

From: XXXXX
To: XXXXXX
Subject: Re: Railstar Out
Date: Sat, 10 Feb 2007 20:06:44 -0700

XXXX,

I am glad to hear from you. I guess my post on the NGDF came across as a little more pro Railstar than it was intended. I was actually sad when the CHS confirmed that there was no truth to the rumor. Anyway, I was hoping to stir the pot and see what other information might come out. Sometimes I am just not smart enough to stay away from the public pissing matches! Perhaps someday I will learn.

The information about Ron Trottier stiffing the landlord in Georgetown is interesting. Given everything else that is going on as well as Railstar's past (Belfast & Moosehead Lake in Maine), it certainly could lead one to see a pattern of questionable behavior.

From what I have been told (from CHS and Steve Butler) the current state of the work on #9 came as a surprise to all involved. Apparently, any work done "in house", that is by Railstar, does not need to be put out for bid. So, Railstar can choose whoever they want as an outside contractor and pay them to do the work. The CHS is of course paying all of the bills, Railstar is supposed to submit their expenses and then the CHS will reimburse them. For projects contracted directly with the CHS, anything over \$25,000 is supposed to be put out to bid.

The story I have been told on the #9 fiasco goes something like this; By the end of the 2006 season #9 was pretty much dead as a doornail (more on how it came to be that way later) and everyone involved new that it would need major work to be ready for the 2007 season. In September Ron Trottier had Steve Butler prepare a list of work items for both #9 & #12 as well as a cost estimate for the work. I did the same for the cars. A meeting was then held with Ron and other Railstar staff where Steve & I presented the work lists and cost estimates. Ron looked them over and briefly tried to cut the costs a little and then another meeting, with the CHS was scheduled. At the meeting with the CHS, Steve Butler's locomotive work list was discussed and I gave everyone present a list of the work that the cars needed. Ron then discussed the financial implications of the work privately with the CHS.

Later, we (Railstar employees) were told that the CHS had approved all of the expenditures, the work would be done and that there would be a full time shop crew over the winter. After the end of the season, I was

told by Ron to submit a proposal for some of the car work directly to the CHS but that all of the locomotive work would be done in house by Railstar over the winter.

As far as I know, Railstar shut down completely by mid November, all employees were taken off of the payroll and the shop was "winterized" i.e., water shut off, heat shut off and everything crammed inside. A few weeks later Steve Butler started doing some work on #9, though no Railstar employees were involved. When I saw Steve in December, he indicated that things were going well and he would have #9 done by May though no work was planned on #12 or #9's actual tender (decisions apparently made by Railstar). The CHS for their part was under the impression that the funding they had approved would cover both locomotives and that a full time shop crew was at work on both of them.

CHS was quite upset to hear that less than nothing was going on in Silver Plume and worried that "they were going to do it to us again" (meaning Railstar was going to leave all of the work until the last minute and start the 2007 season with ill prepared equipment)

Next thing that I heard was the CHS saying that the work had to be put out to bid because Railstar had "kept the CHS out of the loop" and "had just sprung a major problem on them(the CHS)". The "major problem" was that Ron Trottier told the CHS that all of the winter work could be accomplished for a figure that was around 1/3 the amount that Steve Butler had estimated it would take to finish #9, once that money was gone Ron through up his hands and basically said he did not have the money to finish work on #9, so it was up to the CHS. Thus, the work had to be put out to bid under state law. The delay caused by the bid process seems to have ensured that #9 will not get done in time for the 2007 season.

Why exactly Ron Trottier and Railstar chose to embark on this course of action is above and beyond me, I can't see what the hell good having one locomotive part done, one in pieces with no work started and no work planned for the cars does anyone. What was to be gained by giving the CHS a bogus figure for the cost of the work? All of the management personnel at Railstar seem to be under the opinion that the Loop and its equipment will magically heal itself over the winter, with no outside input.

Looking back, I have come to see that Railstar has brought very little to the table for the Loop's operations. Despite much talk of new cars and locomotives in 2004 and 2005, everything currently up at the Loop has been found, paid for and made ready for service by the CHS. To my knowledge Railstar has not invested any money in the operation.

As for poor little #9, what ever Marlin did or did not do was exacerbated by the piss poor maintenance and operating procedures put forth by Railstar's Operations Manager. It was put into service well before it was broken in and all of its issues resolved. Once #12 broke its axle, any pretense of trying to break #9 in and get it running right was thrown out the window. #9 would spit grease fittings off its side rods and they would not be replaced for weeks (until the next time Steve Butler was coming to town), It ran for quite awhile with no lubrication to the tops of the crossheads, piston or Valve rods (drip oilers that were supposed to be put on before it ran again were not installed for weeks). As may be expected, the crosshead shoes wore to the point that they have a distinct up and down motion to go with the back and forth and the piston rings suffered horribly. The first set of rings lasted most of the season, the second lasted less than two weeks.

On the last day of the season, #9 was so bad that it would hardly get up the hill, so much steam was escaping past the worn out rings that the train would just barley move and we had to stop 4 times to build up water and steam. I refused to run the poor thing down the hill again as I felt it was unsafe. Once Railstar management returned to Silver Plume (a good 20 minutes after I parked the locomotive) I was replaced as engineer by Steve Flemmer who took the train for the last two trips.

#9's injectors were a royal pain in the ass and rarely worked well. The operations manager pushed fireman to keep going even though the injectors were not working and the water level was low. He felt it was "embarrassing" to have to stop and add water on the trip up the hill and having to do so was not the mark of a professional railroader. Apparently in his book, scorched crown sheets and boiler explosions are not embarrassing and are a great way to showcase one's professionalism. Seems to me that just fixing the #9 injectors would be a wise course of action, but then if Steve Butler was not there, there was no one on staff who knew how to repair them.

Morning hostling was also interesting, on more than one occasion I witnessed the operations manager get a late start on the process and run #9 from 100 psi to 180 psi in less than 15 minutes. Certainly seems to go against the procedure outlined in GLRR Inc.'s rulebook, but as Railstar has no rulebook or operating procedures, I guess it technically was not a violation. I am sure that #9 felt violated however.

Other factors that may or may not have played a role in #9's demise include Mr. Flemmer's practice of dumping between 5 and 10 gallons of sand into the firebox per day (I have witnessed him go through an

entire 5 gallon bucket in one run) and his other fun and games of leaving the locomotive unattended with both injectors running (end result an overfull boiler and the pressure dropped to 110 or 120) followed by a never ending series of blowdowns and a super hot fire to try and rectify the situation (both #9 and 12 received this treatment multiple times, just that I saw).

His favorite stunt was reserved just for #9 and consisted of shutting off the locomotive's fire so that he could blow steam back into the oil tank.(don't ask me what he thought he was accomplishing) This was usually done at the bottom of the hill while the engineer was oiling around, just gotta love the thought of the single stage compressor going crazy trying to pump up the train, sucking all of that cold air through the hot flues with no fire going! (#9's compressor exhaust is still in the smokebox, under the stack like most coal burners, it routinely would suck out a spot fire as well).

Despite complaints from every member of the staff about Mr. Flemmer's stupidity, nothing was done to deter him from these practices, in fact anyone who dared to point them out found their employment threatened.

All of that said, #9 is a good locomotive and has a lot of potential, if the operator would take the time to fine tune it and learn its quirks before expecting it to pull its maximum tonnage five times a day over a very challenging railroad. I enjoyed having the chance to run it and am sorry that I will not get to do so again.

Track maintenance over the past two seasons has been minimal and only done in response to derailments. Training was non existent, our rules class last year consisted of going over a 1920's Pullman document concerning customer service, focused on how to deal with a dead body on the train, that the Operations Manager found on the internet a few minutes before the "class".

The test was one that came from a Florida shortline that the operations manager used to work for and had little or nothing to do with the Loop. Said test was randomly given to some but not all operating employees, with no notice or preparation, starting in August of 2006. Other than that, procedures were verbally mandated by the operations manager and subject to his whim and random reinterpretation. (For example, cars that failed the initial terminal brake test would be sent out for the day with the brakes cut out, I found this out when I asked a conductor what the hell he was doing and he said that the Operations Manager told him to do it and they did it quite a bit. I informed him that was not acceptable and was not to happen when I was running the train. Mr. Flemmer of course saw no problem with this practice when he was the engineer and in fact would order the conductor to cut out the brakes on cars that he though

were dragging. At times the train ended up with 3 of 6 cars having inoperative airbrakes. Operations Manager saw no problem with this and forcibly defended his point of view.).

Anyway, I could go on for hours about how screwed up the Loop is and the scary things that I witnessed. I really hope they do not kill anyone this year, but you can only dodge the odds for so long. Despite many complaints from various employees, Mr. Trottier refused to see what was really going on and staunchly defended his operations manager.

In short, nothing is going to change this year. The CHS has been made aware of the problems by myself and many other employees, as well as most if not all of the outside contractors that have come near the place. (Breckenridge is considering withdrawing 111 from service based on what their people have seen up at the Loop) From what I can gather it seems to be common knowledge amongst the tourist railroad industry that the place is an accident waiting to happen. The CHS seems to feel that there is no way out of the contract with Railstar. I don't know what else to do except tell everyone I know not to go near the place for fear of their life and pray that Railstar beats the odds for another year. Perhaps both locomotives being in pieces come May will be a blessing in disguise.

I understand your attachment to the Loop, I have not been involved with it for near as long as you have and it kills me to see it being run into the ground through stupidity and ignorance. I certainly did not want to see GLRR Inc. go away, but once it became apparent that Mark was going to lose his gamble (as well as all that Lindsey, Dave, you, John and others had built) I decided that the Loop itself was more important than the political battle, like it or not the CHS owns the place and I have never yet seen a tenant come out on top in a pissing match with their landlord. Too bad that time travel is only possible in one direction.

2006 really made me appreciate what a well run operation GLRR Inc. was. You and John Hammond set a very high standard and I feel lucky to have learned how the Loop should be operated from you guys. The fact that a few people (Me, Matt Armitge, Don Cummings, Wayne & Bob) that were trained by GLRR Inc. came back for 2005 and were able to carry on the same theory of operations for at least a little while is probably the only thing that kept the new operation from going straight to hell. Of course none of those people will be back this year.

It is too bad that things have ended up where they are. I like Ron Trottier and think that he had good intentions.

On a more positive note, I am glad to see D&RGW 5305 up and running on its home turf. Let me know if you would like more copies of the Time-Table. How is your stockcar to caboose project coming?