

## Letter from Korea...

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"Run into the roundhouse, Nellie, the brakeman can't corner you there!" Like cowboys and Indians or West Virginia mountaineers, railroading and railroaders – their songs and their sayings – are a traditional part of American folklore. It is a tradition that railroaders are a tough brand of citizen, that their life is something set apart, that to be a railroaders you've got to be a pretty tough egg.

There is a section of Korea littered with locomotives, criss-crossed with railroad tracks, bustling with activity; they call the area the "Pusan Back Shop," or more simply, "The Roundhouse." Operating the shop are big men, sweaty men, dirty men; they call them the "roundhouse boys."

Combine the railroaders and old soldiers and you have a really special breed of citizen. And combine these men with the roundhouse and you have what the Army calls the 765<sup>th</sup> Railway Shop Battalion.

The 765<sup>th</sup> was originally formed and sponsored in 1944 by the Erie Railroad. Since then all the original roundhouse men and old Erie railroaders have left the unit. But it still considers itself to be an Erie Railroad unit.

There are plenty of oldtimers around from other companies. Take for instance Captain Walter J. Wood, Athens, Pa., machine shop superintendent. Captain Wood has been a railroader for 37 years, working for such lines as the New York Central, Lehigh Valley, and Missouri Pacific. Or take Master Sergeant Milton A. Morris, Newport News, Va., railway blacksmith. Morris has been in the Army for twenty years starting as a mule skinner and then shifting to railroading. SFC William Butler, Portland, Ore., hospital train maintenance man, worked many years for the Union Pacific, as a fireman.

Even the commanding officers, Lt. Col. James K. Hanks, Houston, Texas, is an old railroader with fourteen years experience.

Although less experienced, the newer and younger men are finding the railroad business to their liking. Says Pvt. Dale Winninger, French Lick, Ind., "I was surprised to find all of the buildings rectangular, but I've sort of grown to like that name 'roundhouse man'."

Like all other outfits in Korea, these railroaders have no union hours. Until April they worked from 84 to 102 hours a week. And when you see them mothering 90-ton engines around on cranes – that adds up to a lot of hours! Recently some of the men have been able to cut down to a 60-70 hour week. The shops operate 24 hours a day. Beside one building is a ball diamond hopefully constructed last spring. It is covered with weeds now.

It's hot too! In the spring the temperature was hitting over 110 degrees in some of the shops. They don't bother to take the temperature in the summer.

What have they done? In a twelve-month period the railroaders made heavy repairs on several hundred locomotives. That means taking the boiler off the engine, disassembling the works, making everything tick and then putting it back together again. The boys have made heavy repairs on thousands of freight cars, and hundreds of passenger cars.