

# Hear Them Whistles Blowing!

The ghost of Casey Jones makes a hero out of one railroader, when lives hang by a shoelace

By RICHARD SALE

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"I Want to Be Like Lefty", etc.

**I**T WAS back in the days before a hog had a dead man's control. There wasn't no control except the man at the throttle. He gave her the steam and he gave her the air, and if he upped and walked away from his seat at the window, there was no dead man's control to stop that red ball.

I was firing for Wallaby Joe Wheeler in those days on the Denver-Frisco run. We rolled the drivers of Number 460 which was a six-coupled Consolidation of the

first water. She was the lady with the sixty-one inch drivers and Walschert gear and on the high iron, she'd pull her heart out, and she didn't need no double-heading when we crossed the Reno hump.

Wallaby Joe, he was a fine engine man. He could break her out without a jerk. Back in the gondolas, even to the swaying crummy, they wouldn't feel a breath. Wallaby would give her the throttle, opening up on the quadrant with the kind of ease which made 460 take a long breath and start rolling. They didn't need draft gear in the couplings of the freight cars we hauled. He pushed her off so nice and quiet, they could have used the old pin and never hurt a train.

But Wallaby was getting on, and his eyes had started to go first, so that he wore glasses all the time now. And after that, my wife said to me that his wife had said to her that Wallaby had had himself a fine stroke one night, and they thought he was dead sure.

"Wallaby," I said one day when we were highballing west of Denver, "you oughta quit. While you still got health, you oughta quit. You get a stroke in that engine and there'll be a pretty mess."

"Look, Al," he said, "it ain't like I was running a line of varnish west. I swing the freight drag and there ain't nobody to kill in a freight drag except the bums on the rods under the reefers, and the conductor in the crummy. I wouldn't feel bad at all about killing any of them."

"Sure," I said, "I can see your point fine. But you got to remember that we always take the siding near Montville on the Reno slide down. There's a string of varnish coming up. It would make a nice thing if we bumped that engine. That's a passenger train. Boy, I'd hate to see her staring us in the face. That's Number 9870, the big mountain job. These two engines would sure make a nice bump."

"Al," said Wallaby, "if anything happened to me, you could always step in here and give her the air. You could give her the air hard. I wouldn't even be mad at you if you slapped a flat on the drivers. Just so's you stopped her. Long as you're here, I'm all right."

"I don't like it," I said. "It was here—about that old Casey Jones came roaring down the mountain them years ago. Boy, I wouldn't want no repeat on the cornfield meet he put on."

"There ain't never gonna be a repeat like that," Wallaby said solemnly. "I'm surprised at you, Al, thinking such a thing. You don't think a hogger like Casey Jones'd stand in the ashes and just watch a bump, do you? Why, hell on a coupler pin, Al, he wouldn't 'low a thing like that."

"Casey Jones is a dead engine man," I said. "He ain't allowing anything. He's dead and gone."

WALLABY shook his head. "Maybe he ain't dropping sand, and pushing pistons or giving her air, but he's a live corpse, Al. He's kind o' fond of this stretch o' iron. He's still around."

"You mean, a ghost?"

"Don't know about ghosts. Don't believe in ghosts. But all I know is what Peke Swanson told me about the night of the flood when he was rolling number 496 across the Rienze Divide with a load o' mail and milk stringing out behind him."

"Peke Swanson said it was raining so hard he couldn't even see his own compound air cylinder out ahead o' him. His domes and his stacks was lost in the fog, and the rain wouldn't let him see his own headlight. He was late and he was turning them over hard. Peke, he knew every inch o' the iron across that divide to Carson City. He couldn't see, but he knew his iron, so he pushed her."

I said, "I never heard tell of Peke Swanson wrecking the mail."

"He didn't wreck her. Here he was coming, down Rieze to the Wallace Trestle. You know where it is there. How you come down the mountain and highball that curve, and then, *bam*, you're rattling on the railbreaks across that trestle and ninety feet o' space under your trucks. Peke, he started down, and he wasn't gonna let up on her for the curve either, she being banked sweetly."

"And all of a sudden, here's this guy in the cab. And he says, 'Hello, Peke,' he says, 'Remember me?' Peke knew him you see, in the old days."

"'Casey Jones!' Peke says. 'In the name of God.'"

"'That's right,' Casey says, 'and you listen here to me, Peke Swanson. You'd better slap the air on this job or you're gonna wind up in the valley. Wallace Trestle washed outa there twenty minutes ago and you're highballing for hell.'"

"And Peke, he slapped the air on and pulled her up at the foot o' the curve, and lord, sure enough, the trestle was gone, and so was Casey Jones."

"Gwan," I said.

"Man and boy, that's a true story," Wallaby said. "Ask Pete Swanson; he'll tell you the whole thing."

"Gwan," I said. "I don't believe it. Peke, he's got an imagination, and he just made that up. He had a hunch the trestle was gone and he stopped her, and he made that Casey Jones stuff up."

"That's sacrilege, Al, that's just what you're saying."

"I don't believe it," I said. "Just hokum."

"That blasphemy," said Wallaby. "Just plain blasphemy."

... So this night, we got the green eye at the Bakerfield siding and we went up the mountain, hauling a string of empties. Number 460 was running sweet. She didn't have a squeak in any of her joints, and under her drivers the clicks came up through the spokes right into our heels. The cinders curled back over our heads, and we could feel the rhythm of the counterbalances, swinging round and round down there above the railhead. Man, she was a sweet engine, that 460, sweet and sure and fast for a freight hog.

"Glistenin' pistons!" Wallaby said in a low voice. "Ain't she a dandy now? She couldn't run no better if Casey Jones was the man at the throttle."

"She couldn't run no sweeter," said I, if'n the good Lord himself was wheeling her tonight."

"Fire her," Wallaby muttered. "Fire her, Al, give me lots o' steam tonight 'cause we're highballing west."

**S**EEMED like no time at all before we reached the divide and started across. Me, I was pulling coal outa the shaking tender, filling that shovel's belly full, when all of a sudden we came to the Rieze Tower SW and I glanced out over the coal as we plummeted by, and I saw the red board staring us in the face.

The red board and the red eye: that meant stop and take the siding, but we didn't stop and we didn't take the siding. Old 460 ripped by, gaining speed all the time as we cleared the hump and started

down the mountains for Reno, the wind whistling like a banshee and the cab rocking back and forth hard as a cradle.

Boy, she was wheeling. She was wheeling so danged fast I knew that cradle might turn into an iron hearse before we got through. I clung to the braces on the end sill of the tender as we hit the curve by the Wallace Trestle. The wheel flanges ground against the rail head and screamed out in pain.

We made it, and I was getting another breath; and when I got it, I shouted, "Wallaby! Wallaby, you gone crazy? Give her the air and pull in her pistons! That was a red board we passed at SW! My golly, look down there—look down the mountain, you can see the mountain hog coming up with her varnish and her passengers! This is a single track, Wallaby, and if'n you don't slap the air on her drivers, there's gonna be a bump!"

Wallaby didn't answer me.

He sat by the window, with his head half out, and he was limp and slumped. I could see he was out; something was wrong. His hand wasn't on the throttle and it wasn't on the brake either. His hands were hanging down at his sides and he was out cold. And I thought, "Al," I thought, "you got to stop this engine, you got to put flats on her tires and sparks on the rails, you got to break out coupler pins and maybe mash a box car or two, but you got to stop her."

And then, when the cab seemed to stop swaying a second, I made a jump across the plate between the frame of the engine and the tender drawbar and I hit the floor and skidded and slammed up against the injector pipes and my foot went in between them hard and hurt like blazes, and I knew I'd busted my ankle.

There I was, caught there. I mighta pulled my foot out from between them pipes, but it was busted and the pain all but blanked me when I tried. I was bushwhacked. I looked up at Wallaby Joe, and he was dead. There was us, Wallaby Joe dead at the controls, and me, Full-head Al, all stuck and busted just outa reach.

When we hit the snake curve, I could peer out past the cab's end frame and down below us on the grade. I could see the lights of Number 9870 and her long haul of Pullmans all wheeling up the hill as only that big old mountain girl can churn 'em. I could see her, and me lying there with a dead man and helpless as a hobo in a runaway hopper.

I tried to reach for the throttle to close her, but the quadrant was too far away. I tried to reach for the brake handle to swing her shut, but it was two feet from the end o' my hand and I couldn't make it. Only thing I could reach was the whistle cord, and I yanked and I yanked, giving out blasts all the way as we rattled and swayed along. You should have heard that whistle blowing! I cursed and strained and reached and cried.

And I knew that there was two locomotives that was gonna bump.

ALL of a sudden, I looked up and there was a guy. I thought it was the brakeman come all the way up from the crummy when he heard the whistle blasting. But he wasn't the brakeman. He looked like a boomer, but he weren't no boomer either. He was an engine man; he was dressed like an engine man, his big gloves dirty and greasy. And he looked all torn up as if he'd been in an awful bang. His engine suit was ripped and his face was all crooked.

He said, "Stop straining, Full-head Al. You just stop straining. You're not gettin' nowhere like that."

"Don't stand there talking to me like a no-account wiper!" I yelled. "Give her the air! Pull the air on her!"

"Al," he said, "I can't do that. I'd sure like to do it, but it ain't my engine."

"You damn old fool," I said, "we're gonna bump if you don't stop her right away! There's two trains on one track and two trains ain't ever passed each other on one track yet without a bump!"

"Full-head Al," he said sadly, "I'd shore like to stop this belchin' hog, but it ain't in my power to do the act. It's hard enough

for an engine man in my condition to get here a-tall without pulling no throttle close and slappin' air into her brakes. That's a lot to ask of a ghost, Al, and a mighty sad ghost too."

"You!" I said. "I seen you before somewhere—I seen your picture—"

"Shore," he said. "I usta handle a freight haul in these parts some time back. You remember me, Full-head Al. The man at the throttle."

"Casey Jones!" I whispered.

"You got to stop this engine yourself," said Casey, shaking his head. "Al, I'd be glad to do the act, but I can't. I'm only a poor ghost."

"I'm stuck here," I screamed. "And my foot is busted!"

"Al," said he, "if you could get your shoe offa your foot, you could pull clear. It's the shoe that's jammed."

"This ain't no oxford!" I bellowed. "This is a full shoe laced all the way up. I can't slide out of it!"

"Mebbe I can help you there," Casey Jones said slowly. "Maybe I got just enough ectoplasm to pull the snap bow on that lace, and then you can pull your foot out."

He went over to the injector pipe and bent down and worked on that bow where I'd tied the lace. It felt like cold air hitting my leg, and all of a sudden, he said, "Pull!" and I pulled and I could feel the lace go and my foot was outa that shoe and all but killing me.

"All right," Casey said sadly. "She's all yours. Kill her!" He spat into the firebox. "Kill her quick, Al, because 9870 is stopped below you on account of your whistle blasts and you're headin' for her fast."

"I'll kill her," I panted as I crawled across the cab floor dragging that bum pin behind me, and gasping at the hurt all the way. "I'll burn her drivers down to the hub! I'll shake her valve gear off the yoke! I'll split her side rods clean in two! I'll put flats on every tire, and I'll melt them pistons hot, and shake the crossheads outa their guides!"

Then I reached the throttle and closed her down, and the breath went out of 460's stack and she started coasting. And then I got in behind Wallaby Joe and got to my knees and I gave her the air. I didn't fool. I gave her the air right. I locked her drivers and she went skidding on the rail-heads, and I gave her sand, and she screeched and screamed and groaned and yelled and hissed and spit and swayed.

And stopped.

And when she stopped, the light of Number 9870 was staring her right in the smokebox front and their pilots, coupler to coupler, wasn't more than three hundred yards apart.

I turned around to thank Casey Jones, and he was just dropping off the side. He waved his hand once, and he said, "That's all right, Full-head. See you sometime around the Salt Lake run," and he was gone in the night.

No, I never saw him since. But, if I ever get in another jam, Casey will be there. No doubt about it, at all.

I MUSTA passed out because when I opened my eyes again, the cab was full o' guys. There was the conductor from the string o' varnish, and the hogger of 9870, and my brakeman who'd come across the roofwalks of the empties between 460 and her caboose. They kept patting my back and telling me what a hero I was, and how I was gonna be retired or given my own engine, or get a pension and what not.

"Now listen," I said, slow on account of my foot hurt like fire, "I ain't no hero. I couldn't've done anything by myself. I was stuck, my foot was stuck by the injector pipes and I couldn't've reached my laces to untie it, and we'd have bumped if he hadn't untied that lace."

"Who?" they said. "Who untied the lace?"

"Casey Jones," I said. "Casey Jones himself, by the Lord!"

"Oh, don't be modest, Full-head," said

the bull from my own train. "You saved all our lives, you don't have to be modest about it."

"I'm telling you," I said. "My shoe lace was on the other side of the injector pipe. I never could've reached it. If Casey Jones hadn't swung aboard—he had just enough ectoplasm, he said—"

"Delirious," said the 9870 engine man. "That busted pin o' his. Lotta pain. His imagination—makes him delirious—"

Well, nobody can blame me for getting a little mad. Here I was, giving the man facts about what I'd seen, and—

"Damn it!" I said. "He was *here*! Go try to untie your own shoe lace when your foot is jammed between them pipes! Try reaching around behind the injector pipe! It can't be done!"

They all looked kind of serious, and then they went over to the injector pipe where my shoe was still stuck and they took a look and then they came back, looking sober and they shook their heads. "Well," said the conductor, "you're right. You couldn't have untied that lace. Boy, it would have been just too bad if it hadn't busted."

"Busted?" I said.

"Sure. You can see it plain as day. You must have pulled so hard, you busted your own shoe lace, the shoe loosened and you got your foot out. The lace is busted. The bow is still tied, but the lace busted lower down and loosened the whole shoe. That's how you got your foot out."

"I'm telling you," I cried, "he was here, Casey was!"

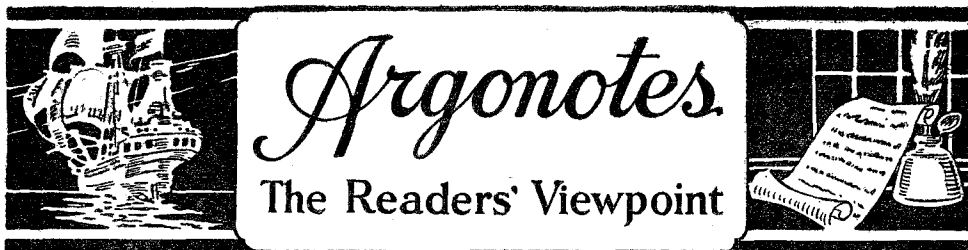
"I don't believe it," said the conductor.

"That's sacrilege," I said.

"Just hokum," said the mountain engine man. "You did it, and you know it, and Casey Jones is one dead-and-gone high-baller."

"Blasphemy," I said. "Just out-and-out blasphemy."

They picked me up and grinned at each other like they knew what it was all about—even if they didn't.



**T**HE sound of heavy guns and steel on steel has grown loud this week. With a couple of inter-reader skirmishes going splendidly, we don't know when there has been so much turbulence in this department. It happens, too, that one participant in the hostilities raises a point worth talking over. Why, this correspondent asks, do we allow our authors to be "insulted" in these columns?

Well, of course "insulted" is a pretty strong word for it; "manhandled" might be a politer and more accurate term. We permit the readers of our stories to throw heavy objects at the men who write them for two reasons. First of all, this is the readers' magazine and they have a right to kick, just so long as they speak in a printable fashion and don't attempt to invade this office with a horsewhip.

In the second place, once in a while (though seldom) one of these brickbats strikes an author where he needs to be struck. It is possible for an author to learn something from rough treatment—once he has gone through various stages of rage, humiliation and despondency and emerged a sane, if shaken, man. Now this doesn't happen often; most of the critical remarks in the letters we get are no more than personal opinion. But anyhow there is nothing like an insult to pick up an author after a hard day's work.

It's time we turned you over to the person who started all this—

**MRS. JOHN MITCHELL**

I am writing you in defense of one of your most brilliant authors, none other than Theodore Roscoe.

In your June 3rd issue of ARGOSY, in the Readers' Viewpoint, you have a letter from a Don Wilkins. You will pardon my expression, but who in the Sam Hill does Mr. Wilkins think he is? He writes as if the improvements or changes in the ARGOSY were all made to please his ego.

Mr. Wilkins writes a fairly intelligent letter, but in giving his opinion of Roscoe he is positively insulting.

I believe everyone has a right to dislike the style of the various authors, but it is not necessary to resort to such un-intelligent adjectives as "louzee", "dud", etc.

At least you, the Editor, had the politeness to refer to Mr. Wilkins as a gentleman. However, seeing that he refers to himself as, "an old, old reader," I take it for granted that he's just a crabby old man, overflowing with his own importance.

As for you, Mr. Editor, I can't understand why you would print a letter that is insulting to your authors. After all, they have a great deal to do with the fame of your magazine, and I should think you would spare them such a letter. I know that they have to put up with a certain amount of criticism, but I don't believe any author of your magazine rates that type of criticism. Again, to quote Mr. Wilkins, at the conclusion of his lengthy letter, "On the whole the new ARGOSY yarns hit me right where I live." Well, sir, I hope this letter hits you right where you live.

CHICAGO, ILLINOIS.

**T**HAT'S only the first bout on tonight's card, ladies and gentlemen. The second has been fought in weekly installments and promises very soon to assume epic proportions. Re-introducing

**E. R. G.**

In May 13 ARGOSY Mr. J. H. Mason rears up on his hind legs and growls about my previous comments on "Ship of Ishtar." Mr. Mason was very cleverly sarcastic, not to say voluble,