

COVER STORY

# Tales from the front

Three Southern Pacific firemen recall good times and bad aboard the legendary cab-forward 4-8-8-2 locomotives





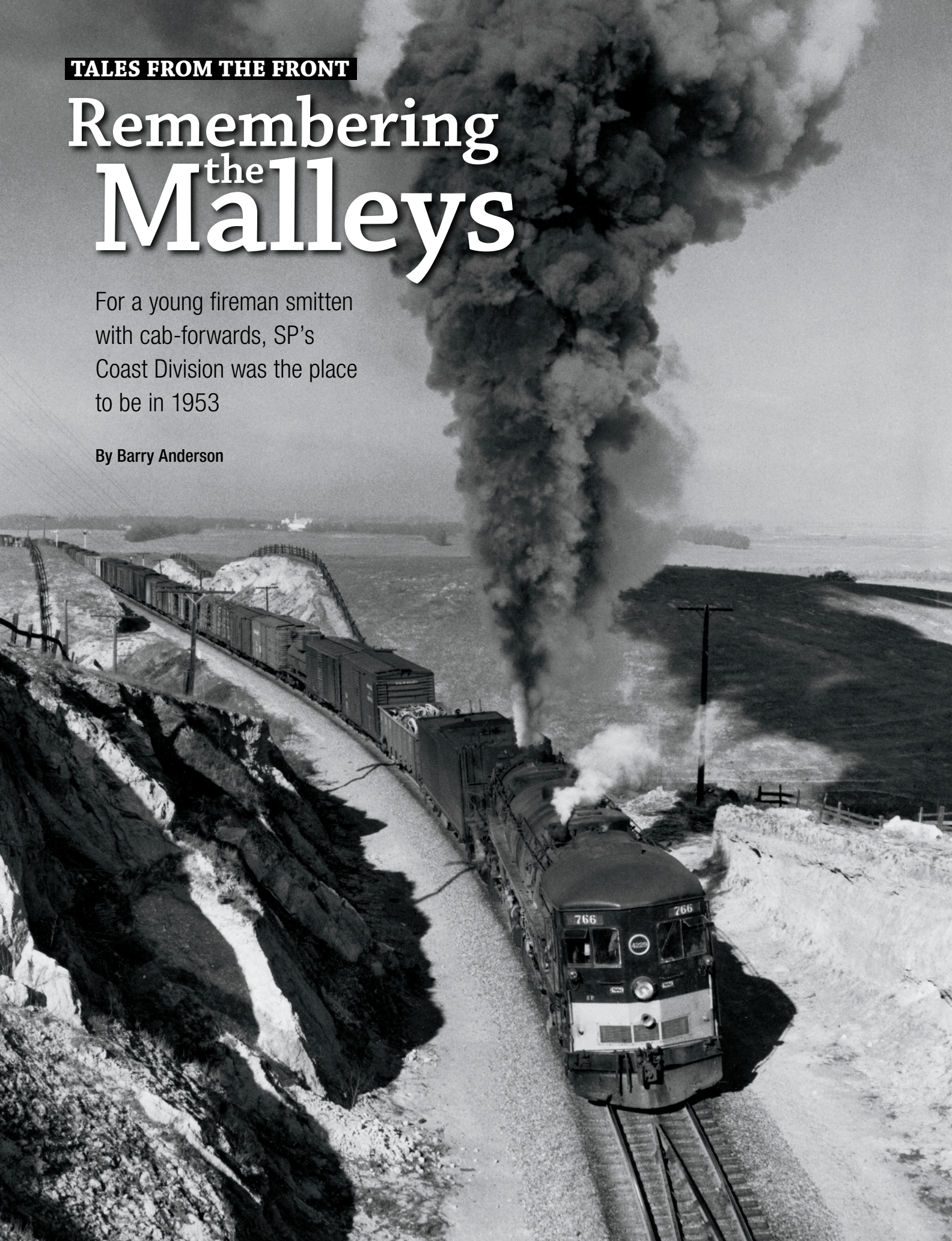
The fireman on SP cab-forward 4180 eyes photographer Robert Hale, pacing the train in an auto through Altamont Pass, Calif., in the 1950's. The man visible through the front windows is likely the head-end brakeman.

**TALES FROM THE FRONT**

# Remembering the Malleys

For a young fireman smitten  
with cab-forwards, SP's  
Coast Division was the place  
to be in 1953

By Barry Anderson



**M**y love affair with Southern Pacific's cab-forwards began in the late 1940's, when I was a teenage railfan growing up on the San Francisco Peninsula. I'd seen them occasionally in the mountains on family vacations to Lake Tahoe and trips north to Mount Shasta, but never "up close and personal."

Then, as hundreds of new F-unit diesels arrived on the SP, they began to displace the cab-forwards from their traditional stomping grounds. First, the older "flat-front" AC-4's, 5's, and 6's were bumped off the Portland and Shasta divisions and the Modoc line. Then the more modern AC-7 to AC-12 classes (excepting the AC-9's, which were rear-cab 2-8-8-4's built as coal-burners to work in New Mexico) were displaced from Donner and Tehachapi passes, showing up in increasing numbers on the Coast and Western divisions.

Many a warm summer night I lay in bed with the window open, savoring the distinctive whistle of an AC-powered freight heading up or down the Peninsula. Cab-forwards became regular power on the freights bound for Tracy by way of Altamont Pass.

Finally, in 1953 I became old enough to go firing. The Coast Division was still almost entirely steam, and firing promised high adventure. My first student road trip was the regular night extra for Watsonville Junction, called for 10:30 p.m. from Bayshore, SP's big yard just south of San Francisco.

I met my engineer, Denny Allison, at the roundhouse. With an "OK, kid, let's go; we've got a Malley tonight," we headed off for the ready track. (A note here: In the years I worked for the SP, I never heard the terms *cab-forward*, *cab-ahead*, or *cab-in-front* used by enginemen. We called them Malleys or by their number series—4100's or 4200's. Although SP's 2-6-6-2 and 2-8-8-2 cab-forwards of the 1910's were compound Mallets, these were retired or rebuilt as simple articulateds, and the 4-8-8-2 cab-forwards of 1928-44 were simple; nevertheless, the nickname Malley stuck to the end.)

There's a magic about a roundhouse alive with steam at night. The flicker of a firebox illuminating the darkness, black looming shapes quietly hissing steam, the pounding of air pumps breaking the stillness. And, there, huge in the inky night, stood our power, AC-

10 No. 4243, its twin air pumps sounding that whistling *phew-phew* distinctive to all the AC's.

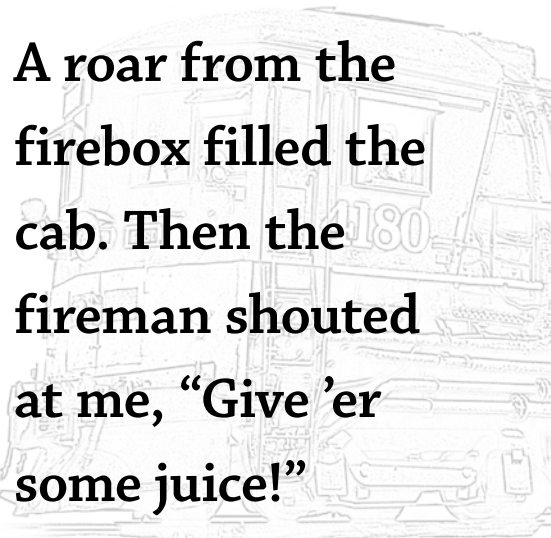
There seemed to be a bewildering amount to learn, but I couldn't have had a better teacher. Allison and his regular fireman were patient to a fault. As they showed me around, I tried to memorize everything they were telling me, knowing I'd be on my own soon enough.

We climbed to the cab and put our lunch and overnight bags in the seat-boxes. With the head brakeman occupying the extra seat by the front windows, I'd be riding on the sandbox tonight. (All oil-fired engines carried a supply of sand in the cab to be tossed into the firebox periodically in order to clear the flues of oil residue.)

I noticed the fireman place his pint whiskey bottle full of coffee on the steam manifold to keep it hot. (Note to self: Obtain an empty whiskey bottle to carry coffee.) His preparations for the run continued: Set the firing pin to the spot-fire position on the firing valve. Drain the water glass and test the gauge cocks. Open the firebox door, kneel down and peer through the flames to check for leaking staybolts and soft plugs. Turn the tank heater on. Walk back and climb onto the deck behind the smokebox to check the lubricators on the air pumps and the feedwater pump. Climb up onto the tender, open the valve releasing air pressure from the oil tank (thus avoiding a faceful of bunker C), check the measuring rod for fuel, and don't forget to close the valve to repressurize the tank. (Later that year I had an embarrassing experience forgetting to close that valve, resulting in no fire and a precarious trek along the running board at speed to close the valve.) Check the water level, supply of water treatment chemicals, and the electric marker lights. Light a white kerosene lantern and hang it from the hook on the rear of the tender.

Back in the cab, we hosed down the deck with the steam hose, then checked that the water pump and injector were working. We were running as Extra 4243 East tonight, so the fireman told me to insert the proper numbers in the drop-down indicator boxes and turn the classification lights to white. Lastly, give the engine a good blow-down to drain sediment from the boiler.

We soon left the ready track, picked up the head brakeman, and backed down to our train, a short 35 cars tonight, but we'd get more at San Jose. My first impression as we moved past Visitation tower, picked up our orders, and pulled out onto the main, was how out-in-front the cab of an AC was. Visi-



**A roar from the firebox filled the cab. Then the fireman shouted at me, "Give 'er some juice!"**

bility was much greater than on any of today's diesels because there was *nothing* in front of the windows, just a straight drop to the tracks.

We made an uneventful trip down the Peninsula to San Jose Yard, took water (and pie at the popular beanery), filled out our train, and headed for Watsonville Junction as Second 938. One other impression from that first trip was just how big and robust these engines were. When I got a chance to take over the firing, we were just passing through the spring switch at Coyote and starting up Morgan Hill. Denny Allison stood up and shoved the throttle toward the backhead (shorter engineers often handled the throttle standing up and facing backward because they could get more leverage than from a seated position). A roar from the firebox filled the cab. The fireman shouted at me, "Give 'er some juice!" Relying on my limited experience on switch engines, I timidly opened the firing valve, whereupon clouds of gas belched from the firebox as the fire became starved for oil. The fireman reached over and yanked the valve halfway across the quadrant, saying, "No, like this!" Next I opened the feedwater valve, increased the atomizer, and turned off the blower.

With the increased draft through the firebox, it was time to sand the flues. Because the regular fireman and I were busy trying to keep the steam and water up, the head brakeman shoveled a few scoopfuls of sand through the firedoor peephole. Looking back along the boiler, I could see clouds of black smoke rolling across adjacent Highway 101.

## Lesson at Tunnel 6

After that first trip, I got to fire four more cab-forwards—Nos. 4196, 4287, 4211, and 4253—on my four days of student trips to the end of the division at Santa Barbara and back. Among my

**South of Guadalupe, Calif., on the Coast Line, "Malley" 4229 climbs Casamilla Hill in 1947. Shortly the train will be on the bluffs above the Pacific Ocean, beginning 100 miles of seaside running toward Los Angeles.**



memories of that student week, Tunnel 6 stands out. The *raison d'être* for the cab-forward was, of course, to keep the crew ahead of the smoke in the tunnels and snowsheds of the Sierras. That works well in theory, but it's a moot point when you're on the third and rear-most engine of a hundred-car train slogging upgrade at less than 10 mph.

I was making one of my student trips on the 4211, on this occasion the second helper on a heavy eastbound drag climbing from Santa Margarita to the top of Cuesta Grade on the Coast Division. As we coupled on ahead of the caboose, the

regular fireman handed me a strange-looking sheet-metal cone with a hose protruding from it. "Here," he said, "You'll need this for Tunnel 6." As instructed, I soaked cotton waste in water from the drinking cooler, stuffed it into the cone, and plugged the hose into an outlet from the engine's air reservoir.

Enginemen are inveterate storytellers, especially when it comes to razzing a new fireman. As we started out of the siding at Santa Margarita, the fireman felt the need to relate in gruesome detail the November 19, 1941, tragedy of Chatsworth Tunnel on the Los Angeles

**AC-10 No. 4210 leans against an eastbound freight climbing Donner Pass at Andover, Calif. By the time of this September 1954 photo, diesels had taken over as road power on The Hill, but AC's still worked as helpers.**

Division. On that day, Extra 4193 West (a Malley) was working uphill through the 7,369-foot tunnel with a 96-car train. The engine stalled. Then, while trying to start, the train broke in two, setting the brakes in emergency. In the dense smoke and heat, the inexperienced fireman panicked, opened the firing valve, spilling hot oil on the track,



David G. Edwards

which caught fire. The fire incinerated the two enginemen, the head brakeman, and 12 cars of cattle. Just the story to tell a green fireman heading into Tunnel 6 for the first time!

Our Malley was working hard all the way upgrade. We plunged into the 3,610-foot tunnel and were immediately engulfed in hot steam and smoke from the two engines ahead of us. Even with all the cab lights on, I could barely see the engineer. The sound of our exhaust bouncing off the tunnel ceiling was so deafening I couldn't hear the fireman as he shouted in my ear. Breathing cooler

air from the respirator helped some, but not knowing how long we'd be in the tunnel was a terrifying experience I shall never forget.

### AC pluses and minuses

I had the good fortune to fire many more cab-forwards during the next three years. With a four-wheel front truck right under the cab, they rode smoothly at the lower speeds of most drag freights. They would get up and move when called upon, but the ride became considerably worse. On the long downgrade from Gilroy to Coyote, for example, we'd often reach 50 mph or so, but the ride got so rough you could hardly read the gauges for the bouncing.

The Malleys fired differently from rear-cab engines. The fireman's controls and gauges were located on the right-hand side of his position in an AC. At first, it seemed strange to fire sitting sideways with my back to the window, but it was much easier to keep an eye on the water glass and steam pressure and to look rearward to the light at the stack to check smoke density. You couldn't see the engineer (and thus change your firing settings in response to changes in throttle or reverse). Helpful hoppers would shout across the cab when they were about to make a move.

The forward windows provided terrific visibility, but that cab was no place to be if you had a grade-crossing accident. Another advantage was the quick access the head brakeman had to drop off and throw a siding switch.

However, having the cab in front was a distinct disadvantage when backing up, since the distance between the crew and the rear coupler was much greater than on a conventional engine. On one occasion, Roseville gave us the 4215 for what amounted to a local freight to Gerber via Davis on the West Valley Subdivision. I spent most of the day listening to the engineer's curses wrestling the big engine into spurs and sidings as we dropped off and picked up cars at stops all the way up the valley.

None of the roundhouses on the Coast Division had a turntable long enough to turn a cab-forward. As hostlers, we turned them on the wyes at San Luis Obispo, Watsonville Junction, San Jose, and Mission Bay. On arrival at Bayshore, the hostler ran the engine the 5 miles up to Mission Bay, turned on the wye around Potrero Tower, and returned to Bayshore. Turning an AC meant at least one leg backing up with some 120 feet of engine and tender obscuring your view. Fortunately, I never had any accidents, but others occasion-

## In the tunnel, we were immediately engulfed in hot steam and smoke from the engines ahead of us.

ally ran through closed switches.

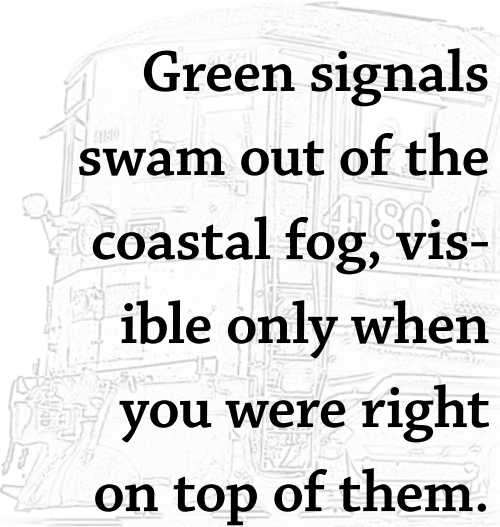
One of the distinct benefits for a brand-new railfan-fireman was that I had absolutely no seniority. All I could hold was the extra board and as the agricultural business (mainstay of the Coast Division) fluctuated with the various harvests, I found myself laid off more than once. Other divisions were hiring and I was loaned out at various times to the Sacramento, Western, and Rio Grande divisions.

On the Sacramento Division, it meant the last chance to fire steam on legendary Donner Pass—The Hill. Four-unit F7's had already bumped the cab-forwards as road power between Roseville and Sparks, Nev., but the helpers were still nearly all AC's.

### Helping on The Hill

The cab-forwards were versatile locomotives, handling passenger, fast freight, and drags with equal ability, but they really came into their own as helpers over the Sierras. Their tremendous power came to the fore slogging upgrade at full throttle, sometimes at 10 mph or less.

The long, slow grind from Roseville up to Norden (only 85 miles) typically took eight or more hours including two water stops. Rear helpers were usually spaced 4 cars ahead of the caboos and another 11 cars ahead of that. Water plugs at Colfax, Gold Run, and Emigrant Gap were spaced so both helpers could take water at the same time. Typically, the rearmost helper was cut off first, then drifted back (with its four cars and caboos attached) to the downhill water plug. Next, the forward helper was cut off (with its cut of cars) and backed up to the upper plug. Those big tenders held 22,000 gallons and took as long as 15 minutes to fill. When both engines had satisfied their thirst, the moves were reversed and the train cou-



# Green signals swam out of the coastal fog, visible only when you were right on top of them.

pled up again. As with any helper operation, the rearmost AC began to start the train first, followed by the forward helper, and lastly by the road engine.

Uncoupling and turning the helpers in the Norden snowsheds was a rather complicated maneuver. The rearmost helper was cut off first, backed up to spot the caboose and attached cars, then backed through a crossover onto the covered turntable. Next, the forward helper shoved its cars back against the caboose, backed through the crossover, ran around the caboose, then shoved the rear 15 cars forward to a joint with the rest of the train. It then returned up the siding and backed onto the turntable. After turning, both engines took water, coupled up, and were off to Roseville on the westbound main.

**San Francisco-bound freight 401 ascends Altamont Pass thanks to the efforts of 1928-vintage AC-4 No. 4102, one of the early “flat-front” 4-8-8-2’s, on September 9, 1952.**

The ride back to town was a piece of cake, especially if you were on the second helper. Nothing to do but set a spot fire, watch the water level, and relax. On one such Friday night trip downhill on the 4227, we stopped to pick up a section gang headed for town for the weekend. Ten or 12 of them crowded into the cab sitting on the deck and sandbox—a little crowded, but glad for the ride.

Keeping sufficient water in the boiler was always *the* prime consideration in firing a steam locomotive. Vivid photos of boiler explosions posted by the company on the walls of crew rooms were a constant reminder of what could happen if a fireman let the water get too low.

Cab-forwards carried their water just the opposite of a conventional engine. Working uphill, water ran to the smokebox end of the engine—that is, away from the firebox crown sheet. For this reason, the AC’s were banned from at least one line—over the Siskiyou Mountains between Ashland, Ore., and Black Butte, Calif.—because the grades were too steep to keep sufficient water over the crown sheet. Going downhill, the opposite was true. Water ran toward the front end and you carried water high in the glass, often nearly full.

## Fog along the coast

The trickiest stretch of track on the Coast Division was the Guadalupe Subdivision, between San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara. The subdivision had a roller-coaster profile, always climbing or descending. To compound the problem, the line ran close to the ocean and was often blanketed in fog. For a fireman, it was frequently difficult to know exactly where you were and whether you were heading uphill or down.

One of my first trips over this stretch was firing the “Smoky,” a peddler freight that picked up and set out all along the line. The engine was the 4293 and we were running as First 916, called for 8 p.m. on a slow job that would take most of the night. Predictably, we encountered thick fog after picking up a string of reefers at Guadalupe. Visibility was cut to a few dozen yards. Green signals swam out of the fog, visible only when you were right on top of them. Soon I had no clue where we were and told the engineer. “That’s OK, son,” he replied. “I’ll help you watch your water and tell you where it should be.”

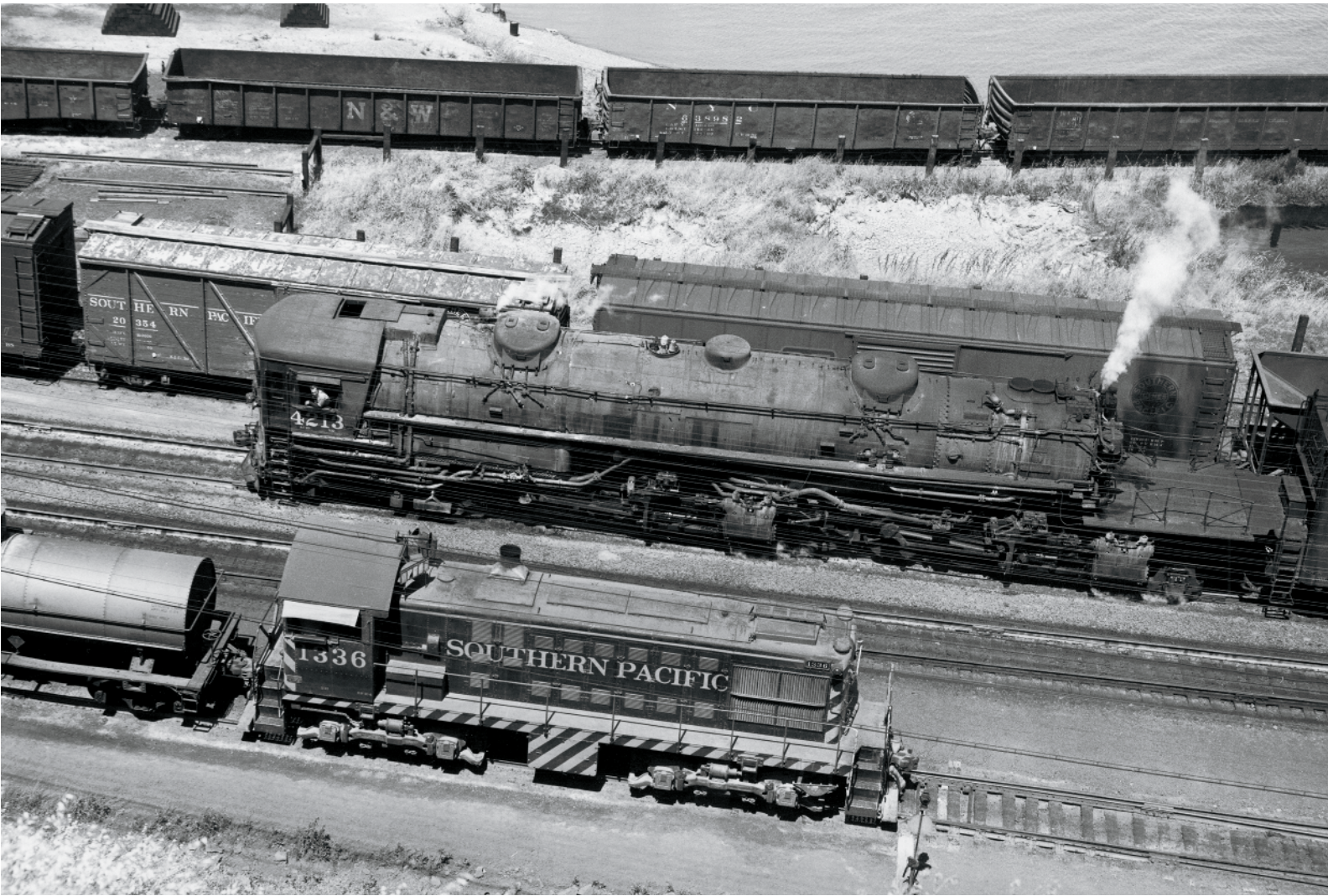
We spent a lot of time in the hole that trip, getting out of the way of a string of first-class westbounds: train 373, the hotshot *Coast Merchandise*; 95, the *Starlight*; and 75, the *Lark*. Sitting in a lonely siding with the headlight turned off, it was black out there beyond the flickering of the firebox on the tracks. All was quiet but for the whistling sounds of the air pumps. Suddenly, the signal ahead turned red, and out of the cottony fog the flashing Mars light of a *Daylight*-type 4-8-4 emerged, gave a couple of toots of his air horn to acknowledge our green signals, and slammed by with a lighted string of cars, then vanished into the fog. For me, that exemplified the romance of railroading.

By the end of 1955 the diesel invasion was in full swing and, except for the San Francisco commutes, most steam had disappeared from the main line. My last trip on a cab-forward was on the 4199 with train 403, from Tracy over Altamont Pass to Bayshore, an unremarkable five-hour trip. Had I known it to be the last, it would have been a sad farewell to a unique experience.



John C. Illman

# Cab-forward as classroom



Richard Steinheimer

A handful of student trips at the end of the AC era gave a young man lessons and memories for a lifetime

By Dan Ranger

I started my railroad career on Monday, June 18, 1956, when I signed on to become a locomotive fireman on SP's Western Division in West Oakland, Calif. I had turned 18 on June 13 and graduated from high school on the 16th. These were the two prerequisites to qualify for being hired. I passed the physical, the initial book of rules test, and was put on the student fireman's list.

My first mainline run as a student was the "Vegetables" from Oakland to Roseville, 109 miles. Our engine was AC-7 No. 4172. The fireman was a very good instructor, and I got to fire about

**At Port Costa, Calif., along the Carquinez Strait, the fireman of westbound Malley 4213 appears to be exchanging words with his counterpart on Alco S2 switcher 1336. It's June '56—the AC's have just months to live.**

half the trip; we had 99 reefers, and the 4172 fired well. On the layover at Roseville, I wandered around the two roundhouses (one pretty much for the cab-heads, the other for everything else). I recall sitting near the outbound track, watching power getting placed there from the house. There was the smell of Nalco feedwater treatment chemicals,





creosote, fuel oil, sulfur, and steam. For this 18-year-old, it was heaven.

Late in the afternoon, I got called to go back to Oakland on the 4271 with a general freight train of about 60 or 80 cars. The hogger was G. H. "Georgie" New, an "old head" with a 1941 seniority date as an engineer. The trip went pretty well until we stopped for water at Davis. The fireman went back to the tender, leaving me in charge of things. When he returned to the cab he bawled, "Good God, I put it in and he runs it out on the ground!" I had forgotten to close the overflow valve and there was a "lake" under the fireman's side of the cab. From that point on, about every 5 miles George would put his cab light on and check on things, glowering at me.

Things went pretty well until we got to Port Costa for a set out and a fill. We cut off and pulled down in the clear to let the yard goat remove and add cars. Once he was done, we backed up, took water, then recoupled to the train. As we waited for air pressure to come up

in the brake line, George told me, "I want a full glass of water."

"Are you sure?" I hazarded.

"Yes, I'm sure," George bristled.

I thought, *OK, if that's what you want, that's what you'll get, but I don't think this is a good idea.* We were on a super-elevated curve to the right, so I was on the high side. But I did as I was told.

With the train draped around two curves, we took slack, then started forward, with sanders on. About the time the 4271 "got into it," she started working water. It was a sight: Great plumes of steam and water gushed from her stack into the night. We stalled, took slack, started forward, and the same thing happened. George looked at the fireman and me; "Blow her down!" he said. After blowing off the excess water, we tried again. This time the big engine walked the tonnage out of Port Costa.

We got into West Oakland and tied up. A pickup truck came to take us to the crew room. The head brakeman took the front seat and George and I got

in the bed. The time of reckoning was at hand: the signing off on my student fireman's report. George said, "Here, hold the flashlight." He dug the paperwork out of his grip and took out his ballpoint pen. In the part of the form labeled "Remarks," he marked "Good." I almost fell over. After all the problems, I expected a negative comment.

"Mr. New, why 'Good' in the remarks?" I asked.

"Dan, that thing at Davis anyone could have done. At Port Costa, it was my bull. I did not take in account where we were. You did exactly as you were told—can't fault you for that. Overall you did a good job."

If there was anything you could say for Georgie New, he was fair.

### **Bad one trip, good the next**

My next cab-ahead student trip was Oakland-Santa Clara on a 90-car empty reefer train with AC-10 4209 in the early afternoon. Since the route was mostly level, I figured this for a walk in the



Two photos: Ward Kimball

**Veteran hogger Bascom Farrow (left, subject of a photo essay in October 1948 TRAINS) grips the throttle of AC-11 4246 on train 60, the *West Coast*. Across the cab, fireman Robert Taylor calls a green signal: “Clear!”**

park, but 4209 would not cooperate. I could not keep her hot to save my life! Neither the fireman nor I could figure out what the heck was going on. We staggered into the Santa Clara yard, glad to be rid of the poor-steaming beast.

At about midnight I got called for a freight from Santa Clara east to Tracy via Niles Canyon and Altamont Pass. In the crew room I discovered the power was that no-good 4209! “Oh, great,” I thought. “She was a pig on the flatland, now I get her on the grades.”

We boarded the engine, coupled onto the train, got the air, and left. The hogger—not the same one I had before with the 4209—told the fireman and me the train was “over tonnage” for an AC-10 but that we had a 4-8-4 on the rear to help.

Up to Newark we went, through Centerville to Niles Junction. To my surprise, the 4209 was behaving much better, but now came the test: Niles Canyon and Indian Hill. As we left Niles the hoghead said, “Boys, I hope you’re on top of it because that [expletive] on the rear end isn’t doing anything. We got it all!”

We made Indian Hill in good shape, with steam pressure just below the pops. We took water at Livermore, then set out for Altamont Pass. Again, no problems. At the crest we stopped and cut off the helper, then rolled down the east side of the pass. Daybreak came as we neared Tracy.

About a week later I was back in Santa Clara. I hunted up the roundhouse foreman, the same one on duty the night of the 4209 adventure. Wondering how they were able to turn that pig we had out of Oakland into the good puller that got us over Altamont Pass, I asked him what he had done to the 4209. He told me they “serviced it.”

“That’s all?” I asked.

“Yep.”

I explained what had happened from Oakland and then to Tracy. He said, “Son, did you have the same engineer both trips?”

“No.”

“What does that tell you?”

There were guys who could run Malleys and guys who could not. Those who tried to run them “by ear” failed. One had to pay attention to the back-pressure gauge and be governed by it. A lesson to be learned.

## Sidesaddle Malleys

The AC’s were interesting beasts. The fireman rode them “sidesaddle,” sitting on the seatbox with his back to the window. You did not watch the fireman’s water glass, you watched the engineer’s on the other side of the cab. To watch the fireman’s glass would have given you a permanent crick in your neck.

These engines were built for mountain service. As such they were counterbalanced for 25–35 mph. When Donner Pass was dieselized, the AC’s got bumped to the “flatlands” of the Western, Sacramento, San Joaquin, and Coast divisions. There they got to run, sometimes up to 50 or 55 mph. They did not like this, and expressed their displeasure by riding rough. The journal boxes on the lead truck, under the cab, bounced up and down at an alarming rate. The nee-

**From that point on, every few miles George would turn his cab light on and check things, glowering at me.**

dles on the gauges were a blur.

Most of the Malleys were pretty good stoves. When you got the engine out of the house and on the train, it was a trick to guess when the herder would give you the highball to leave. You never let that happen without having the old girl really hot and ready—if she wasn’t, leaving town was pure hell. So you got the water up, with a roaring fire and steam on the rise, hoping you had things right when you got to go. It was a trick. In fact, it was a trick with any engine leaving the initial terminal. An old-head fireman told me on one of my student trips, “Son, you can always look good coming into town. The trick is to look good leaving.”

After my student trips, I had no more encounters with the AC’s, though I fired many smaller engines in yard and local freight service. In December 1956 I was firing for an old head, Tom Barry, in Port Costa. It was a midnight job and I went out to get our Alco diesel switcher ready. Tom came out and asked, “Dan, did you read the bulletins?”

I sheepishly replied that I had not that night. Tom said, “Here, read this one.” It went something like this: “As of December 31, 1956, all AC class locomotives will be withdrawn from service.”

Tom said, “Son, that’s the end of it. The 4400’s and 4300’s will be next, and I think by spring steam will be gone forever.” He was pretty well right. There were a very few occasions when an odd steam engine was put in service in 1957. But the AC’s lay quiet until late November, when the 4274 took a railfan excursion from Sacramento to Sparks and back—the last cab-forward trips ever [Winter 2007 CLASSIC TRAINS].

I’ll always treasure those student trips on SP’s legendary cab-forwards.

### More on our Web site

For a roster, specifications, and more on SP’s cab-forwards, go to [ClassicTrainsMag.com](http://ClassicTrainsMag.com)

# My ‘love-hate relationship’ with cab-forwards

Triumphs and tribulations on a unique breed of locomotive

By Bob Freese

I hired out in spring 1951 as a fireman on SP’s Coast Division. I spent the first month as a student fireman, starting out on switch engines in the Mission Bay and Bayshore yards. The training consisted of three daytime tricks, three evenings, and three midnights, mostly on 0-6-0 switchers at Mission Bay and 2-8-0’s at Bayshore.

My first road trip was on the 2:30 a.m. freight to Watsonville Junction with a 4-8-2. After my rest, I caught an evening freight down to San Luis Obispo. From there I made two round trips to Santa Barbara, and another trip back up to Watsonville Junction. My final training trip was on a freight back to San Francisco, where I then took the rules exam and was able to mark up on the extra board. I “made my date” on a midnight switcher at Mission Bay. Most of my jobs were on these boring switch engines, but I did get an occasional mainline job on a 4-8-2 or a 2-10-2 until I was laid off in November. I was called

back without notice in May 1952 for the 2:30 a.m. freight and, to my delight, the engine was No. 4199—my first cab-forward. Thus started my “love-hate” relationship with these unique and sometimes difficult engines.

We left Bayshore with seven cars, bound for San Jose where the rest of our train was waiting for us. The engineer was a newly promoted man, very friendly, and I immediately liked him. We got the highball from the herder and started our run. I had a half glass of water and almost 250 PSI on the steam gauge. But before we reached the main line, the pressure began dropping and the water was also getting low. Thinking that the flues were coated, I asked the hogger if I could sand the flues and he agreed. He dropped the reverse lever in the corner and opened the throttle most of the way, but the pressure and water level continued to drop. So he closed the throttle and came over to my side as we coasted.

He told me to sit in the engineer’s seat and blow the horn at the road crossings. He continued to fuss with the fireman’s controls, but we kept losing steam pressure and water level. Next he opened the door and windows on the fireman’s side, then came over and did the same on the right side. Next he told me he was going to do something to fix the problem and to follow his orders. At his command, I was to open the throttle and drop the reverse lever all the way. As I did this, he *put out* the fire and opened the firebox door. After a few seconds there was a loud *whoosh* from the rear of the locomotive and I looked out the window to see the sky filled with debris and black smoke. Within seconds he re-lit the fire, and in a few minutes

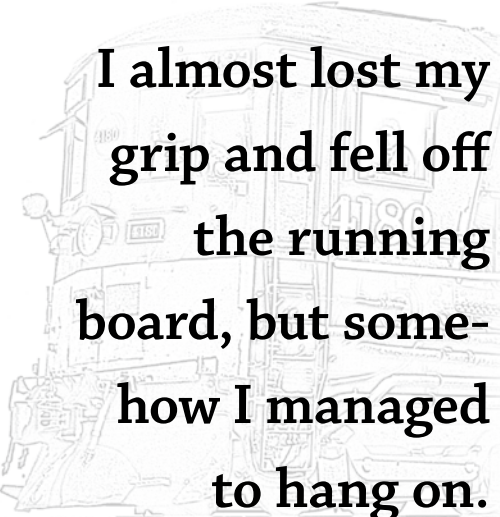
we had a full head of steam and half a glass of water.

The hogger later explained to me that apparently the screen at the end of the boiler was blocked. When we arrived in Watsonville Junction he asked me not to tell anyone what he had done, because it might have damaged some flues. We never heard anything about the flues, but there was a small article in the *Redwood City Tribune* about a lady who had hung out her laundry the night before our trip, and when she got up in the morning she was shocked to see that it was covered with soot and the backyard was also a mess.

## Watch that whistle!

Another cab-forward adventure happened with one of my favorite engineers, an old-timer known as “Sanitary Jake.” I had fired for him several times, and every trip was a pleasure—except this one. We had deadheaded to San Jose, picked up our engine on the ready track, and coupled to our train. Although we had a newer AC, Jake had to work the engine rather hard to keep us moving at a good pace.

As we were approaching Gilroy, Jake came over and asked me to go back to the tender and check our water level. He’d heard that this engine was very hard on water, and he would stop at Gilroy if he felt we couldn’t make it to the next water plug. Now, the later model AC’s were equipped with a gauge in the cab, not unlike a gas gauge in a car, that would show the water level in the tender. However, like many auxiliary items on steam engines in the 1950’s, it didn’t work—in fact, I don’t recall ever seeing one that did. So we had to check the water by sight, which meant looking into



I almost lost my grip and fell off the running board, but somehow I managed to hang on.

the tender and hoping to get a reliable estimate of how much water was left.

Doing this on a cab-forward required the fireman to climb out of the cab and onto the running board, make his way down the length of the boiler to the rear deck, climb up the ladder to the top of the tender, open one of the hatches, and check the level—all while the engine was moving. I had never been asked to do this before, but I liked and respected Jake, so I told him I would.

I eased myself out the cab door and started down the boiler. As I neared the end of the boiler, we were approaching a grade crossing. For some reason, instead of using the front air-horn valve as was customary for crossing warnings, Jake accidentally squeezed the valve for the steam whistle—which was about 2 feet from my head. There was a long, *loud* blast. I almost lost my grip and fell off, but somehow I hung on and was able to complete my task.

Upon my return to the cab, Jake was beside himself with apologies, but I was OK and told him I wasn't mad, just momentarily scared to death. Good man that he was, Jake bought my supper that night.

## Fed up on the 4133

One morning, I was on engine 4133, one of the earlier "flat-front" AC's, heading north out of Watsonville Junction. My engineer was an all-business, somewhat unfriendly guy who obviously didn't trust young firemen, so when I worked with him I kept my mouth shut and minded my business. I had no problems—until this trip, when our relationship went downhill in a hurry.

We left Watsonville Junction with 68 cars of rock, a very heavy train. Before we even got out of the yard I started losing pressure and water level. When the hogger saw I was having problems he stopped the train and said nothing, but the look on his face spoke volumes. I worked to get the steam and water up to normal for a few minutes and then we started moving again, only to die within a few carlengths. This happened again before we finally got on the main line, but then I had a chance to sand the flues and hopefully correct the problem. The hogger opened the throttle and dropped the reverse lever down, but it became obvious that sanding was not going to help and we died again.

This went on for almost 25 miles and about 3 hours before the hogger said he was fed up with me and told the head brakeman to line the switch for the middle siding at Gilroy so he could go to beans. But he wasn't the only one fed up. During all of my struggles, he had

not offered one word of help or support, just mumbling under his breath and giving me those nasty looks. I had had it with him and that engine, so I did something I never thought I would do. As we left the engine and headed for the restaurant, I grabbed my grip and walked right past him and directly to Highway 101 and started hitchhike.

"What are you doing?" he yelled.

"I've had it with you and that engine," I answered. "I quit!"

The conductor came walking up from the caboose and asked the hogger what was going on. He told the hogger that he had come down yesterday with that same engine and that they had had the same problems I was having and that the fireman on that trip was a promoted engineer and that he had strug-

**Views from the front: Two photos from AC-7 4175 working train 5-935 on May 21, 1955, show what a cab-forward fireman saw. The view ahead (top, coming into Gilroy, Calif.) was second to none, but it was a *long* way down the running board to the tender (above)!**

gled the same way I had. When that crew reached Watsonville, they reported the problems to the roundhouse and suggested they inspect and repair the engine before sending it out again. So much for maintenance in the mid-'50's.

The hogger never apologized to me, just told me what the conductor had told him and that ended the conversation. I finished the trip, struggling all the way, and the hogger still never even looked at me. Fortunately, I never had to fire for him again. ■



Two photos: Benny A. Romano