Rio Grande it was far from that.

When the Utah Railway started building, the reports that went around would make any young fellow long to change to the new road. Although those reports proved to be mostly fabrication, still it was for many