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Alaska Railroad

Pdf package contents
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Uncle Sam's railroad
The Alaska Railroad
By Guy Zalbourg
Pages 22-25, September 1949

The railroad that had it too good
The Alaska Railroad
By Jerome Sheldon
Pages 23-30, September 1955

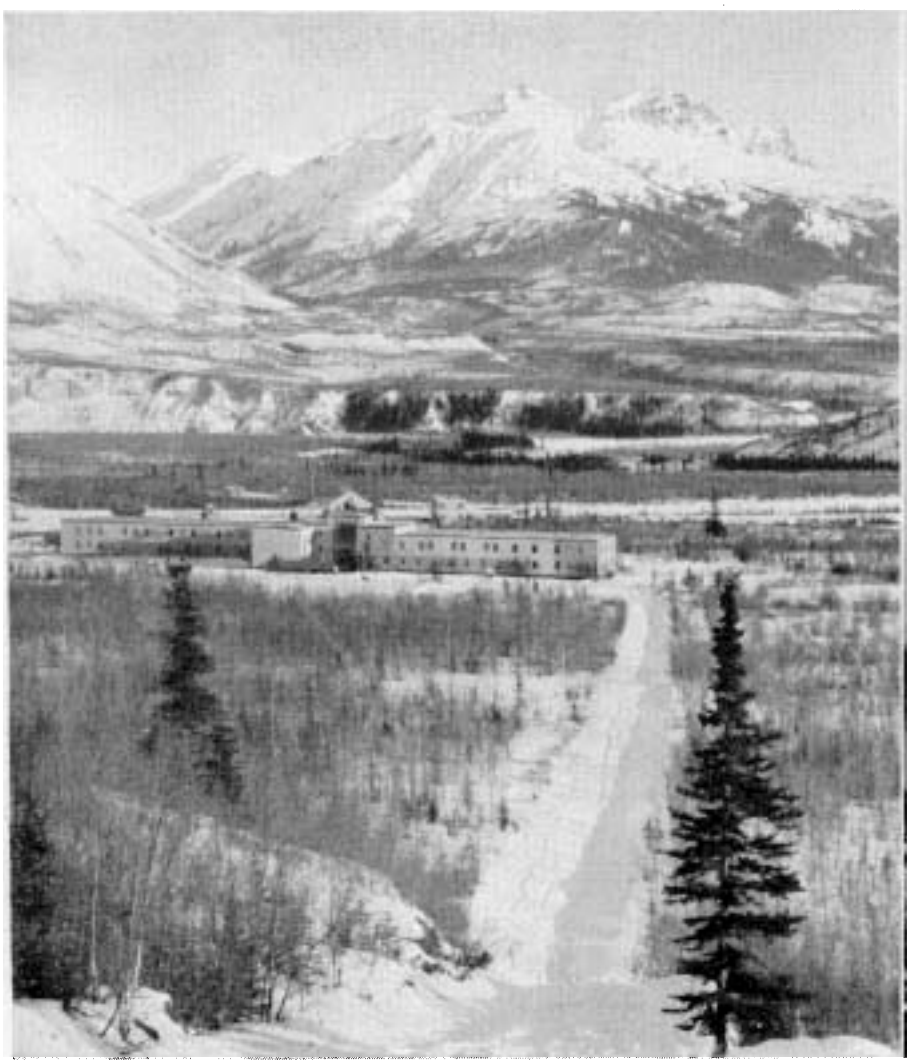
Uncle Sam's railroad experiment
The federally owned Alaska Railroad
By David P. Morgan
Pages 42-47, April 1963

Cold War railroading
How Khrushchev holds down the Alaska Railroad's operating ratio
By David P. Morgan
Pages 40-45, May 1963

The bear and the big hook
Wildlife vs. the Alaska Railroad
By George Jennings Gale
Page 23, April 1967

Why did Alaska go for SD70MACs?
By David Lustig
Page 22, July 2002

Alaska's extreme RDC run
By Bob Johnston
Pages 24-25, July 2004



Mount McKinley Hotel, austere in appearance but scenic in location, is owned by the ARR.

Converted mine rescue cars and two onetime diesel

Uncle Sam's railroad

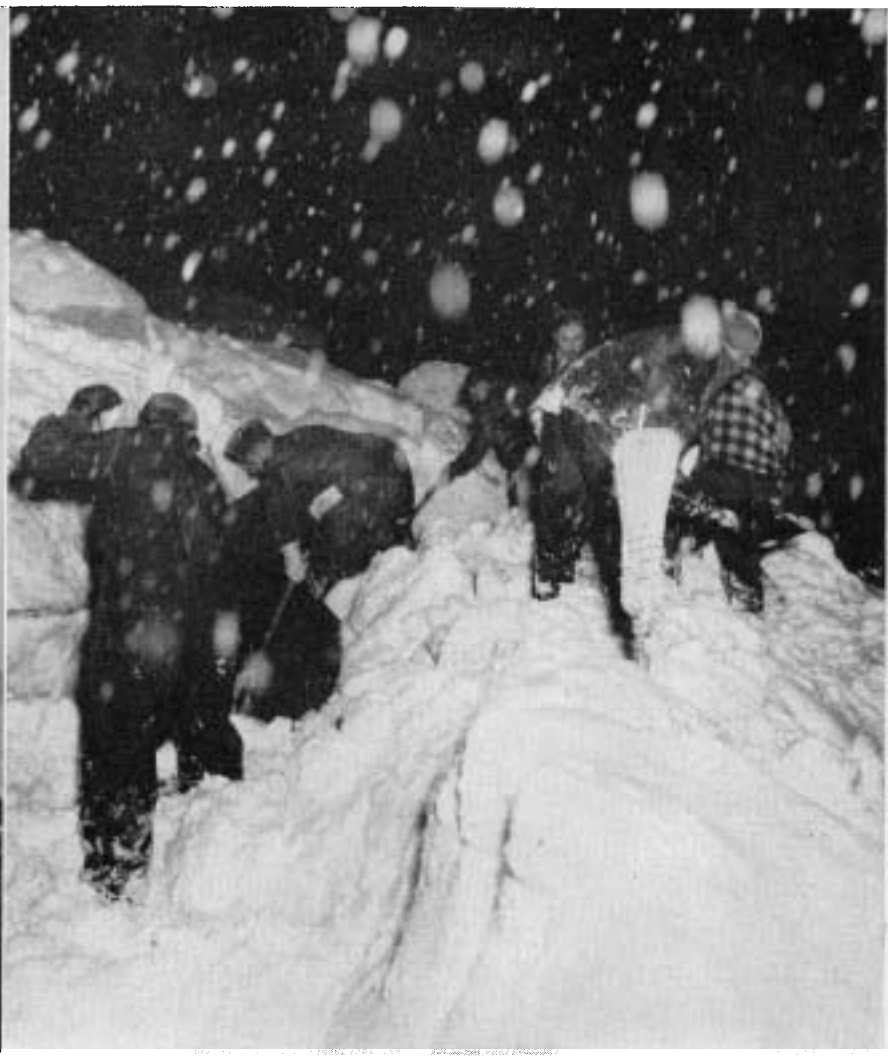
BUSINESS is booming on the Alaska Railroad, the United States Government line which reaches farther north than any other railroad in the Western Hemisphere. Traffic has doubled since the war days of 1943. Diesel locomotives are now accomplishing in 13½ hours what steam locomotives used to do in 32¼ hours. The laurels are not entirely the diesels', however; the internal combustion power plants are a part of the effect, not the cause. The cause is an ambitious $50 million improvement program which includes rebuilding much of the 26-year-old railroad as well as rehabilitating its locomotives and rolling stock.

The Alaska Railroad is operated by the Department of the Interior. The line runs from tidewater at Seward, 470 tortuous miles north to Fairbanks, about 100 miles south of the Arctic Circle. A branch line runs from Portage, 64 miles from Seward, to the port of Whittier, which the Army has used since 1943 to save 52 miles on the trip to the interior. The line from Portage to Seward is costly to maintain and operate, and it is planned to abandon this section after completion of a highway connecting Seward with the Kenai Peninsula and the rest of Alaska.

Alaska is a youngster, geologically speaking, and for that reason running a railroad there is far from being a sinecure. The earth hasn't jelled yet; earthquakes are frequent. Even more distracting, and certainly more frequent, are the frost heaves which shake the right of way and curl the rail because ballast is too skimpy. Better ballast and heavier rail are among the items included in the improvement program currently being pushed by the railroad.

In the winter, the temperature often drops to 60 degrees below zero on the northern end of the line, and icy winds sweep down the mountain passes. Four years ago at Bear Valley, near Whittier, the wind blew five empty freight cars off the bridge and demolished part of the structure. Trains buried in snow banks are also commonplace, and it's a hardy breed of railroaders who can take what Brakeman Fred Bimms and Conductor Joe Axe took last January 11, and still

switchers make up AuRoRa, ARR's blue-gold streamliner.



Rescue workers dig for buried trainmen after the Curry Slide accident in January, 1949.

For years a federal derelict, the Alaska Railroad now features better track and a streamliner

BY GUY ZALBOURG

stay on the job without a break.

Bimms, Axe, another brakeman and Captain L. M. Hebbelthwaite of the U. S. Army were riding the caboose of train No. 26 when it was stopped because of two snowslides over the track. The four men got out to investigate. Luckily for the other three, Brakeman Max Shake decided to walk the catwalk on top of the cars while the others strode along by the side of the train. They had walked about half of the 14-car train when a third slide came hurtling down, burying the men on the ground. Shake, who had had trouble closing the caboose door because of snow, was some distance behind the trio and thus escaped the slide. He was able to run for help to extricate the others.

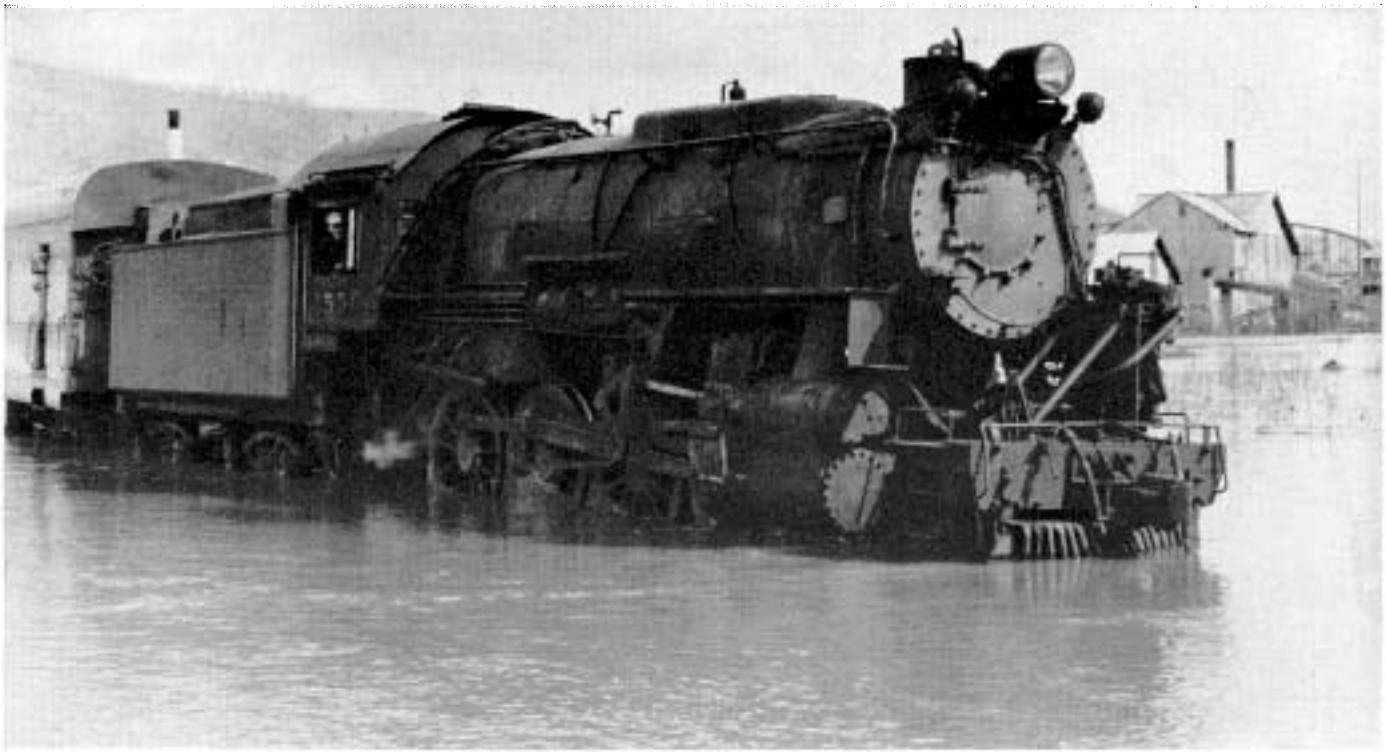
All three men survived their burial in the snow, but the two hours they spent entombed seemed a lot longer than 120 minutes.

"I didn't hear a sound until the [rescuers'] shovel hit my leg," said Conductor Axe after his rescue. "It hurt, but it was the most welcome blow I ever received. . . . When you are trapped in the snow, you can't help yourself. You can't shout nor move nor do anything. You just wait. . . . And you're not a hero. The heroes are the boys outside digging."

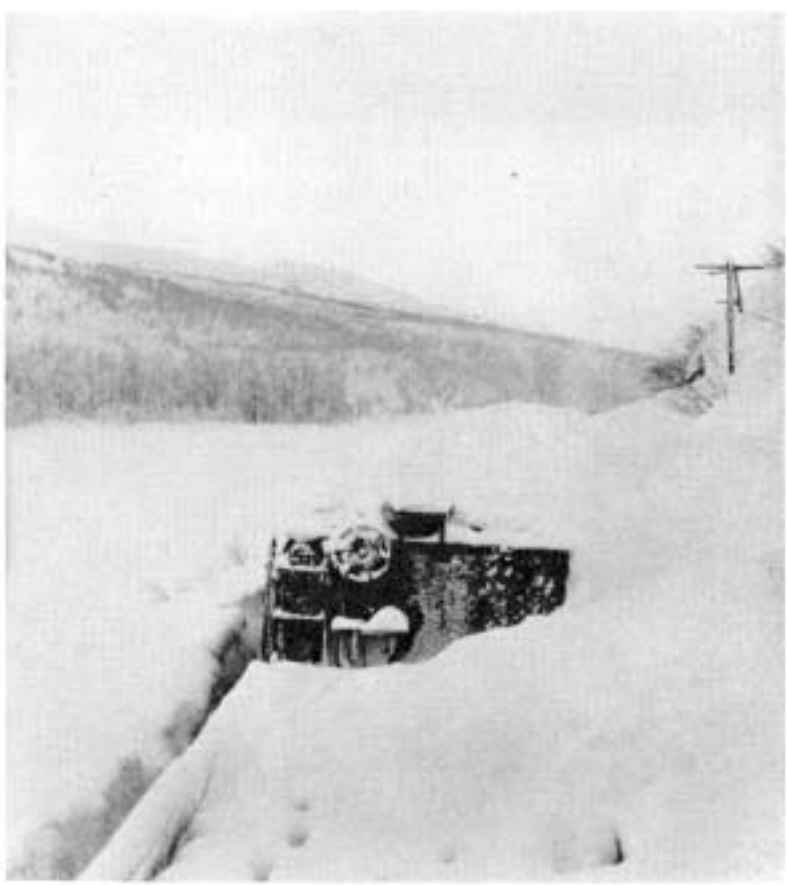
But it was just another episode in the life of the Alaskan railroaders. They were back to work the next time their names rolled around on the call board.

THE Alaska Railroad's importance to Alaska and the United States cannot be overestimated. When President Warren G. Harding drove the Gold Spike on July 15, 1923, his two misses and two hits with the maul opened what had hitherto been a closed door to Alaska's interior. The ARR carved a road to the coal mines of the Matanuska and Healy River areas. It hauled dredges and heavy machinery to the mining districts and farm implements to the agricultural areas. It moved new settlers in, and brought building material for their homes. It brought them food and clothing.

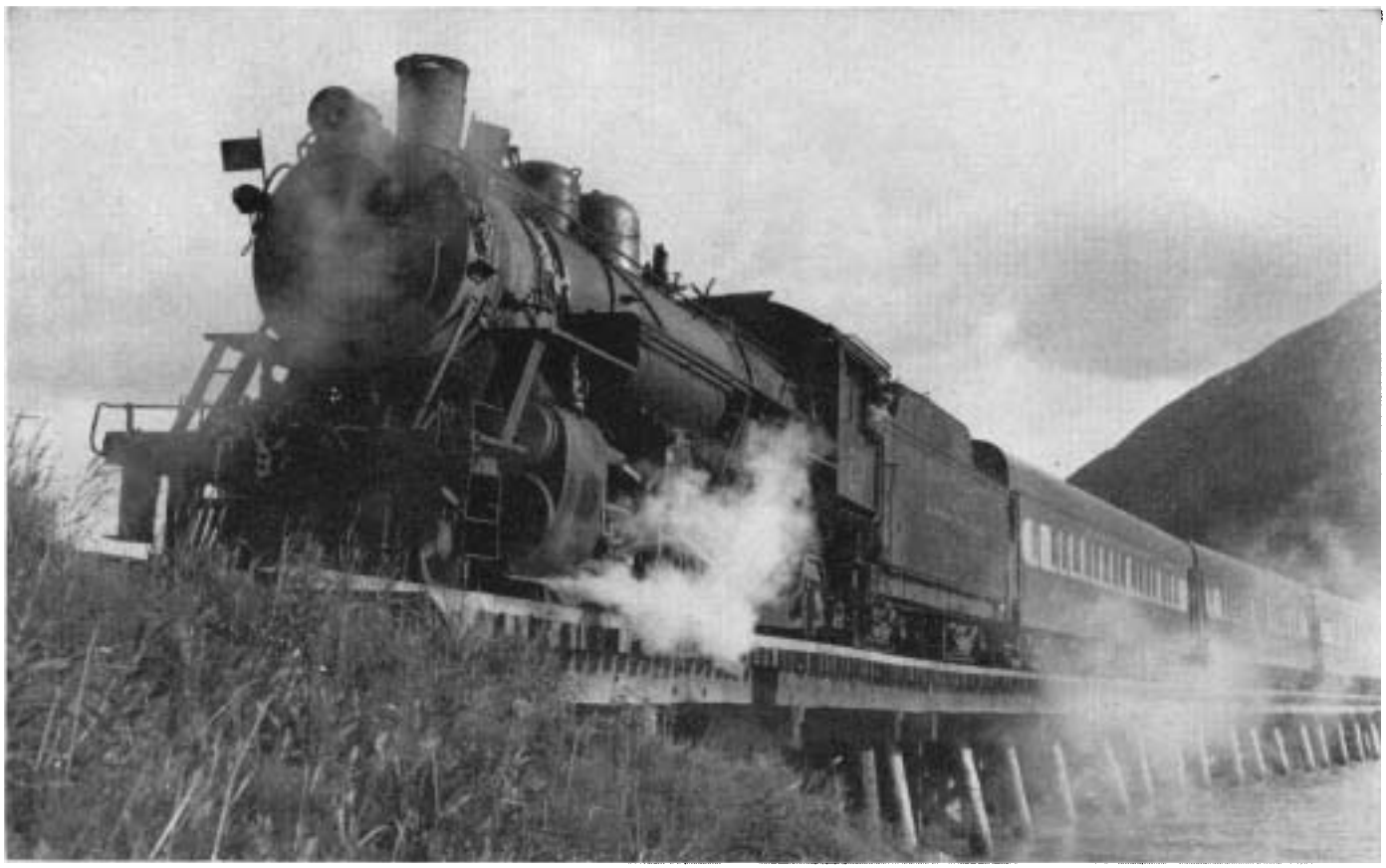
A dozen communities have developed along the right of way. Anchorage sprang up like a jack-in-the-box



↑Lest the diesel's traction motors drown out and die, an Alaska Railroad 2-8-0 of War Department design wades across the flood-level Tanana River with the AuRoRa.



←Map of Alaska Railroad shows mineral wealth, game locations and mountain ranges of ARR's territory. ↑Another view of the Curry Slide that caught No. 26, a northbound 14-car freight, in January. Caboose was buried under 10 feet of snow.



One of the ARR's modern steam locomotives, a Baldwin-built Mikado, crosses the Moose Pass Trestle in the romantic, rugged Kenai Peninsula country of Alaska. The bright cars of the AuRoRa behind No. 701 feature reclining swivel seats, arch roofs and easy-riding 12-wheel trucks.

from a site along the mud flats at the head of Cook Inlet and became a sprawling tent city of 2000 people.

The railroad is a funnel which channels ships' cargoes into Alaska and connects with 3500 miles of waterways in the interior. This is the ARR's economic value. The railroad also plays an integral part in the Army's plan to bolster Alaska's — and the United States' — defenses. This is its strategic value.

During the war, the cheaply constructed and poorly maintained line almost collapsed. Its 70-pound rails and skimpy ballast suffered under five years of hard use serving the Army and Air Force. It was a weak property indeed when John Patrick Johnson approached Secretary Harold Ickes in 1945 and asked for the job of general manager of the Alaska Railroad. The former general manager was about to retire, and Johnson cited his 24 years' experience with the Santa Fe and his four years with the Army Transportation Corps. He got the job and forthwith laid out a rehabilitation program which he put before Congress.

Then things began to happen on the Alaska Railroad. Wooden cars were junked and replaced with steel ones. Wheezing old steam locomotives were retired in favor of diesels. The 32¼-hour passenger service between Anchorage and Fairbanks was reduced by the amazing time of 18¾ hours, through the installation of Alaska's first streamlined train, the *AuRoRa,* in the fall of 1947. Seventy-pound rail is giving way to 115-pound. Ties and ballast are being renewed. The Alaska Railroad, which never was actually completed but only "pioneered through," is at last becoming a railroad worthy of the name.

The streamlined *AuRoRa* passes magnificient mountain scenery all along its entire run. President Harding, when he made the trip to drive the Gold Spike at Nenana, ran out of descriptive adjectives as his special train skirted hanging glaciers, mountains green with virgin forests, mountains capped with snow, tumbling rivers, deep gorges. He was awed by the grandeur of Mount McKinley, the tallest mountain in all of North America, towering four miles high. The most magnificent view of all came at Anchorage, where McKinley was visible 150 miles away at 11 o'clock at night. Alaska, like Norway, is the land of the midnight sun.

President Truman's secretary, Charles G. Ross, was a St. Louis newspaper man at the time the railroad was opened, and he accompanied President Harding on the big trip.

"One of most vivid recollections of the spike-driving ceremony is the physical discomfort I suffered," Mr. Ross wrote in the Gold Spike edition of *The Forty-ninth Star* last year. "This was not the fault of Alaska, but of Admiral Rodman, who was with us.

"The admiral was supposed to be an expert on Alaskan climate. At Tacoma, Wash., on his advice, all the newspapermen in the party outfitted themselves for a rugged climate. We bought heavy shirts and heavy underwear, sweaters and galoshes, and leggings to protect our shins against mosquitoes. I was dressed for an arctic climate. . . .

"The sun was hot and there were no mosquitoes. . . . The next day the President made a speech under the blazing sun at the baseball park [in Fairbanks]. Three persons were prostrated by the 94-degree heat."

That was in July. Six months later, in the noonday gloom that balances summertime's midnight sun, the Alaska Railroad crews were fighting heavy snows in temperatures ranging as low as 60 below. This terrific range between summer and winter temperatures and weather conditions is the Alaska Railroad's chief operating and maintenance problem.

The strange case of

THE RAILROAD THAT HAD IT TOO GOOD

Uncle Sam alternately starved and spoon-fed his Alaska Railroad. It took a Southern Pacific operating man to put him back on the right track

BY JEROME SHELDON

EARLY THIS SPRING Southern Pacific put in a call to Anchorage, Alaska, for Frank E. Kalbaugh. In 1953 the road had loaned its superintendent of the Salt Lake Division to the Government as general manager of the Alaska Railroad. He had done his job so well that now SP needed him more than the ARR — as general manager of the newly formed Southern Pacific Pipe Lines Inc.

Housekeeping problems on a scale unbelievable on a privately owned railroad faced Frank Kalbaugh when he became general manager of the Alaska Railroad. His 34 years on the Southern Pacific had hardly prepared him for the situations he would find on this Government-owned line which for almost 30 years had been the target of Alaskans' criticism — for its high rates and competition with privately owned truck lines — and the victim of Federal indifference. Although Kalbaugh was the appointee of a new administration in Washington, his job was not a political reward.

The railroad which Kalbaugh supervised provides a 470-mile link between its tidewater terminal at Seward and Alaska's Interior metropolis, Fairbanks. Seward is on ice-free, mountain-ringed Resurrection Bay, where Alaska Steamship Company and Coastwise Lines vessels discharge their freight and where passengers used to catch the Thursday (and Tuesday in the summer) boat train to Anchorage. Alaska Steam discontinued its passenger boat service from Seattle in the autumn of 1954. Sixty-two miles north of Seward is Portage, where the 12-mile Whittier line joins the main line, and the track proceeds for 50 miles along the rock-bound shore of Turnagain Arm to Anchorage. Whittier is a port on a deep fiord of Prince William Sound that the Army developed during World War II to shorten the railway haul to its Interior bases.

From Anchorage the railroad extends along Knik Arm and up the broad Susitna River Valley, which drains the south slopes of Mount McKinley. Broad Pass, with an elevation of 2363 feet, is lower and wider than any of the passes in North America's Rocky Mountain chain. From Summit, in the pass, the railroad descends through the Nenana River Canyon to Healy, junction for a branch line extending to the nearby Suntrana coal mines. From Healy to Fairbanks the line is in the Tanana Valley, which drains into the Yukon. At Nenana the ARR crosses the Tanana River on one of the longest (700 feet) single-span bridges yet built for railroad traffic. Fairbanks is the northern terminus, but a branch line does extend another 27 miles to Eielson Air Force Base.

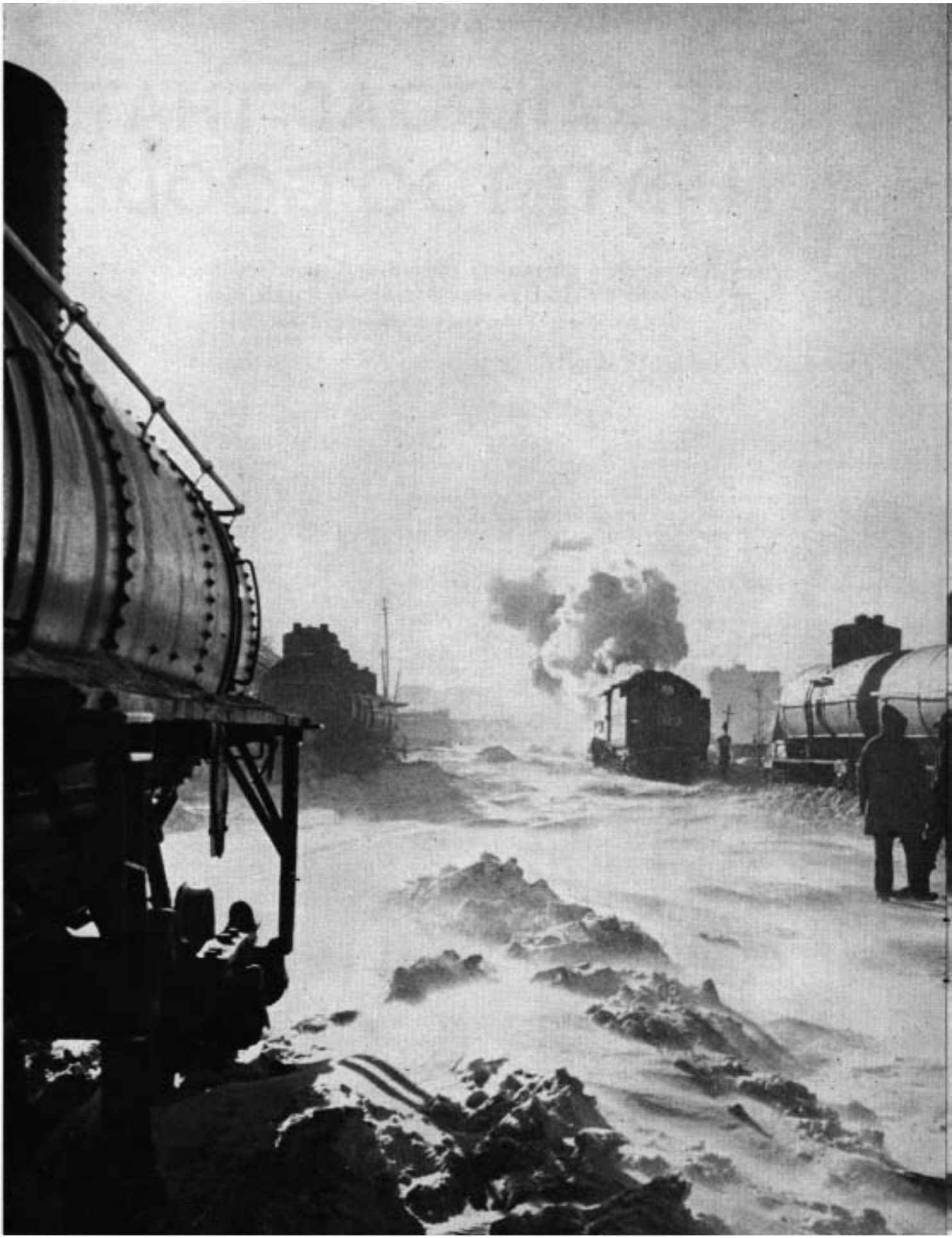
Jerome Sheldon.

FRANK KALBAUGH: It was his job to apply the rod to the spoiled child.

BEFORE he moved into the general manager's big third-floor corner office in the ARR's administration building in Anchorage, Kalbaugh for five years had been superintendent of SP's Salt Lake Division. His headquarters were in Ogden, Utah, and he had supervision over 5000 employees and trackage extending westward from Ogden to west of Reno, Nev., and Alturas, Calif. He had started with SP as a "mudhop" in 1919, inspecting freight car seals, and eventually served in 7 of its 10 divisions — from Oregon to New Mexico, California to Utah. He had never been actively interested in politics nor had be been to Washington, D. C., until his Alaskan appointment.

This came about when Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay requested the SP to recommend a good man for the general managership of the Alaskan Railroad. Kalbaugh was suggested as a likely candidate. So he accepted, taking indefinite leave of absence from SP, and went to work for the Government. He said his only instructions from the Secretary of the Interior were to run the railroad safely, efficiently and economically.

He found an organization of employees numbering about half those he had supervised on Southern Pacific's Salt Lake Division, and the 470 miles of main line, of course, were less. After he took over management of the ARR, Kalbaugh cut the payroll considerably, with the resulting natural resentment of employees who lost their jobs and of Anchorage and Fair-



Walter R. Strong.

banks merchants whose business was affected thereby. But he reported the railroad's first so-called profit and, better yet, the reduction of some freight rates.

Kalbaugh's predecessor as general manager was a man about whom opinions varied. Col. John P. Johnson, fresh from wartime service in the Army Transportation Corps, took charge of the Alaska Railroad in 1946. He recommended to Congress that the railroad be either rehabilitated or abandoned. Whereupon Congress was to appropriate in the coming four to six years close to 80 million dollars which was spent for building up roadbeds, laying new rails, constructing new yards and shop buildings in Anchorage and Fairbanks. Johnson was appointed general manager of the ARR on January 1, 1946, and resigned October 21, 1953. He is now reported to be in South America.

DRAMATICALLY symbolizing the management problems that Kalbaugh inherited are the tremendous amounts of military surplus material which the ARR acquired after World War II. Spread over 30 acres of ground at Eklutna, an old Alaska Native Service school about 35 miles north of Anchorage, are block-long rows of tarpaulin-covered supplies which have been completely inventoried only recently. The ARR received the opportunity to bid for the property that was surplus to the needs of the armed forces, and representatives were sent to the States to inspect what was available. There was no cost except for the freight charges for shipping it to Alaska. It remained for Kalbaugh's management to discover what a treasure trove was hidden in unopened crates and never-used mechanical devices.

Many of the items conceivably could have been used by the railroad, but not in the huge quantities in which they were acquired. The shops use grinding wheels — but the railroad has enough to last 100 years. There are hundreds of carbide and electric floodlights, thousands of bits for high-speed drills, 500 shovels, electrical cable for ships, 15 barrels of tire-recapping cement, molds for tire recapping, 30 axial-flow ventilating fans, 42 centrifugal pumps with Chrysler motors never removed from their export packing cases, the back ends of six Navy buses — all neatly crated. This could go on *ad infinitum*. In all, Kalbaugh estimated, the railroad has surplus property valued at an original cost of 10 million dollars.

What struck him hardest when he became the ARR's general manager, Kalbaugh said, was the waste — in time, in effort and in materials. To introduce a business-type budget for the railroad, with its system of cost controls and accounting, the Interior Department assigned Leland P. Draney, former Secretary of American Samoa, a career Government man in fiscal matters and a onetime banker. Because of the economies he introduced in operating practices, Kalbaugh said, the ARR was able to report a new income of approximately $700,000 for the fiscal year which ended June 30, 1954.

To bring about stronger control in the mechanical department, Kalbaugh hired two men from Stateside roads who estimated that they had earned their salaries for the next two years just in the economies they effected in the first few months. They are G. V. (Curly) Randall, the superintendent of motive power and equipment, and George Higgs, master mechanic. They both were recommended to the Alaska Railroad's new general manager by their own former railroads.

Randall, who came from Eugene, Ore., is responsible for the maintenance and repair of all the ARR's mechanical equipment. He served the Southern Pacific as general foreman of mechanics, starting his 18½ years as an apprentice mechanic. Higgs was superintendent of diesel power and operation for the Spokane, Portland & Seattle 14 years; previously he had been with General Motors and with the Baltimore & Ohio and Jersey Central railroads as a locomotive fireman. He also had Navy experience as a submarine diesel engineer.

Randall said the mechanical department has adopted procedures of maintenance which are more efficient and economical and increase the availability of equipment. Preventive maintenance schedules have been adopted instead of the practice of running equipment until it breaks down. The railroad had 55 locomotives — all in use. The roundhouse was on an 8-hour 5-day week schedule for servicing these locomotives. Randall said there actually had been an operational demand for 35 locomotives. He placed the roundhouse on a 24-hour round-the-clock schedule to increase the availability of the individual locomotives. That is, a locomotive coming into the roundhouse in the late afternoon after a day's operation can be serviced immediately and sent out for use that

NO CHURCH SOCIAL: A switch crew spots tankers at Anchorage with switcher 319, a 1944 Lima-built 0-6-0 hand bomber. Temperature: 10 below zero.

night. Under the former servicing schedules, the locomotive would not have been handled until the next day.

The result according to Randall is that 14 locomotives are now in storage and 6 steam locomotives are being held on a stand-by basis to use in emergencies such as the floods that occur in the spring thaw. Diesels cannot operate through water deeper than 4 inches. The locomotives remaining in service have been placed on a fixed maintenance schedule, with certain procedures to be carried out on a fixed mileage basis. The locomotives get a complete overhaul every eight years; about six locomotives a year get this overhaul. There is a continual rotation of motive power through the shops with a fixed complement of personnel for the job.

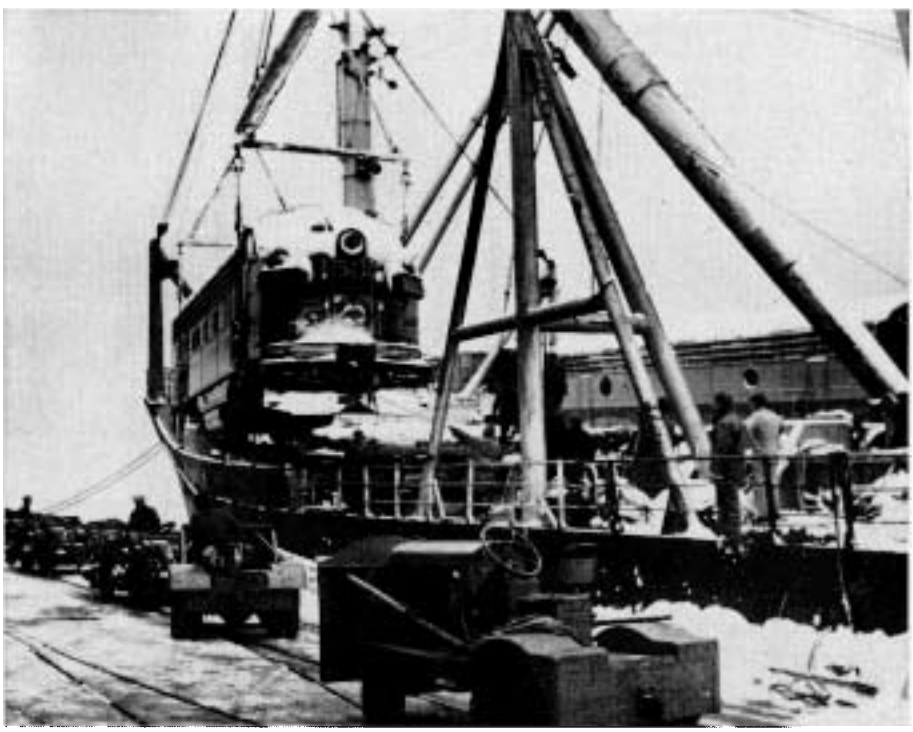
Randall was shocked by some of the things he found after joining the ARR in the spring of 1954 — such as the 12 or 13 stokers for steam locomotives representing a total cost of about $50,000. They were never installed because the railroad has been dieselizing its motive power. Whether the stokers were acquired as war surplus or purchased cannot be determined exactly because so many records were destroyed in a fire in the Anchorage yards a few years ago.

Another item is a 125-foot locomotive turntable designed to turn the largest steam locomotives in the world. Randall said the Southern Pacific and the Union Pacific are almost the only roads in the country with turntables this size to turn their giant articulated engines. Randall guessed there probably are not more than a dozen 125-foot turntables in the country. The ARR is storing its giant turntable at Birchwood, near Anchorage, for it never has been installed. Although there is no record as to its purchase, Randall is inclined to believe the turntable was acquired under the 80-million-dollar rehabilitation program rather than as surplus, because the military forces would not have had such equipment made up.

Some of the 280 cars acquired on the last order in 1953 were retired because they could not be repaired. The cars were secondhand and rebuilt from other lines; most of them were ruled off Stateside railroads 6 to 25 years before and they were not safe for the high-speed operations that the Alaska Railroad was developing in changing to diesel power and rebuilding its roadbed.

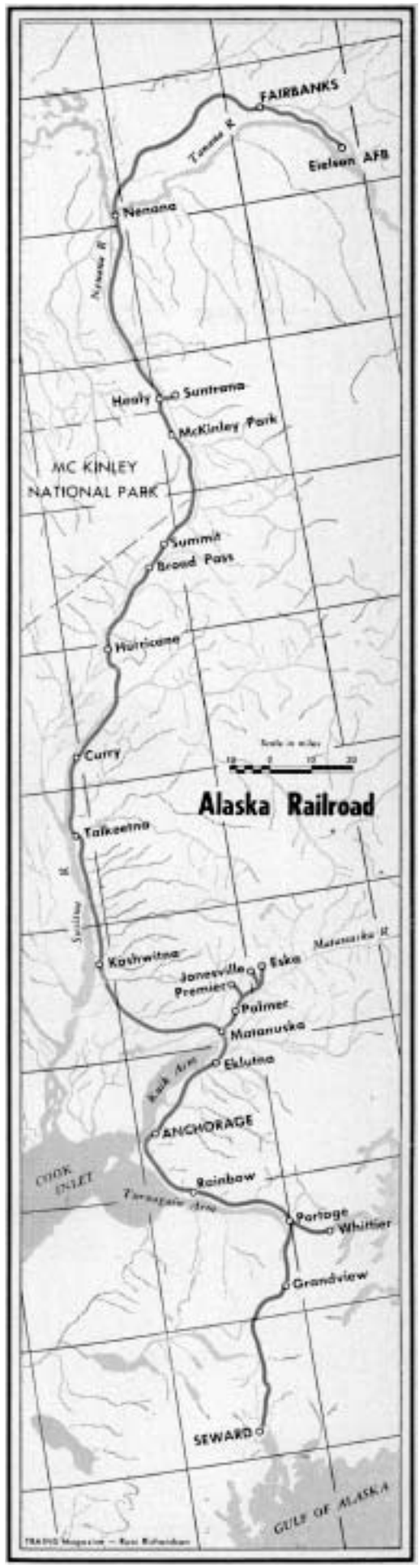
Still in service are flat cars used during construction of the Panama Canal and cars from the old Copper River & Northwestern Railroad, which operated out of Cordova, Alaska, to the Kennecott Copper Mines. The stock inventories required for the repair of these cars and other old rolling stock is "beyond all comprehension" and they are not interchangeable.

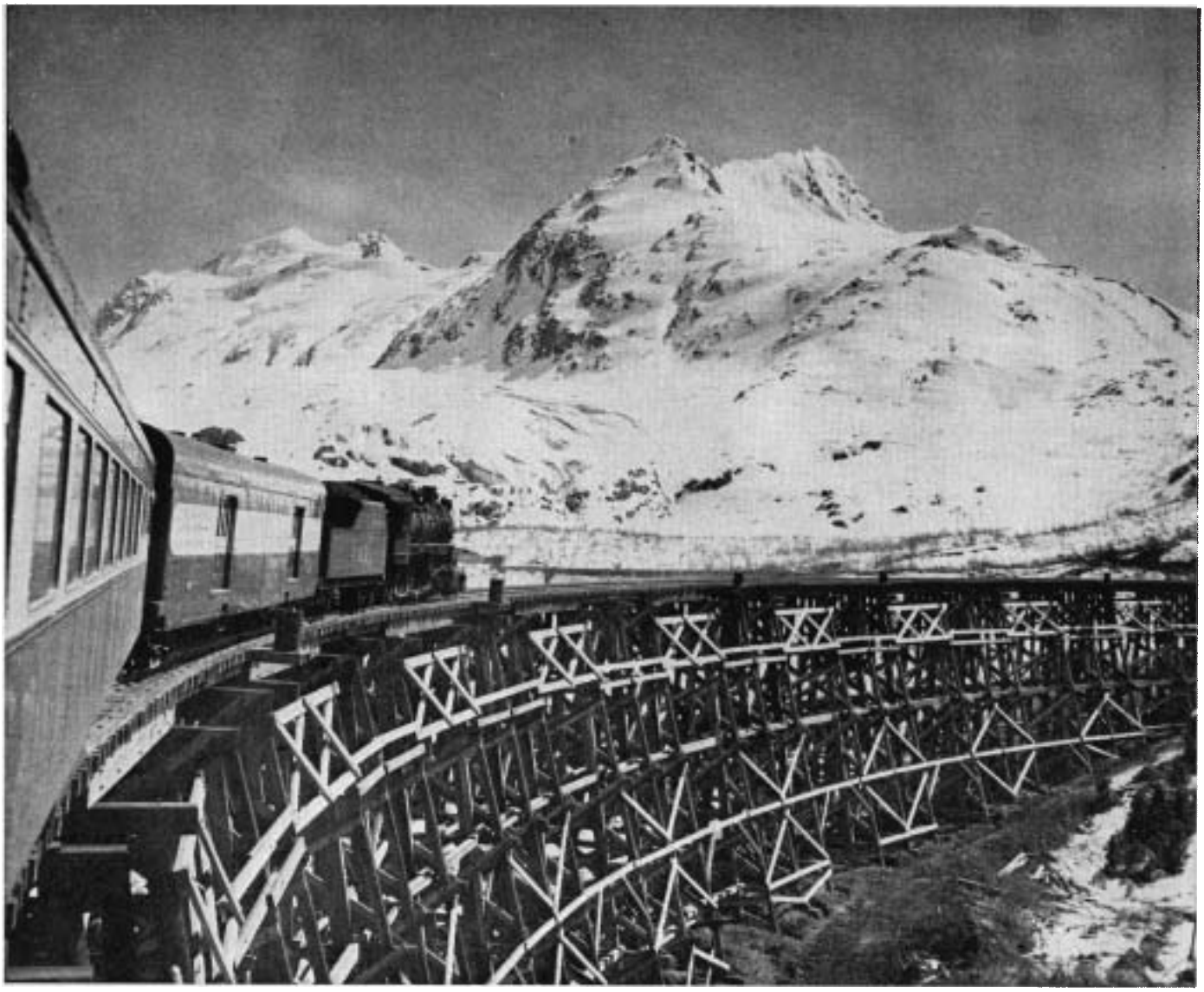
Another department in which Kalbaugh brought about changes was the stores department, headed by John W. Miles, whom he hired from the Illinois



Jerome Sheldon.

1500-HORSEPOWER EMD'S are unloaded at Seward in 1953. The locomotives were separated from their wheel trucks to lessen strain on Gadsden's boom.





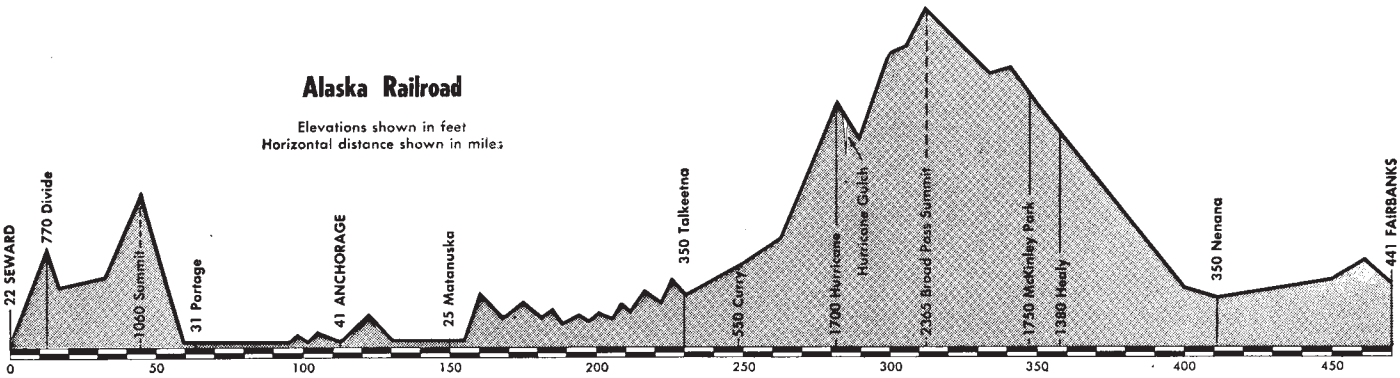
NO. 2 COASTS carefully out over Hillside Trestle in 1951. The trestle and a loop were eliminated in 1952.

Central in the spring of 1954. Miles found "everything wrong" with his department in that materials and supplies were promiscuously stored in several warehouses. They were not properly cataloged and no accurate count had been taken of the supplies in several years. The railroad formerly had conducted a commissary in Anchorage to supply its hotels and mess houses with food and meat. Employees could also purchase their food and clothing through the commissary. This stemmed from the original inaccessibility of stores to isolated points on the line. Since Anchorage merchants were anxious to serve the railroad, Miles said, the ARR started to purchase commissary supplies on a contract basis. The space released by closing the commissary became a new central warehouse.

For many years the Alaska Railroad operated the McKinley Park Hotel — at a loss. The operation was turned over to the National Park

Jerome Sheldon.

AT PORTAGE the daily train for Whittier stops, then leaves the main line for the 12-mile trip to the Army-developed port on Prince William Sound.



Service, another agency of the Interior Department, and the hotel has been leased to private concessionaires. The railroad also operated hotels at Curry and Healy, former division points. During the winter of '55 the hotel and restaurant at Curry was closed and all that remains at that point is a small mess hall to take care of the few employees and passing train crews. At Healy the hotel and restaurant are no longer operated by the railroad but are leased out to a private operator.

Another service of the Alaska Railroad which was disposed of is the Yukon River boat operation. At Nenana, famed for its ice classic in which thousands of Alaskans try to guess the annual breakup of the Tanana River ice, the railroad based its two diesel tugs, the *MV Tanana* and the *MV Yukon*, and its remaining sternwheeler, the S.S. *Nenana*. The boats pushed freight barges down the Tanana and Yukon rivers to Tanana, Galena, Holy Cross and Marshall, a distance of almost 800 miles, and up the Yukon River to isolated Fort Yukon, just above the Arctic Circle. The equipment was leased to a group of experienced Alaska riverboat operators prior to the ice breakup of the rivers in the early part of May 1955.

Before the age of the airplane in Alaska, the rivers were the arteries of travel and the sternwheelers that plied the Yukon had heavy passenger bookings. In the 1920's and '30's the Alaska Railroad helped provide a circle tour of the far north in co-operation with the British Yukon Navigation Company and the White Pass & Yukon Railroad. Steamers from Seattle delivered tourists to the ARR at Seward, whence trains took them to Nenana with an overnight stop en route at Curry. From Nenana, American-flag riverboats operated down the Tanana and up the Yukon to Dawson in Canada's Yukon Territory. There Canadian sternwheelers took the tourists up to Whitehorse, where they boarded the narrow-gauge trains for Skagway — and their ships for the southbound voyage along the Inside Passage back to Seattle. This tour could be taken in the reverse direction too. All this has passed with the development of highway and air travel in the North.

It was Kalbaugh's belief that if the nonrevenue functions of the railroad were sheared off, the railroad freight rates could be lowered and a profit earned at the same time. Although the prior management did report a profit of over a million dollars for at least two postwar years, a General Accounting Office survey report explains that the factors of interest and depreciation were not considered. A privately owned railroad would have to pay the costs of improvements and maintenance from accumulated savings through revenues earned from operations, or by funding, with payment of interest and principal made from future revenues. The ARR's rehabilitation was financed by interest-free appropriations.

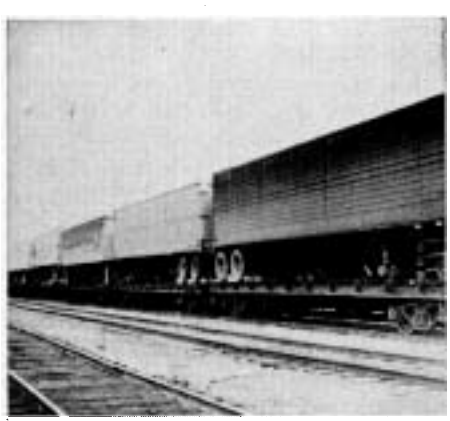
An interesting development for freight transportation between the States and Alaska is that of possible seatrain service, whereby loaded railroad cars would be carried by ship to Seward or Whittier, where they would roll off onto dockside trackage. Alaska Steamship Company, Luckenbach Lines and Coastwise Lines have expressed interest in this service. Seatrain service would reduce the handling of cargo, which inevitably would be reflected in the freight rates. Before such service can be started, arrangements for interchange of equipment, maintenance and tariff schedules have to be made between the ARR and the Association of American Railroads.

Before the war the Alaska Railroad ran one freight train a week between Seward and Fairbanks. Passenger service used to require an overnight stop — at Curry. Gas-lighted coaches with straight-back seats ran once a week in either direction. Today freight is carried on daily schedules between Seward-Anchorage, Anchorage-Fairbanks. And the streamlined *AuRoRa* links Alaska's two main cities — daily in the summer season, three times a week in the winter.

The ARR has two docks at Seward which can accommodate four ships. The docks are operated by the Northern Stevedoring & Handling Corporation as a contract stevedoring company for the railroad. At the present time all the docks at Whittier are under the jurisdiction of the U. S. Army and all the stevedoring is done by Army personnel and only Army

Jerome Sheldon.

BOAT TRAIN pauses at Portage en route from Seward to Anchorage. The observation car is the old Yukon, veteran of Alaska passenger travel.



Walter R. Strong.

PIGGYBACK is an old story to Alaska railroaders. The spring breakup imposes numerous highway restrictions, so the truckers take to the rails.

Extra 556 leaves Anchorage to connect with Alaska Steamship Line at Seward. Photo by Walter R. Strong.

Locomotives of the Alaska

August 1, 1954

STEAM

Series	Type	Cylinders	Drivers	Boiler pressure	Total weight, engine and tender	Tractive effort	Builder — date
551, 554, 556, 557, 561, 562	2-8-0	19″ x 26″	57″	210	288,950	31,500	Baldwin 1943-1944

DIESEL

Series	Type	Type engine	No. cylinders	Horsepower	Weight	Builder — date
50-51*	B	Inline	-	150	25 tons	GE 1944, 1941
1000-1001	B-B	Inline	6	1000	120 tons	Alco-GE 1944
1010, 1013	C-C	Inline	6	1000	127 tons	Alco-GE 1943
1014, 1017	B-B	Inline	6	1000	127 tons	Alco-GE 1943, 1945
1018, 1026	C-C	Inline	6	1000	127 tons	Alco-GE 1943
1027, 1028	B-B	Inline	6	1000	127 tons	Alco-GE 1943, 1942
1029, 1030	C-C	Inline	6	1000	127 tons	Alco-GE 1942
1031	B-B	Inline	6	1000	122 tons	Alco-GE 1942
1032-1036, 1041-1043†	C-C	Inline	6	1000	127 tons	Alco-GE 1942, 1943, 1945
1050-1057‡	B-B	Inline	6	1000	122 tons	Alco-GE 1942, 1943
1065, 1067, 1069	B-B	Inline	6	1000	127 tons	Alco-GE 1942
1070, 1072, 1074-1078	B-B	Inline	6	1000	122 tons	Alco-GE 1943
1201-1204	B-B	V	6	600	99 tons	EMD 1942
1300	B-B	Inline	8	1000	122 tons	BLW 1945
1500-1508	B-B	V	16	1500	123 tons	EMD 1952, 1953
1510, 1512, 1514	B-B	V	16	1500	126 tons	EMD 1953
1809	C-C	V	16	1600	123 tons	EMD 1952

* Roundhouse switchers.

† Leased from Army.

‡ Series 1050-1051 shrouded by International Railway Car & Equipment Manufacturing Company, Kenton, O. (Other Alcos similarly "covered" by Puget Sound Bridge & Dredge Company, Seattle, Wash.)

cargo or cargo for Army contractors at Whittier is handled there. All commercial cargo coming into Alaska by ship-rail transportation comes through the terminal at Seward.

"Our present schedules call for freight to move from Seward to Fairbanks in less than 24 hours after a ship completes discharge," said R. H. Bruce, superintendent of operations. Seventy-five per cent of the cargo unloaded from ships at Seward is placed directly onto railroad cars; 25 per cent is sorted in warehouses first. Trains 28 and 30 northbound and 27 and 29 southbound are the daily freights between Seward and Anchorage. New trains are made up in Anchorage for the northward trip to Fairbanks. Train 25 is a daily through freight to Fairbanks; train 23 operates three times a week as a local. Train 21 operates to Palmer in the Matanuska Valley. Southward these trains are numbered 22, 24 and 26.

A typical freight train on the Alaska will consist of from 45 to 100 cars using one to four diesel-powered engines. The crews include one conductor, two brakemen, one fireman and one engineer.

In the Anchorage and Fairbanks terminals, shipments unloaded from trains are checked on the freight house floors and consignees are notified. Then the store-door delivery service, provided by contract draymen as a free service to shippers, takes over. This free truck delivery of freight within Anchorage and Fairbanks was introduced by Kalbaugh last year, after he felt the railroad's income warranted the expense.

This reporter arrived in Alaska in February 1953 aboard Alaska Steam's *Baranof*, which has since been retired from passenger service. After a stormy crossing of the Gulf of Alaska, the ship's pitching and rolling ceased when it came into Seward's harbor and beside the ARR docks. The mountains were white and bleak. Passengers stepping on deck from the warm saloon quickly retreated to their staterooms to bundle in overcoats before braving the 10-above temperatures again.

Longshoremen in tan Army-surplus parkas worked cargo winches. Stewards from the ship carried passengers' suitcases down the cleated gangplank. In sight of the ship beside Seward's beach stood the Anchorage boat train toward which the passengers walked over the icy pier. Its consist included an Alco road-switcher marked UNITED STATES ARMY with the Transportation Corps badge, a baggage car, a streamlined chair car, and the old open-platform observation-lounge car *Yukon*. Escaping steam hung in a mist about the cars as the passengers boarded and found their seats.

Only 21 passengers had come in on the *Baranof*, for this was not the tourist season. These and a few townspeople going up to Anchorage had plenty of room in the train. Most of them placed their bags and coats on the seats in the chair car, then made their way back to the lounge, where coffee and sandwiches were being served over a small curved counter. The black leather-upholstered armchairs could be turned for a passing view of the Kenai Mountains, of glaciers and the famous loop, which has now been abandoned. The tracks used to make a complete circle on a trestle to cross the Bartlett Glacier, 44 miles north of Seward. The glacier in recent years has receded and the tracks have been laid across on solid ground.

Passengers crowded to the windows and the back platform when a dozen moose struggled through the drifted snow at the base of a mountain barely 100 feet off the right of way. Moose fight a losing battle with the trains in this section. The snow is banked so high along the tracks that the animals get into the cleared right of ways and run for miles before finding a way out. They have fallen between the ties of bridges so that these have had to be sheathed. Steam trains used to stop for moose; diesels cannot always stop before a hit.

On the next day's run between Anchorage and Fairbanks on the *AuRoRa*, the conductor pointed out two score white specks just visible near the top of a mountain towering over the Nenana River canyon near McKinley National Park. He identified them as Dall mountain sheep.

The name of the Alaska Railroad's principal passenger train includes the initials ARR. Its consist includes a diesel, a baggage car, two chair cars, and a diner-lounge. The diners are operated by Arctic Concessions, whose waitress serves an adequate $1.75 lunch and a $2 dinner on oilcloth-covered tables. A bartender dispenses drinks at the other end of the car, and a cook tends the galley in the middle. The cars of this streamlined train are former Army hospital cars acquired after World War II as military surplus.

The 12-hour run for the 356 miles between Anchorage and Fairbanks provides *AuRoRa* passengers with a smooth journey. Heavier rails — 115 pound — were laid over new grades and ballasting in the postwar rehabilitation program.

The battle against weather is one which will always make railroading in Alaska just about the most rugged in the world. Frost heaves and ice floes over the track cause trains to operate under slow orders in winter. Since the railroad's official completion in 1923, when President Warren G. Harding drove a golden spike at Nenana, the line had never been properly completed. Heavy wartime use just about broke the system down.

When Congressional appropriations poured in for the rehabilitation, none was allotted for the Seward-Portage section because that stretch over the Kenai Peninsula was to be abandoned and Whittier instead of Seward developed as a port. However, the military in Alaska decided two tidewater terminals were necessary, and the Port of Whittier was reserved for military cargoes. Additional appropriations of almost 4 million dollars have been allotted for the Seward-Portage section. Kalbaugh felt that if the earlier funds had not been so lavishly spent, the Seward-Portage rehabilitation could have been accomplished within the earlier appropriations by Congress.

The best example of this lavish expenditure lies in the Fairbanks yards where its 17 miles of tracks are capable of serving four times the requirements of the railroad for many years to come. This was Kalbaugh's estimate. Literally carved out of the tundra — with the surface covering cut away and a solid base laid down for rails and new shop buildings — this railroaders' dream yard was designed to serve as a tie-in for a railroad which someday might be built from the States. Its cost was $7,500,000.

Time may show that the Government can operate a railroad as efficiently as private enterprise.

IN APRIL 1955 R. M. Whitman, division superintendent of the Great Northern at Seattle, Wash., went to Anchorage to take over from Frank Kalbaugh. For outstanding Government service Mr. Kalbaugh has been awarded the Department of the Interior's highest recognition, the Distinguished Service Award. The award, in the form of an engraved citation and gold medal, reads in part: "Bringing to bear a high degree of managerial ability and unselfish devotion to the challenging task of reorganizing and improving the railroad, he soon placed it on a sound and profitable basis. . . . The railroad can now handle more freight than ever before, and the Alaska shipper and consumer are provided better service at less cost."

TRAINS goes to Alaska—3

Uncle Sam's railroad experiment

What happened because land grants were taboo

DAVID P. MORGAN

I INSTEAD of being borne by a Pacific Northern L749 Constellation through a cold, clear March 1962 afternoon en route from Juneau to Anchorage, I might have ridden into the heart of Alaska on a Pullman if the last dream of Western railroad expansion had been realized. Even after he had approved the Alcan Highway in early 1942, President Roosevelt confided to reporters that it might be necessary to shelve the road for a while and build a light, single-track railroad from Seattle into Alaska. It would be easier to keep open in the winter, F.D.R. said. Then in May 1943 his irrepressible Secretary of the

Interior, Harold Ickes, denied that he had urged a second highway. "As a matter of fact," he said, "I would be inclined to suggest to the Army Engineers that, instead of another highway, they build an elevated railroad all the way across so that they would not have all of this trouble with snow and ice, bogs, and all that sort of thing. Originally they would have to use wooden piles." In 1945 Edward Hungerford, dean of American railroad letters, caught the fever in his prophetic novel, *A Railroad For Tomorrow*. He foresaw sleepers departing New York nightly for Fairbanks, 3800 miles but less than 4 days away, as well as rails beyond to the Bering Straits, where carferry connections could be made with the Trans-Siberian. The dream bubbled into print all over again when the Pacific Great Eastern came out of hibernation in 1949.

Yet isolation is only one of the harsh facts of life with which tne 537-mile Government-owned Alaska Railroad has lived since its completion in 1923. Alaska is simply the least of the 50 states in terms of what it takes to sustain line-haul railroading. Although more than twice the size of Texas, the state has approximately the same population as Tucson, Ariz. Its geography and climate imply an abnormal operating ratio. Its largest city is a rail haul of only 114 miles from the coast. Its biggest industry — fishing — is hardly conducive to carloadings. And exporting its coal, lumber, or farm produce is not economic.

Fifty years ago, though, Alaskan enthusiasm for a development railroad was so infectious as to confound logic. "Alaska, as a storehouse, should be unlocked," said President Woodrow Wilson in 1913, voicing the sentiments of a majority of Americans who thought of the territory as a new farming and mining frontier. Yet even assuming Alaska's inferior sub-bituminous and lignite coal could be marketed and cash crops could be raised south of the permafrost, the logistics were wrong because even after transportation to tidewater, coal or wheat would still be more than 1200 nautical miles from Seattle. Even the unhappy experience of the privately financed Alaska Central Railway fired rather than muted the clamor for rails. Building north out of Seward toward Fairbanks, the Central had gone bankrupt trying to tunnel and trestle its way through the mountains of the Kenai Peninsula and to replace its line after washouts.

Everybody agreed that the Government would have to step in, but the terms of its participation were hotly disputed. The American railroad land-grant era was too recent and too misunderstood to permit this kind of Federal support, and public opinion did not favor Government guarantee of a private carrier's bonds. President Taft, who initiated study of the problem in 1912, concluded that Washington should build a railroad and then lease it to a private operator. His successor, Woodrow Wilson, thought that the Government should build *and* operate the railroad, and in 1914 Congress gave him 35 million dollars to do so, the only strings being that the line should not exceed 1000 miles and that it should connect the Pacific Ocean coast of Alaska with its interior coal fields and navigable rivers.

An angry short-line vice-president in Amarillo pointed out in a letter to *Railway Age Gazette* that 35 million dollars was equal to half the country's income tax. "The main point," he declared, "is there is no right or justice in taxing the Texas farmer to build and operate railroads as an experiment in Alaska." He didn't know the half of it. By the time President Warren G. Harding drove the gold spike on July 15, 1923, and the railroad was declared officially complete, its construction had cost 56 million dollars — or more than seven times the amount

All photos, U. S. Department of the Interior.

BOLD, bright streamlined face of snowplow-fronted 1050 (left) belies its origin as a 1000 h.p. Alco-GE road-switcher. Beauty along the Alaska — termed "riotous excess of nature's wonders" by Harding — includes 296-foot Hurricane Gulch and a scene along the Turnagain Arm.

the U. S. had paid Russia for Alaska in 1867.

For all of its cost, the Alaska Railroad was a construction classic. All supplies had to be moved more than 2000 miles, which meant that the builders had to virtually create their own navy as well as make a serviceable port at Seward on Resurrection Bay. Secondhand steam shovels, dump cars, and 2-6-0's were imported from the Panama Canal to equip the work trains, but the bulk of the work was manually accomplished by immigrant European labor. World War I created a manpower shortage; an influenza epidemic demoralized the crews. Yet in spite of all, the steel was hammered home across a barren, inhospitable land. Even to hold the cost to $78,000 a mile exclusive of equipment, the builders were obliged to spike light 70-pound rail to untreated ties, substitute pile trestles for fill or steel bridges wherever possible, use just a "sprinkling of ballast," and lay track across tundra and glacial muck without grading. They even managed during the work season of 1917 to hand-drill and hand-excavate 4 million cubic yards of solid rock at a cost of only $1.35 a yard.

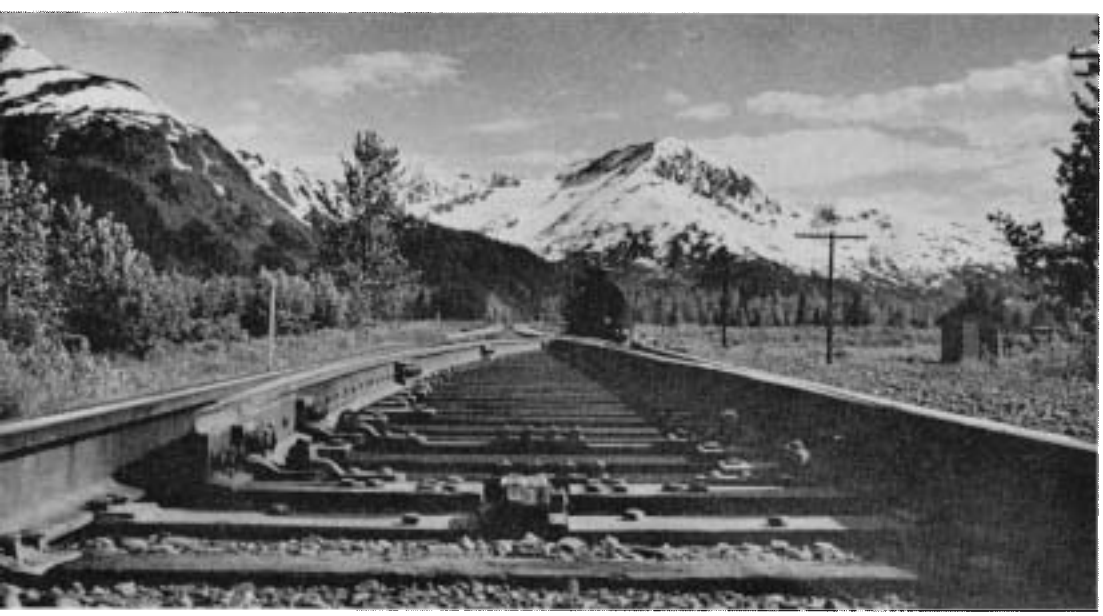
In terms of profile, the first 50 miles north from tidewater was the toughest; this was ironic since the Seward-Anchorage division was destined to become the high-density end of the railroad. From Resurrection Bay at Seward the builders had to climb two divides on the Kenai Peninsula on grades ranging from 1.5 to 2.2 per cent. The right of way of the defunct Alaska Northern (alias Alaska Central), which had driven 71 miles inland, offered access of a sort, yet its tunnels had to be enlarged and its trestles rebuilt. Descending from the second summit of 1063 feet, the line described two spectacular loops which included tunnels as well as 106-foot-high trestlework on a 14-degree curve. From Portage the line followed the Turnagain Arm of the Cook Inlet into Anchorage, which was simply a railroad construction town in World War I but was destined to become the territory's largest city.

Out of Anchorage the rails followed the Knik Arm of the Cook Inlet to its conclusion at Matanuska. At this point branch lines were extended up the Matanuska River Valley to nearby coal fields. The main line swung across to the Susitna River, which was paced 75 miles northward toward the Alaskan Range. After attaining Broad Pass at 2337 feet on a maximum gradient of 1.75 per cent, the railroad dropped down the far side on 1 per cent past the boundary of Mt. McKinley National Park. On the descent a division point was located at Healy and a short branch was built from there into nearby sub-bituminous coal fields. After crossing the Nenana River, the road then followed the river valley into Fairbanks — 467.5 miles from Resurrection Bay. Here connections were made with the Tanana Valley, a privately built 3-foot-gauge mining road which the Alaska Railroad bought and operated until highways put it out of business in 1930.

If tunnels, loops, and grades were the rule south of Anchorage, impressive bridges were the hallmark of the line north. For example, on the ascent

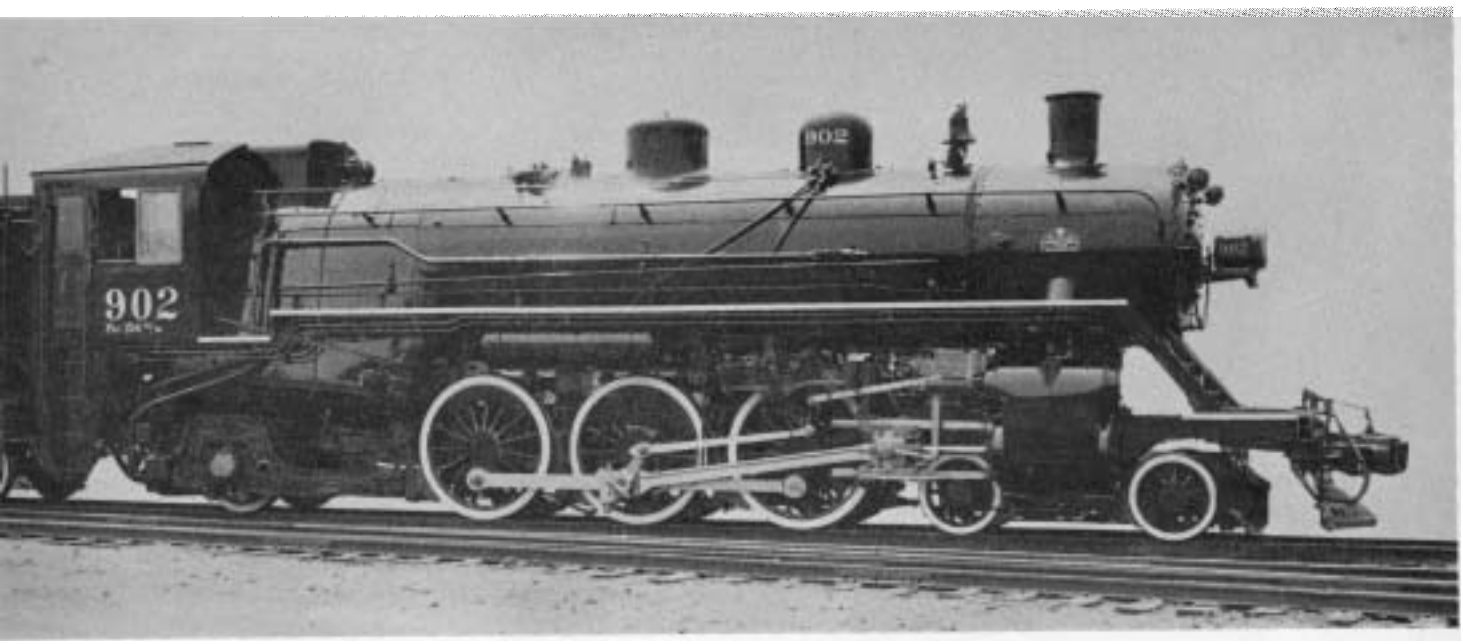
to Broad Pass the builders encountered huge crevices dug out by glacial streams. The deepest was Hurricane Gulch, which required a steel arch bridge 918 feet long and 296 feet high to cross. Bridging the Susitna River at Mile 264 was complicated by the fact that the builders had to allow for the spring breakup of the ice jam. They settled on 1322 feet of bridgework and trestle spans, including Howe and pony truss spans and dominated by Alaska's largest single railroad bridge: a 504-foot through truss span. The fortitude of the builders may be gauged by the fact that on occasion they drove rivets when the thermometer stood at 42 below zero.

On the north end of yet another



Steve McCutcheon.

CHUGACH Mountains loom up (above) in a pastoral scene between Seward and Anchorage. Not far away in deepest winter (right) a rotary is propelled along in the famous Loop District surveyed by the old Alaska Central to bypass Bartlett Glacier and replaced after World War II.



LAST new steam locomotive ordered by the Alaska, nondescript Baldwin 4-6-2 902, was delivered in 1945. Among the Eddystone graduates she found on the Government road were three Mikados, Nos. 701-703, bought during 1927-1929 and equipped with boosters. In 1932 Baldwin also built a 4-8-2 for the Alaska, the 801 — a lanky machine with 63-inch drivers. The Mikes had 54-inch wheels.

Both photos, collection of H. L. Broadbelt.

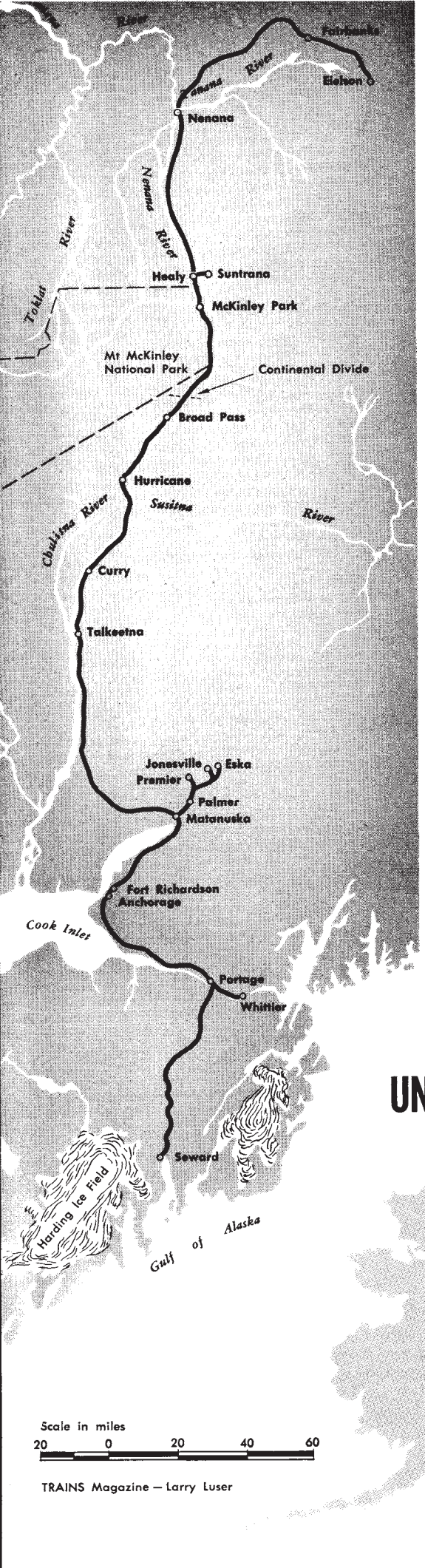
Alaska Railroad.

bridge — this one across the Tanana River — President Warren G. Harding declared the Government railroad complete on July 15, 1923. First he gave a ceremonial tap to a $600 gold spike placed in a predrilled hole; then when a conventional steel spike was inserted Harding missed it twice before finally driving it home.

The railroad never found a more fervent booster. Never a man to spare the adjectives, Harding pulled out all the stops in his last public address in Seattle. Of the builders he exclaimed, "They have given us a splendid railroad, and as they have built it miraculously, it is our determination to retain it and to operate it wisely. . . . This gorgeously scenic route of 500 miles, through a riotous excess of nature's beauties and wonders, is destined to attract travelers from all over the world as soon as report of its attractions is commonly circulated." Of the line's 56-million-dollar cost, he said, "I am willing to be charged with a purpose of something like prodigality in my wish to serve Alaska generously, and more, in this matter of road building."

Less than two years later the country discovered that the Union Pacific of Alaska, as the late Harding had likened it, was a railroad carrying very little from nowhere to nowhere. Noting that the Government was subsidizing each of the 5000 people along its line $400 a year for continued operation, a California Congressman said, "Pull up the rails and make a highway of it." What embarrassed Washington was the fact that a railroad running annual deficits of more than a million dollars was still almost 12 million dollars shy of "completion" in terms of replacing temporary wooden trestles, widening cuts, and deepening ballast.

President Coolidge's Department of the Interior, reluctant custodian of the line, admitted that the Alaska Rail-



road was "not a financial success" and dispatched a Pennsylvania Railroad official, N. W. Smith, to Anchorage to see what might be done. Smith, who remained in Alaska to manage the road, found that there just wasn't enough business in the territory to support a railroad. The Matanuska coal was difficult to mine, the Healy lignite couldn't even be burned on a locomotive, and neither field was competitive in the export market. Alaska's wood was overripe and unmarketable in the States.

By 1930 the Alaska Railroad's 200 per cent operating ratios had piled up losses totaling 10 million dollars since construction, and Congress began to investigate. A Senate committee found that the Alaska was essentially a one-way (inbound) road; that rotary drifts on the south end and -70 temperatures on the north end pushed costs up each winter; that the road had been lax in collecting on old freight bills to the tune of $324,000; and that there were still only 8400 people living within the 50,000 square miles considered tributary to the railroad. As a development road the Alaska had failed miserably, even though its freight rates were only 30 per cent higher than those in the U. S. Pacific Northwest compared with 420 per cent higher for the Alaska-B. C.-Yukon narrow-gauge White Pass & Yukon. The senators' patience ran short. Soon thereafter the railroad raised its freight rates 50 per cent and hiked passenger fares from 6 to 10 cents a mile. The new pricing, which didn't require I.C.C. approval because the Commission had no jurisdiction in the Territory, didn't endear the railroad to Alaskans, but it served to keep deficits to manageable levels.

WAR, hot and cold, finally and permanently hauled the Alaska Railroad out of its Dark Ages. As early as 1913 an argument for the railroad had been its ability to supply coal to a strategic North Pacific coaling station for the Navy, which was deemed vital in the event of an "American-Asiatic" conflict. By 1941 the fleet burned oil but the Japanese threat was genuine enough for the military to request an alternate port at Whittier on the Passage Canal of Prince William Sound. Army Engineers laid a 12.4-mile branch from Portage to Whittier in 1942-1943, drilling 4910-foot and 13,090-foot tunnels en route.

More than 1100 men of the 714th Railway Operating Battalion, an Omaha Road unit, went north to sustain the Alaska in its hour of crisis. Between the emergency replacement of ties, ballast, and bridge pilings, and the War Department 0-6-0's and 2-8-0's which it was issued, the 714th not only kept the Government road intact but substantially increased its traffic capacity. The line moved 764,775 tons in 1944 vs. 474,884 tons in 1941. Military bases were supplied, so were the construction crews on the Alcan Highway out of Fairbanks. But the operation was ruggedly makeshift, as the veterans who recall rotaries in 48-below weather and the old McKeen car trailer that served as a mobile PX will testify.

The war never really ended for the Alaska Railroad. The Japanese were soon driven out of the Aleutians, the Dawson Creek-Fairbanks highway was finished, and the 714th went home after 25 months of duty, of course, but the embers of warfare were hardly cool on March 5, 1946, when Winston Churchill recognized a new frustration in his "iron curtain" address at Fulton, Mo. We had purchased Alaska from Russia in the first place, and as Alaskans are fond of pointing out, U. S. and Soviet soils are so close together that schoolhouses with the pictures of Lincoln and Marx on their walls are only 3 miles apart on the western reaches of the 49th state.

So beginning in 1947 the railroad neglected by Washington since Harding became the recipient of a controversial six-year overhaul estimated at 80 million dollars — or considerably more than the first cost a quarter-century before. The symbol of the road's strange, expensive, yet incomplete reform was a blue-and-orange streamliner named *AuRoRa* and formed of ex-hospital cars pulled by 1000 h.p. Alco-GE road-switchers masquerading beneath cab-type carbodies. The evidence of this modernization was still very much around Anchorage when I arrived a year ago to review the line's second and more enduring postwar revamp. I

UNCLE SAM'S RAILS

WAR DEPARTMENT 554, one of the 2-8-0's that lasted until dieselization, carries white flags and train indicator boards.

IN a scene long gone, Mike 703 stops at makeshift water plug.

Steve McCutcheon.

PANAMA 2-6-0 pauses at Palmer in search of local patrons.

Clayton C. Tinkham.

LOOKING down the hood of one of the Alcos that introduced dieselization in 1945.

Alaska Railroad.

NO longer around is the 213, an ACF Motorailer car possibly of U. S. Navy origin.

Alaska Railroad.

IN a scene familiar to Alaska railroaders, Extra 802 requires manual assistance.

NEXT month we conclude our Alaskan coverage with a long look at today's Alaska Railroad and its prospects for maturity. Read it in May TRAINS.

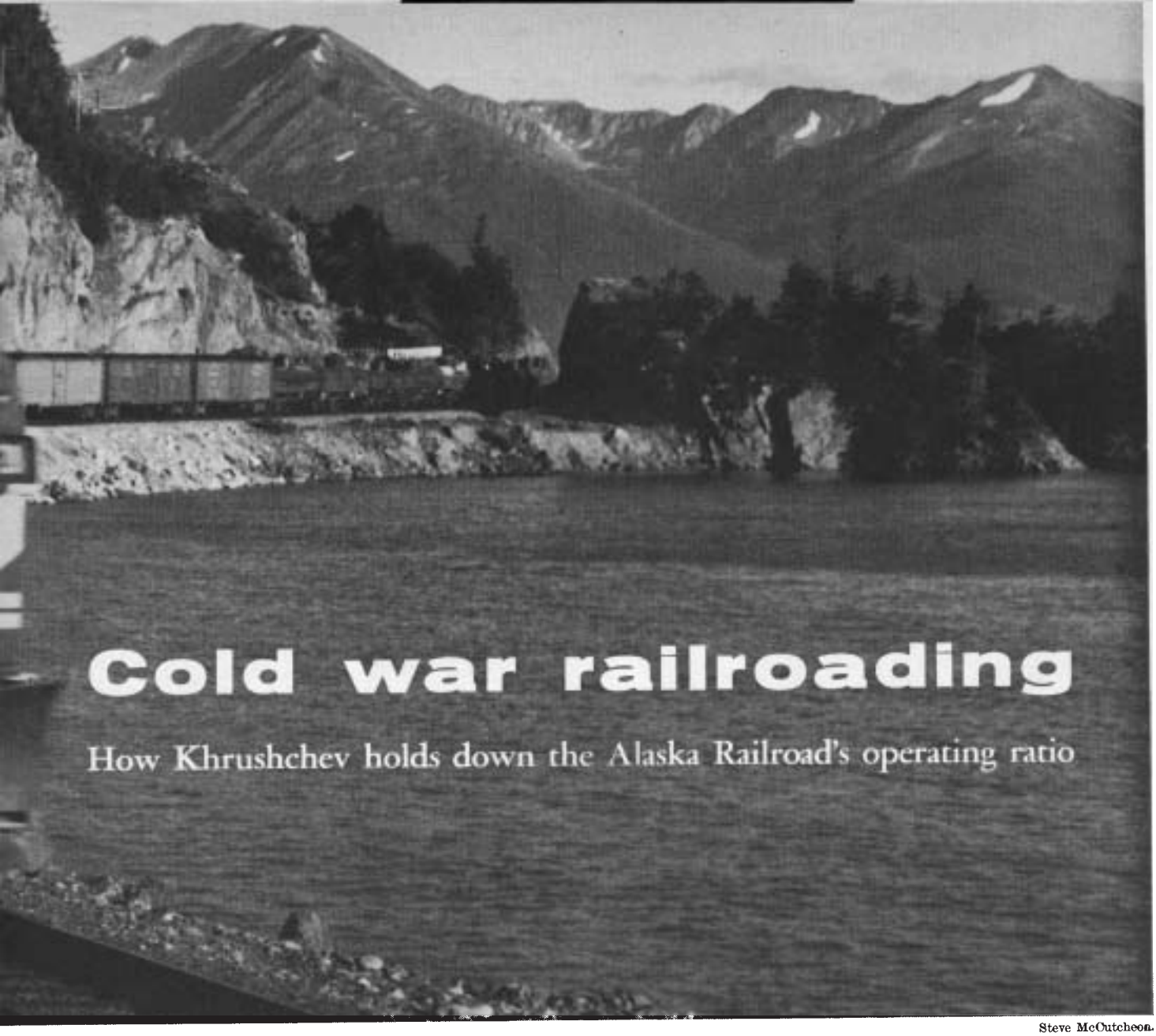
TRAINS goes to Alaska—4

DAVID P. MORGAN

I THE popular mind justifiably associates Alaska with the plane, not the locomotive. Statehood can be attributed to the influence of aircraft. It may even be that the Alaska Railroad itself would not exist today, much less break even, if aviation had not come of age. Recall, if you will, Alaska on the "flat" maps of our grade-school geography books; the state lies in the Far North, far off the trade routes of the mariners. Columbus notwithstanding, it took the plane to turn the world from a pancake into a ball. Once one examines a spherical projections map it becomes an easy matter to understand why the short route from Chicago to Tokyo is through Anchorage, not Honolulu; and that Australia is nearer to Alaska than to any other part of our continent. Militarily, the plane's indifference to land masses places Moscow 4335 air-miles from Fairbanks but 4662 from New York and 4984 from Chicago. Again, Peking is a 4522-mile run from Juneau, Alaska, but 5902 miles from San Francisco. So what was Seward's Folly has become McNamara's Prudence.

It is simply because the personnel stationed in Alaska to man its strategic Army posts, air bases, and radar-warning networks must be fed, housed, and kept warm that the Alaska Railroad can flirt with the prospect of breaking even — even by Government accounting. At that, the railroad is a traffic man's nightmare. Consider its statistics: 90 per cent of its traffic is inbound . . . 75 per cent of the tonnage which crosses the docks at Seward and Whittier terminates in Anchorage — hauls of only 114.3 and 62.5 miles respectively . . . and while 30 per cent of the road's business is strictly military supply, from 90 to 95 per cent of it is "Government" directly or indirectly. The traffic which the Alaska originates on line, mainly coal, is consumed in the state, which denies the railroad the long haul which export would mean. In other words, the railroad lives on subsistence traffic — and there's not enough of that around to support all of the water, road, pipeline, and rail capacity that's available.

In size, the 537-mile Alaska Railroad compares favorably with the 541-mile Monon. Even their gross operating revenues are similar. Dig any deeper, though, and the contrast is awesome and tells much about Alaska



Cold war railroading

How Khrushchev holds down the Alaska Railroad's operating ratio

Steve McCutcheon

and Indiana as well as about Government and private operation. Compare, say, calendar 1961 for the Monon with the year ended June 30, 1962, for the ARR:

	Alaska	Monon
Gross revenues (millions)	$14.1	$17.9
Revenue tons (millions)	1.4	5.7
Ton-miles (millions)	195.4	892.5
Revenue passengers (thousands)	67.4	54.4
Passenger-miles (millions)	8.4	9.1
Average freight haul (miles)	135	155

Obviously, the Monon does a lot more work for its money and has far less to show for it. In the respective years noted, it ran a deficit and of course passed up dividends, whereas the Alaska had more than 2 million dollars left over after expenses and depreciation. Rates are the key to the puzzle. In the U. S., excluding State 49, the average ton-mile revenue for the railroads is 1.37 cents vs. 6.04 cents in Alaska, which explains why our roads realize $6.24 on their typical ton of freight after moving it 450 miles but the Alaska grosses $8.16 on the average ton it moves only 135 miles. Add in the facts that the Alaska pays no taxes because it operates entirely on Government land, has no dividend obligations, and depends on Washington for appropriations to cover major improvements. Then, and only then, does it become apparent how the Alaska can meet its payroll.

Such statistics do not discredit the Department of the Interior, into whose domain the railroad falls, nor the men and women who actually operate the line. Just as the Government finally sold off its Mississippi River barge line, so would it presumably unload the railroad if a responsible buyer made a decent offer for ARR's 125.5 million dollars' worth of net assets, excluding land. There've been no offers to date, nor are there likely to be. Railroads in the continental U. S. have enough unproductive track of their own without picking up an extra 537 miles which terminate 1232 nautical miles from Seattle.

BUYERS aside, there probably would not be any railroad to sell today unless a quick, drastic, and costly overhaul had been approved by Congress after World War II. In 1946 the line that had never really been finished in the first place, Harding's gold spike ceremony of 1923 to the contrary, lay flat on its back, utterly exhausted by its war effort. The original 70-pound rail, which had suffered as many as 56 breaks a day in the war, was still

Rolan Sloan.

WAR surplus 2-8-0 built by Baldwin in 1943, No. 557, is the only steam engine left on the Alaska. She is an oil burner.

ALCO 1001, Alaska's second diesel, gingerly inches over temporary track after a slide, not an uncommon occurrence up north.

An Alaska album

Steve McCutcheon.

MORE trains like this would please the railroad. Secondhand hoppers trundle soft coal to Anchorage behind rebuilt Alco "cabs."

Steve McCutcheon.

WINTER means nonrevenue train-miles. A pair of Alco hoods collaborate behind a Russell plow in the vicinity of Talkeetna.

Steve McCutcheon.

Steve McCutcheon.

END of track: Fairbanks. Terminal facilities were built to accommodate traffic from a direct rail link with the States — which never developed. Population today is 60,500.

in place. Ballast was a joke. "Every other tie was broken," an official recalls. A freight crew running north from Curry to Broad Pass against a 1.75 per cent ruling grade required 12 hours to run 56 miles, doubling three hills in the process. Out of Seward to Anchorage 10 cars constituted a train for a 550-series ex-War Department 2-8-0; even so, the 480-ton load would require doubling three grades and consuming 12 to 16 hours for 114.3 miles. Passenger service? Alaskans laughed at it, and claimed with some justice that a man could make better time with a good dog team.

Either Congress must vote some interest-free appropriations to overhaul the railroad or it would die — the choice was that simple. Whereupon the now controversial rehabilitation program presided over by Col. John Patrick Johnson got under way. It eventually cost approximately 95 million dollars and produced a physically strong but administratively lax property ["The Railroad That Had It Too Good," September 1955 TRAINS]. Johnson, a Santa Fe mechanical department man, had joined the Military Railway Service in 1941; had railroaded throughout the war from Iraq to Iran to China, India, and Burma, then to the Philippines; and finally had been appointed the Alaska's general manager in 1945. He thought big and acted fast. Beginning in 1947, the Alaska replaced its entire mainline steel with 115-pound rail, installed treated ties, reballasted, widened cuts, and installed steel bridges in place of wooden trestles. He built new stations and freighthouses, installed train radio, erected a new diesel shop in Anchorage, and laid out a new yard in Fairbanks.

Under Public Law 478 the railroad, as a Government entity, got a prior claim on war surplus, for which it had to pay only freight charges to Alaska as well as any unexpired depreciation. Accordingly, Johnson imported hundreds of ex-Army cars, mainly troop sleepers and hospital cars, which were rebuilt into everything imaginable: flats, reefers, box cars, diners, bunk cars, even an office car. He got locomotives, too — notably 1000 h.p. Alco A1A-A1A hoods originally built for overseas service in countries such as Iran. Among all the gear that came into Anchorage were items which no one has since been able to account for: a 125-foot turntable, a dozen mechanical stokers, 42 powered centrifugal pumps, ventilating fans, grinding wheels, drills, bits, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

Johnson resigned in August 1953 and departed Alaska, reportedly for a job in South America, and his name slipped out of *Who's Who in Railroad-*

ing. He left behind a virtually new railroad, the biggest single employer of civilians in the Territory, and mixed opinions. "Hell," says one man who worked for him, "he may have wasted some money but he got the job done. Besides, the war surplus didn't cost us anything. It would have been sold for peanuts or junked in the States if we hadn't got it."

A new Republican Administration in Washington took a dimmer view of the rehab program, though, especially in view of a Hoover Commission report that the railroad should tighten its belt. At Secretary of the Interior Douglas McKay's request, Southern Pacific reluctantly agreed to dispatch a good operating man — Salt Lake Division super Frank E. Kalbaugh — to the scene to put the road's house in order. Thereafter a succession of U.S. officials from Western roads took two-year leaves of absence to manage the Alaska, a policy finally terminated last year when John E. Manley, an ARR man since 1937, was sworn into the $22,000-a-year job.

When Frank Kalbaugh showed up in 1953 he found precious little about ARR policy of which his instincts as an Espee man could approve. The road really didn't know how much or what kind of war surplus it had buried under tarps because the original invoices had been destroyed in a fire and nobody had ever inventoried it. Some 55 steam and diesel locomotives were doing the work of 35 because the Anchorage engine terminal worked only one shift a day on a five-day week. Too much of the line's energy and money was being siphoned off in non-rail activities — holdovers from construction days ranging from Tanana and Yukon river tug and sternwheeler barge operations to an employee PX-style commissary to the Mount McKinley Hotel. Hopelessly uneconomic local passenger trains rolled out of Anchorage to Seward, Whittier, and Sutton. And the payroll was too big.

Under Kalbaugh and his successors the Alaska Railroad got a new image. It had begun life as a proud baby, rapidly had sunk to pauper status, had been drafted as a soldier, then had made up for its abused past in what amounted to profligacy. Since 1953 it has acted, for the first time in its life, like a business. Insofar as its ownership and the economics of the state permit, the Alaska operates like any other U. S. railroad. Its hotel has been turned over to the National Park Service (and leased in turn to private concessionaires); its river craft has been sold to private operators; passenger trains operate only between Anchorage and Fairbanks, where the fact of no through highway excuses their $300,000 annual deficit; the Anchorage diesel shop is open around the clock; and the sole steam locomotive on the property is fired up only for an occasional fan trip or an event such as the Palmer Fair.

In common with most other railroads, regardless of their ownership, the Alaska suffers from no ailment today that more traffic wouldn't fix. Its biggest single commodity is coal. The railroad grosses about 1½ million dollars a year on subbituminous and lignite by moving 350,000 tons of it to the military and 50,000 tons to civilian consumers in ex-Erie ore hoppers. The radar-warning station at Clear alone consumes three to four carloads of coal a day. Coal also accounts for the railroad's biggest train — a 156-car drag once operated out of Healy. Yet production is but a fraction of the potential (the state has 5.4 per cent of North America's coal reserves) because thus far in Alaska's history it has been uneconomic to export the fuel. The Japanese, of all people, have been investigating the situation, and should it ever become economic for them to buy Alaskan coal (in spite of the 3313 miles from Seward to Yokohama) the railroad could boom. General Manager Manley thinks that coal, exported or not, remains cause enough for the railroad.

The railroad even has cause to worry about oil, all of which is imported. For example, if gas lines penetrate the Anchorage area extensively they could endanger the satisfaction which the railroad receives from the fact that every four to five homes represent a tank-car load of oil a season. Gas could go to Fairbanks, too. As a matter of fact, one aspect of Government — the military — sliced the railroad's revenues by 6 million dollars a year in 1955-1956 by building a pipeline from Haines (which is near Skagway on the White Pass & Yukon) to Eielson Air Force Base, near Fairbanks, which deprived the railroad of a 510.5-mile tank-car haul from the port of Whittier. Exactly what sense it made for the Pentagon to thus weaken a Government-owned transport link on which it is dependent, oil or no, is beyond comprehension.

So far as general merchandise goes, the railroad is now caught up in a "to be or not to be" game over containerization. Down on the sea at Seward, where 266,000 tons cross the docks a year, the railroad erected two big corrugated-metal transit sheds in 1957 to accommodate orthodox ship-to-box-car transloading, then almost immediately jumped into a container program which almost emptied the dock freighthouses. Between them, the railroad, Garrison Truck Lines (which uses the Alaska under Plan I piggyback), Alaska Steamship (which operates converted Liberty ships), and Puget Sound-Alaska Van Lines (a barge-and-tug operator) settled on a standard 8 x 24-foot "box" stressed for 60,000-pound loads and adaptable for water-rail-road movement. The railroad itself owns 347 of these URB's

Inside Uncle Sam's roundhouse

DIESEL LOCOMOTIVES

Road numbers	Model	Type	H.p.	Weight (tons)	Builder	Date
1201-1202, 1204	SW1	B-B	600	99	EMD	1942
7107, 7109, 7112, 7123	SW2	B-B	1000	115	Alco	1943
1000-1001	RS1	B-B	1000	125	Alco	1944
1014, 1017, 1027-1028	RS1	B-B	1000	122	Alco	1943
1010, 1013, 1018, 1026, 1029-1030	RS1	A1A-A1A	1000	127	Alco	1942-43
1050-1055, 1057, 1065, 1067, 1069-1070, 1072, 1074-1078	RF1	B-B	1000	127	Alco	1942-43
1821, 1825-1828, 1830-1831, 1834, 1836-1839	GP7	B-B	1500	126	EMD	1951
1500-1508	F7	B-B	1500	123	EMD	1952-53
1510, 1512, 1514	FP7	B-B	1500	126	EMD	1953
2000	GP30	B-B	2250	130	EMD	1963

Notes: SW2's were acquired from Army when ARR took over switching at Ft. Richardson; 1000-1001 were purchased new for Whittier Branch but all other RS1's and RF1's served in Iran; RF1's include both cab and booster units and were shrouded by Puget Sound Bridge & Dredge in Seattle; F7's include four booster units, one of which has been turned back on GP30 No. 2000.

STEAM POWER

Number	Type	Cylinders	Drivers	Pressure	Tractive force	Builder	Date
557	2-8-0	19" x 26"	57"	210 lbs.	31,500 lbs.	Baldwin	1943

(for Unit Rail Box) and mounts them on flats which contain electric lines (supplied by a midtrain ex-troop sleeper which holds two diesel-generator sets) for heating or refrigeration. The URB's were so successful in expediting shipments and reducing handling and damage costs that the Alaska (in common with the White Pass Route) seemed destined to eliminate the box car—until last year. Then in May 1962, the railroad began interchanging freight cars with U. S. and Canadian roads for the first time in its existence through the medium of a CN-operated Prince Rupert (B. C.)-Whittier barge service. Its supporters claim that through-car service to Alaska via Canada saves money and cuts five days and 600 miles off schedules via Seattle and assert that the operation has enjoyed a "very successful" first year. Since 68 per cent of the state's consumer imports originate east of the Mississippi, the claim is that through-car service can lower the cost of living from 5 to 7 per cent for Alaskans.

THE train sheet in Anchorage inked in by the chief dispatcher and his three trick DS's clearly indicates where the traffic flows. Each night a freight hauled by six F7's and loaded up to 4000 tons makes a 12-hour round trip to Seward, accounting for half the road's receipts. Through freights make the Anchorage-Fairbanks long haul three times a week in each direction. Add in a once-a-week local freight to Healy; an every-other-day Fairbanks-Healy local, mainly to move coal; a five-day-a-week Anchorage-Whittier mixed turn; and four coal trains a week into Anchorage — and you have it.

In summer the road operates daily Anchorage-Fairbanks passenger service in daylight (the 356 miles take 12 hours). In winter twice-a-week service is offered; the daylight run alternates with a "mixed" which includes coaches, a diner-lounge, sleepers, and — coupled on the rear — URB's and piggyback.

The daylight schedule is blended, in unequal parts, I found, of unusual equipment, scores of stops, a 49 mph speed limit, monotony, moose, and occasional scenic stoppers. The consist — blue and orange rebuilt 12-wheel Army hospital cars hauled by two FP7 cabs — includes a baggage car which holds not only skis and a team of huskies, say, but also a diesel-generator set for train lighting, and water storage tanks for the steam generators. A private operator runs the diner-lounge, peddling beer, magazines, and jukebox selections as well as meals. Because of the lack of roads, there are stops — dozens of 'em. Typical orders beside the brakestand call for stops at Mileposts 197, 200, 203, 206¼, south switch at Montana, and Montana itself! Miles of the railroad in winter constitute simply a vast desert of white — uninviting, unpopulated. But there are moments: easing across Hurricane Gulch Bridge 296 feet up at 10 mph is one of them . . . another is negotiating the Nenana Canyon between Healy and Mt. McKinley, which might be called the Alaska's Silverton . . . and traversing the downright pretty line along the banks of the Susitna River.

If your train slows to 15 mph but does not stop — as mine did on several occasions — it has caught up to the Alaska's most stubborn and lifelong enemy, the moose. He thinks the railroad was built for his exclusive use, the better to avoid deep-snow walking with its attendant danger of wolves, and he claims rights over all trains. The railroad has dug "moose siding" leadoffs from its rails with bulldozers and even made salt licks, but to no avail. A moose prefers between-the-rails walking. He's immune to air horns, resents deeply being prodded with fusees, and will finally turn and charge a locomotive if provoked. The railroad hits about 120 moose a year and distributes their carcasses for food to on-line orphanages. Not forgotten is the moose which a passenger train hit and threw into a switchstand, which diverted the train unexpectedly down a siding and into a gulley!

LESS amusing than moose and far more difficult to contend with are natural disturbances, which range from frost heaves to floods to earthquakes to snowslides to paralyzing cold:

¶Yard engines work and freight and passenger trains operate in and out of Fairbanks when the temperature drops to 74 degrees below zero. Tonnage is reduced out of regard for stiff journals, but the major problem is keeping the train line pumped up on freights. Rubber gaskets in the hose couplings freeze so that they become as hard as steel washers and consequently leak air. Alcohol introduced into the line from 5-gallon jugs mounted on the air pumps of the diesels keeps the problem under control down to 50 below, but if the temperature sinks lower it's hard to get even 50 pounds on the gauge back in the caboose.

¶In the summer of 1955 an earthquake took out 200 feet of line on a 30-foot fill just 25 minutes after a freight had passed, and when the section crews arrived there was no trace of where the earth had gone.

¶The Alaska has a rotary, a comparatively new Cooke (1930) coupled to a 12-wheel Vanderbilt tank off the UP, but this goes out only once a year or so — which displeases no one since it's regarded as the "coldest, wettest job on the railroad." Jordan spreaders (whose wings reach out 18 feet on each side of the track) and bulldozers can do 90 per cent of the job today. The railroad knows its enemy so well that it can count on two slides a year at Kern, near Mile 71 on the Seward line. It simply stations a pair of cats near by, waits for the slides to pile 25 feet of white over the rails, cleans up the mess, and takes the tractors home.

¶Then there's Lake George — east of the main about 35 miles north of Anchorage. Melting snow fills it until it's 20 miles long and ½ to 1 mile wide, imprisoned by a glacier. Then — anytime between July 1 and the middle of August — the glacier recedes and the lake's water level drops 200 feet in 8 to 10 days. The water pours under, against, and over the railroad toward the Knik Arm of the Cook Inlet usually stopping traffic at least 24 hours.

PERHAPS locomotives tell the Alaska's history as well as anything or anyone on the property. G.I. 2-8-0 557 reminds one of the too many years that the ARR made do with Government hand-me-downs which were originally designed to dig canals or restore service over bombed-out European lines. Ditto for the flock of 1000-series Alco hoods on the roster; for a season the railroad tried to dieselize with what were essentially switchers, despite the "shrouds" the Johnson regime placed on them, and made no complaint because the alternative was G.I. Consols. The GP7's — also ex-Army — *are* good road power except for the fact that they ride on switcher trucks and ride hard. The EMD F7's and FP7's represent the new, businesslike Alaska of 1963. The freight units run off 90,000 miles a year; now have in excess of 600,000 miles on their clocks; cost less to maintain than any other road diesels in the U. S. save those of Western Pacific (thanks to Alaska's nine months of clean, cold air, the use of high cetane-rating fuel, and an excellent lube oil control); and otherwise duplicate S.O.P. in the rest of the states. A wreck put six F7's down an embankment last year, breaking the back of a booster unit. ARR has turned it in on a GP30, now abuilding at La Grange. The road would like eventually to buy three more such high-horsepower hoods so that four of them could supplant the six F7's now required for the Anchorage-Seward haul. In other words, to approach the problem just as a road "on the outside" would. Such thinking bodes well for Uncle Sam's railroad experiment. I

THE BEAR AND THE BIG HOOK

Wild life vs. the Alaska Railroad

GEORGE JENNINGS GALE

I WHILE I was station agent at Healy, Alas., on the Alaska Railroad during the extremely cold winter of 1946-1947, I was asked by the train dispatcher to go down into the Old Healy yard and check on a big hook that had been on the old caboose track since fall.

I got my lantern, parka, and bunny boots and struck out about 7 p.m. It was over a mile to the cold, bleak, dark old yard; and when I reached the big hook I saw that some freight had picked up the idler flat and that the hook was swinging free out over the caboose spur. As I looked over the situation, I found that the machine was completely snowed and frozen in. The weather had been wet and sloppy the entire fall, then after Christmas temperatures had fallen to 65 and 70 degrees below zero at times.

While I was working around the big hook something appeared on the main line and reflected in my lantern light against the white snow. For some reason I grew frightened and headed up into the cab on the hook, but I sensed that the "thing" was following me up onto the machine. The cab was only about 3' x 5', and its windows were broken, so I got out of that trap and climbed out onto the crane that supported the swinging hook.

As I moved out on the boom the animal continued to follow me. I realized that it was a bear — a giant bear, but extremely thin and covered with ice. I didn't take time looking the animal over but began sliding down the hook chain.

The great bear looked down at me but knew better than to jump, so he backed down the boom. By the time I had reached the hook itself, which weighed some thousand pounds, it was swinging about 4 feet from the frozen track.

The bear would reach the ground soon. Under ordinary circumstances I never would have been able to climb that chain, but that night with the thick mittens I wore I squirreled the chain and found myself up on the end of the boom with the huge bear looking at me from the ground. As he raised up on his back legs, his front paws waved 4 feet from my face as I lay on my stomach.

The beast began bumping into that big hook, and as the hook started to swing he got down on all fours and boxed and shoved at it, snarling in the most vicious and primitive way, his neck sticking in and out like that of a snake.

I knew I would soon freeze to death if I kept monkeying around with that bear. Even if he did let the hook alone, no doubt he would head back up the vehicle and again come out on the boom; in time he would wear me out. Grasping at ideas, I found that I could shine the lantern in the bear's eyes so that he could not see, but he would almost scream in rage.

The animal had the big hook swinging wildly. When the hook was farthest from the bear I shined my lantern in his eyes and the hook caught him alongside the head and back, knocking him into a ditch some 30 feet below the track.

He lay still, and I crawled back to the cab and found a paper carton containing about a dozen fusees. I seized them, then lost no time lighting one and heading back toward the depot at a run. I left a burning fusee on the track and saw the bear come up to it. He had some difficulty passing it.

I came to a little bridge between the two Healy yards and lit a fusee for each end of the bridge. There was a string of box cars reaching down toward that bridge, and I mounted the boxes and sped for home. The bear did not follow and I soon lost track of him.

NEXT MORNING Ray Rupp, the section foreman at Ferry, 12 miles north of Healy, saw a bear in his yard. He borrowed a .30-06 from one of the native boys who worked for him, headed back home, and found that the bear had knocked down his meat cache and made off with a quarter of caribou.

Ray knew that a winter bear was dangerous. After he had been forced out of his den, in time he would starve to death. Ray followed the bear tracks to a creek, but he was a sourdough and he knew better than to walk across that creek and climb the high bank. So he went upstream, crossed the ice to the other side, and made his way back. He found the bear hiding under the boughs of a big cedar tree — waiting for Ray's head to appear over the creek bank, and perhaps with one swipe to tear it off. Ray said that as he walked up to the bear he heard a hissing and he shot. It took five cartridges to kill the old thin bear.

Ray returned to Ferry, got his boys and a dogsled, and brought the dead bear into camp. It weighed some 200 pounds. It should have weighed over a thousand, but it had been in a state of starvation before it ate the quarter of caribou. And it was crusted with ice. Apparently during the fall thaw water had run into its den and had soaked the animal. The sled dogs would not look at the meat after it was cooked.

He was a sad creature, but perhaps for one brief moment he had enjoyed distinction. He may have been the first bear in Alaska to be flagged down by a fusee. I

John C. Benson

Alaska's 16 SD70MACs wear the state's blue-and-gold, including the Little Dipper constellation emblem.

Why did Alaska go for SD70MACs?

Two words: radial trucks. And the railroad is eyeing a derivative model, too

When an American railroad is thousands of miles from any other in the U.S., whatever it buys better be good or it's not going to last. We're talking about the Alaska Railroad, 470 mainline miles of curves, tundra, mosquitoes, and the most beautiful scenery anywhere.

ARR owns 16 of the loneliest EMD SD70MACs in the world, plus 37 older EMDs. The '70s are of interest because these are the first modern six-motor (C-C) units—delivered in 1999 and 2000—on what has traditionally been a four-motor (B-B) railroad. So why did ARR break with tradition, and is it glad it did?

"We're happy with them and getting happier," said Joshua D. Coran, ARR's chief mechanical engineer. "Why did we buy them? Two words: radial trucks."

Radials represent a major advance in suspension and adhesion. A standard truck's axles are rigidly aligned, unable to "steer" through a curve. A radial allows each axle to constantly be parallel to the track and corrects for up to about 10 degrees of curvature, reducing wear on rail and wheel.

Coran, with ARR for 19 years, has long been a proponent of C-C power for the road. He looked into rebuilt SD40-2s with 645F3B engines rated at 3500 h.p. and retrofitted with a radial truck, vs. buying new 70-MACs. ARR didn't because there was no budget for a test and little desire to go ahead without one.

The '70s now exceed the availability of anything else on the roster, with 85-90% availability vs. 75-80% for older road units.

A few early software glitches have been ironed out, and the $2.2 million, 415,000-lb. '70s run unrestricted on Anchorage-Fairbanks oil trains and Healy-Seward coal trains. In summer, the two daily Anchorage-Fairbanks passenger runs each get a '70.

The 16 units allowed ARR to retire 12 units: the last of its GP7s, GP35s, and GP40s (not Dash-2s). And, for the first time in years, ARR didn't have to lease units from the lower 48.

Are Alaska Railroad's motive-power needs satiated for a while? Not really, Coran says. "We're talking to EMD about a dedicated passenger locomotive that can also do freight service in the winter, probably SD70MACs with passenger capability."

Stephan Koenig

What's in a number? Quite a bit, apparently

VIA Rail Canada 911, one of 20 new Genesis units, has had a run of bad luck. Plagued by software problems since its fall 2001 delivery, 911 struck a drawbar on the track, destroying three of its four traction motors; hit an auto in Quebec; then, while en route to Toronto for repair, suffered eight flat spots on its wheels after crews failed to release the handbrake. The unit is shown March 11 in NS local H1J at CP's SK Yard in Buffalo, N.Y., en route back to GE at Erie, Pa., for repair ... and renumbering to 921!

Bob Johnston

Riders load provisions aboard ARR's RDC-3 at Talkeetna on August 16, 2003, for the Hurricane Turn.

Alaska's extreme railroading

Two passenger trains, but they share little more than the same rails

There are many reasons why people visit Alaska. Riding the "Hurricane Turn" is not one of them.

Most vacationers to the 49th state relax aboard the *Denali Star*, which runs daily between Anchorage and Fairbanks with perhaps the most colorful collection of new and rebuilt passenger cars in North America. The *Star* sports everything from a cathedral-like former Chicago & North Western lounge rebuilt for the *Florida Fun Train* to six classic domes (three Budd, three ACF) to bi-level full-length domes — with open observation decks — operated by three different cruise companies. From plush seats, travelers can delight in an unspoiled view of nature in the raw: rushing rivers, rampant wildflowers, soaring eagles, lumbering bears, and if clouds cooperate, a peek at North America's tallest peak, Mount McKinley in Denali National Park — Alaskans call it Denali.

The other way to experience the real Alaska coughs to life Thursdays through Sundays. That's when the Hurricane Turn's two 50-year-old Rail Diesel Cars burble out onto the main line at Talkeetna (pop. 500), a frontier town at the end of a side road about 100 miles equidistant from Anchorage and Denali Park. It runs 57 miles to the middle of the steel arch bridge that leaps 296 feet high over Hurricane Gulch, reverses direction, and comes back. The ARR calls this the Hurricane Turn. Locals casually refer to it as "the Flag Stop."

Whatever the name, the railroad is the only way into the homes, cabins, and fishing spots along the railroad in the 50-plus miles between Talkeetna and the highway crossing just south of Hurricane Gulch. There are no roads to these cabins, as the Anchorage-Fairbanks highway goes up a different valley on the other side of a mountain range. There isn't any electricity, either.

Service is mandated by the law, says Anchorage resident Mark Butler, en route to his cabin for the weekend. "One stipulation of an early 1980s 500-parcel government land sale lottery," says Butler, "was that 'access via railroad' be maintained when Alaska Railroad ownership was transferred from the federal government to the state in 1985."

Waiting at Talkeetna's scruffy platform for the RDCs is an assemblage of homeowners, weekend campers, dreamers, day trippers, and a lot of dogs.

"Milepost 248.5," notes conductor Buddy Gray, seeing regular passenger Doris Ivory. Gray walks through the two former New Haven and New York Central stainless-steel warriors, collecting fares and making a "switch list" of stops for engineer Chuck Tenney. These are invariably small clearings and trailheads: milepost 235.9, 241.7, 241.9, 248.5.

The last is Curry, a siding and the site of a former crew change (the railroad hotel burned down in 1957) where Ivory gets off. From the baggage compartment, Gray hands Ivory her shot-

No roads: U.S. and Canadian remote flag-stop service

Route	Operator	Miles	Seasonal	Days	Name (#)	Equip.
Talkeetna-Hurricane	ARR	57	May-Sept	4	Hurricane Turn	RDC
Anchorage-Fairbanks	ARR	356	Oct-April	1+	Aurora	Pass.
White River-Sudbury, ON	VIA	300	All	3	185 / 186	RDC
Montreal-Jonquiere, QC	VIA	308	All	3	Saguenay	Pass.
Montreal-Senneterre, QC	VIA	436	All	3	Abitibi	Pass.
Cochrane-Moosonee, ON	ONR	186	All	3	Little Bear	Mixed
The Pas-Churchill, MB	VIA	570	All	3	Hudson Bay	Pass.
The Pas-Pukatawagan, MB	VIA	156	All	2	290 / 291	Mixed
Lillooet-D'Arcy, BC	BCR	35	All	8*	none	Track car
Sept Illes-Schefferville, QC	QNS&L	357	All	2**	none	Mixed
Sault St. Marie-Hearst, ON	AC (CN)	296	All	4***	631 / 632	Pass.

\+ Winter Hurricane Turn also operates one round-trip per month Anchorage-Hurricane (169 miles)
* Plus Seton Portage-D'Arcy, five round-trips per week, on demand
** One round-trip turns at Labrador City
*** Three round-trips per week in winter

Days = number of trips per week. ARR: Alaska Railroad; AC: Algoma Central; BCR: British Columbia Railway. CN: Canadian National; ONR: Ontario Northland; QNS&L: Quebec North Shore & Labrador; VIA: VIA Rail Canada

gun. Almost everyone carries a weapon; a 12-gauge shotgun is the weapon of choice for warding off bears.

Curious about these wilderness abodes, I accept Butler's invitation to hop off the train and hike a mile into the woods and up a ridge to his cabin. Are shotguns really necessary, I ask? Butler points to gouges in his cabin's door where a bear has pawed, hoping to reach food it smells inside.

"This helps discourage 'em too," says Butler, pointing to a doormat consisting of a few dozen heavy nails poking through a piece of plywood. "You might want to hop over that!" he adds helpfully.

There was no mistaking the Turn's return later that afternoon. Tenney's horn blasts echo through the valley as if to command, "Get down to the tracks if you're coming ... or else!" At the clearing along the Indian River where the trail from Butler's cabin reaches the track, the crew lets everyone off to stretch their legs for about 10 minutes — shades of Rio Grande's *Royal Gorge*! "We'll drop fly fishermen with hip boots here on the way up and pick them up a mile downstream on the way back," says Gray.

At the next stop a whole family waits: Sassan and Kristy Mossanen, baby Maya, their extended family and friends, and the obligatory dog, a golden retriever mix named Kaya. Unlike Butler, the Mossanens live in their wilderness home yearround. Visitors are frequent in the summer — "We had 90 people out here for our wedding," they boast.

But not in the winter, when daylight shrinks to a few hours each day, and temperatures in the -30 range are ordinary. Then, the Mossanens' life revolves around the train schedule. Between late September and early May, flag-stop service between Anchorage and Fairbanks route is offered by the *Aurora*, which runs north on Saturdays and south on Sundays. An Anchorage-Hurricane turn runs the first Thursday of every month. The high falutin' *Denali Star* that bypasses all of this takes an eight-month winter break.

Regulars like Ivory, Butler, and the Mossanens can buy $80 ticket books, where each $10 coupon is good for a 20-mile segment; Alaska residents and seniors get a discount from the $72 summer fare for the round-trip.

There's no charge for dogs, who ride in the passenger compartment and generally fall asleep on the floor until someone starts eating a sandwich. "A 125-pound Akita that gets off at milepost 268 gets unfriendly when there are too many other dogs on board," says Gray. "If that happens, we muzzle 'im up."

With its flapping stack cap, the RDC-2 sounds like an idling farm tractor, belying the existence of new 350 hp Cummins engines that could rocket the cars to 100 mph, if it weren't for the maximum speed for the RDCs on the Alaska Railroad, 49 mph.

But the main virtue for passengers of having RDCs on this run occurs when the Hurricane Turn reaches its namesake bridge. Folks riding the *Denali Star* and *Aurora* scramble to take photographs as their train creeps over the towering structure at 10 mph, but the RDCs actually stop on it for several minutes while the engineer switches control from the cab at one end to the cab at the other. If someone needs a little extra time for a photo, no problem.

The *Acela Express* it ain't. But isn't getting as far away from what that speedster represents why people have chosen the Hurricane Turn anyway?

TRAINS takes you there

Photo by Tom Danneman

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