

## PROJECT "RAILFAN" Continued ...

By Major General (Retired) Hugh F. Foster, Jr., U.S. Army

In the April 10, 1986 *Bluewater Sentinel* General Foster described the development of "Project RAILFAN" in 1971-72 while he was Commanding General of Fort Monmouth, New Jersey. Due to budgetary restraints there was need at Fort Monmouth for an inexpensive way to provide suitable quarters for senior bachelor non-commissioned officers.

The idea of converting railroad passenger cars into NCO quarters occurred to General Foster after Private David Durkoop asked permission to bring his former Pennsylvania Railroad private car, the "Mountain View," onto Ft. Monmouth for living quarters. The basic concept of the RAILFAN project was to remove all the seats, patch the car floors and roofs and install a partition across the center of each car dividing it into two equal apartments. The first six cars were re-wired for 110 volt electrical service and the original base board steam heat pipes modified. Air-conditioning was provided by window units.

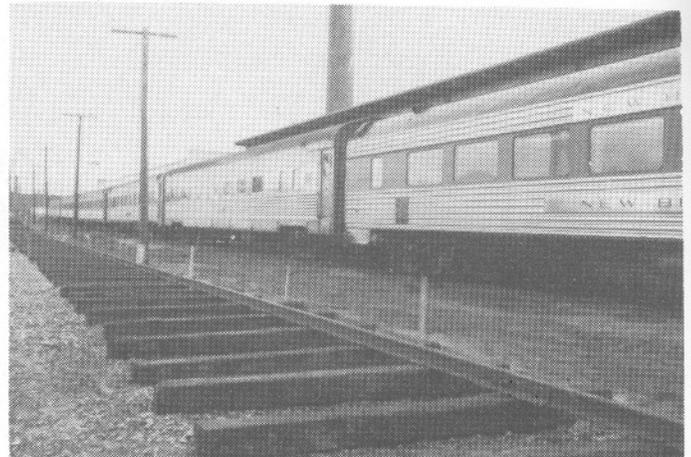
Army regulations at that time permitted a Post Commander to spend up to \$25,000 on his own authority. Using surplus materials and providing training to U.S. Army Reserve Engineer units, Project RAILFAN under the able direction of Deputy Post Commander Colonel Vernon C. Davis was kept within these fiscal limitations.

### More Cars

To get on with RAILFAN, Fort Monmouth had to settle for four more former New York, New Haven & Hartford parlor cars, one stainless steel coach and three steel-clad "Cor-Ten" carbon steel cars. Made by U.S. Steel, "Cor-Ten" is a low alloy, high tensile strength steel used in rail car, building and bridge construction were high strength and resistance to atmospheric corrosion are important. The cars purchased were:

- Four New York, New Haven & Hartford parlor cars built in 1948 by Pullman Standard, lot 6788. Included were 303, the *Brockton*, later Penn Central 7102; 305, the *Woonsocket*, originally the *Rowayton* and later PC 7104; 313, the *Pawtucket*, later PC 7107; and 320, the *Meriden*, later PC 7112. These cars were similar to the NYNH&H parlor car *New Britain*, described in the first part of this article, except they lacked glass partitions and 14-seat lounge at the vestibule end; they were full parlor cars.
- Coach 4031 built in 1941 by Pullman-Standard for the Southern Railway's *The Southerner*, lot 6647, plan 7457-A.
- Coaches 2638 and 2639 built of "Cor-Ten" steel in 1941 for the New York Central by Pullman-Standard, lot 6651, plan 7464.
- Coach 2667 built of "Cor-Ten" in 1942 for the New York Central by American Car & Foundry, lot 2209.

The former Pennsylvania Railroad Coach 4031 was similar to the first five cars received, so it was added to those cars, which also included the former NYNH&H parlor car *New Britain*, completing the original seven car string. After 4031 was in place, the rail joiners were unbolted from the first track and heavy trucks chained to the rail bent the track into a sharper curve to the second right of way.



**IN "RAILFAN" SERVICE** - The first cars to arrive, the Budd-built former Penn Central coaches 4018, 4025, 4021 and 4020, have been sited on the unused spur at Fort Monmouth and the second track completed. Interior refurbishing remains. The nearest coach, skirted 4018, was built in 1940 as a demonstration car for the New York World's Fair. It still sports a Pennsylvania Railroad Keystone herald. U.S. Army Photograph.

### A Tight Curve

The four NYNH&H parlor cars were moved onto the second spur without difficulty, but the three New York Central cars could not negotiate the sharp curve. To overcome this problem, the brake linkages were disconnected and portions of the undercarriage cut off with an oxy-acetylene torch.

The blind end of the four NYNH&H parlor cars, with toilets at only at that end, were modified the same way as Number 400. The women's toilet and lounge were converted into a shower and dressing room. At the other end in three of the cars, the floor-to-ceiling luggage rack shelves were removed from both sides of the aisle. The metal walls were left. In the cubicles created between the car end and the walls, a toilet and stall shower were installed on one side and a toilet compartment across the aisle. The fourth NYNH&H car retained the end luggage racks; this end being made into a communal launderette with washing machines and dryers.

The three "Cor-Ten" steel cars had large lounges at both ends. The men's lounge had two toilet compartments and one was converted into a shower. The women's lounge had but one toilet and a stall shower unit was installed.

These cars were repainted aluminum on the outside. Wooden step boxes were provided for each car in the second string, since there was no high-level platform for them. The apartments on the blind end of the car strings were reached by wooden steps placed between the tracks.

### Volunteer Help

Project RAILFAN could not have been completed without a lot of volunteer labor. The 469th Reserve Engineer Battalion, members of the Signal School Brigade, Project Transition trainees, civilian members of the Office of the Facilities Engineer, members of my staff, Colonel DeVan and the Project RAILFAN Officers and I worked many cold hours that winter to expedite completion of the project.



**RAILFAN LUXURY** - The original ceiling lights and luggage racks have been retained in this Non-commissioned Officer apartment decorated by the occupant. The restroom lounge next to the hallway has been retained. U.S. Army Photograph.

**WEEKEND RAILROADERS** - Members of the 469th U.S. Army Reserve Engineer Battalion (Construction) install electrical conduit. The original baseboard steam heating was retained, but divided mid-car so each apartment had its own thermostat. Window air-conditioners were used. U.S. Army photograph.

**The End Result**

When completed, RAILFAN provided 26 bachelor apartments for senior NCO's, including a WAC first sergeant, a launderette and a communal lounge. The apartments varied in length from about 28 feet in the coaches to 33 feet in the NYNY&H parlor cars, not including the toilets or lounge areas. All were 10 feet wide, considerably larger than the barracks rooms to which bachelor NCO's were normally assigned.

The RAILFAN apartments afforded more privacy, individual environmental control and a bright, clean place to live. The response was gratifying. The waiting list for RAILFAN apartments was closely watched by the applicants to be sure no one "bucked the line."

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USAR Troops installing interior wiring

**THE GREAT 150 PUMPKIN SPECIAL**

The last 1987 Bluewater Michigan Chapter train excursion, *THE GREAT 150 PUMPKIN SPECIAL*, operated at full capacity on October 3rd in conjunction with the Caro, Michigan Pumpkin Festival. Trip Chairman **Dave Haugan** devised an the fall color trip offering the rare opportunity to ride Tuscola & Saginaw Bay Railway's former Michigan Central-New York Central trackage from Millington to Caro to Colling to Harger and back to Millington. The following two pages are excerpted from the special edition of the *Bluewater Sentinel* passed out to passengers on the *PUMPKIN SPECIAL*.

**RAILFAN** *Continued from page 19 ...*

The Fort Monmouth **RAILFAN** project received some publicity and the concept was considered briefly for other posts, but never carried further. At Fort Monmouth, the existing track close to all utilities was a major factor in keeping the project within cost limitations. Similar opportunity was probably not available at other posts.

### Future Plans Dropped

Plans were developed for expanding the initial project at Fort Monmouth, but never materialized for several reasons. There was an understandable reluctance on the part of the Department of the Army to invite invidious publicity by housing military personnel in "junked railroad cars." The Army would naturally prefer to provide proper and adequate housing, although the Army is totally at the mercy of Congress. Military housing is a budgetary item over which Congress holds an extremely tight rein.

Initiative and originality are not encouraged. In many cases, Congress intentionally maintains housing levels below requirements in order to force military personnel to live off post, thereby enriching the local community and business coffers while gaining favorable consideration at re-election time. In the long term, the use of railroad cars would generate higher maintenance costs than those for permanent buildings.

with air evacuation across the Pacific it was more feasible to land the planes close to their destination Army hospitals.

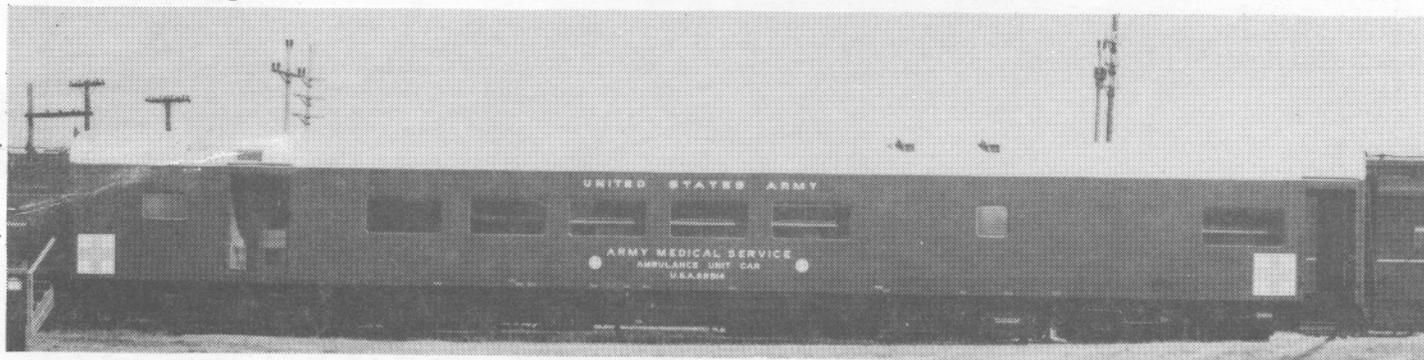
In November, 1965, the Army dispatched a fully equipped and staffed train of 14 ambulance cars and two hospital kitchen cars to Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Here they were used to evacuate 273 elderly patients from a hospital endangered by a nearby damaged barge loaded with Chlorine gas.

The patients were transported to the Central State Hospital in Alexandria, Louisiana. Two patients died from heart attacks while the train stood on a siding at the Alexandria hospital. Apparently, the excitement of the trip was too much for them.

In August, 1970, a few of these cars were used as safety escorts for two trains moving residual World War II poison gases from Army arsenals to Sunny Point, North Carolina. Here the gases were loaded on an old freighter and sunk at sea. Other than these two occasions, the cars had not been used prior to 1971.

### RAILFAN Family Apartment

The ambulance car USA 89514 was in mint condition and was wired for 110/220 volts. There was a fully equipped stainless steel kitchen with refrigerator, freezer, stove,



**U.S. ARMY RAILWAY AMBULANCE UNIT CAR** - Project **RAILFAN** temporarily converted U.S. Army car 89514 into a family apartment for demonstration purposes. The 27 foot patient ward was divided with a partition into one two-room apartment. The 1952-53 series of Ambulance Unit Cars provide complete living and medical facilities for 27 patients, a doctor, nurse and six attendants. U.S. Army Photograph.

### Army Hospital Cars

Fort Monmouth also developed plans to provide temporary housing for married couples, including those with one small child. With the assistance of the U.S. Army Material Command, Railway Ambulance Unit Car USA 89514 was borrowed to test the feasibility of converting it to small family housing.

This car was one of 63 built by the St. Louis Car Company in 1952-53 to replace 62 of the 1944 model ambulance unit cars shipped to Korea. The 63rd car in the new order replaced one 1944 model converted to a communications car for the Presidential railroad train.

The Korean hostilities had ended by the time these 63 cars were delivered. The cars were maintained in standby condition at all times. They were "exercised" periodically to redistribute lubricants and cleaned every month. They were never used for their intended purpose of evacuating patients from Korea or for that matter, Viet Nam, because

sink and pantry. The car had two toilets, both electric and steam heat, full air-conditioning, a shower, telephone, several clothing and storage lockers and two roomettes.

The main patient bay was 27 feet long. To convert the car for small family use, this bay was cleared of all berths and a single partition installed to divide the bay into a bedroom and a sitting room. The bedroom accommodated twin beds, a night table and two dressers. The sitting room held a sofa, two lounge chairs, a cocktail table, an end table, two small tables, bookcase and floor lamp. There were also 24 built-in reading lamps!

Although not accomplished for the demonstration model, it would have been necessary to change the toilets and make appropriate connections to utilities. Total cost for the conversion of one car was under \$500. All berths removed from the car were stored. The car could have been restored to the ambulance car configuration overnight.



**AMBULANCE CAR KITCHEN** - Coffee urn and electric stove with oven in the U.S. Army Ambulance Car Number 89514 built in 1952 the St. Louis Car Company. Note the pet-cock to pressurize the car's water supply. U.S. Army photograph.

Unfortunately for this part of the plan, the topic of "family housing" raises the hackles of Congress even higher. The Army had no desire to alienate Congress, from whom all blessings flow, so shortly after the model car had been prepared, I was directed to restore it to the ambulance car configuration and return it to the depot.

**Finis To RAILFAN**

In late 1975, after I had retired, the Commanding General of Fort Monmouth was directed to close out Project RAILFAN and dispose of the cars. They were sold as scrap for considerably more than had been paid for them. It is interesting to note that one local rail commuter wrote to his newspaper editor, complaining the RAILFAN cars looked better than those in which he rode to work every day.

**Morale**

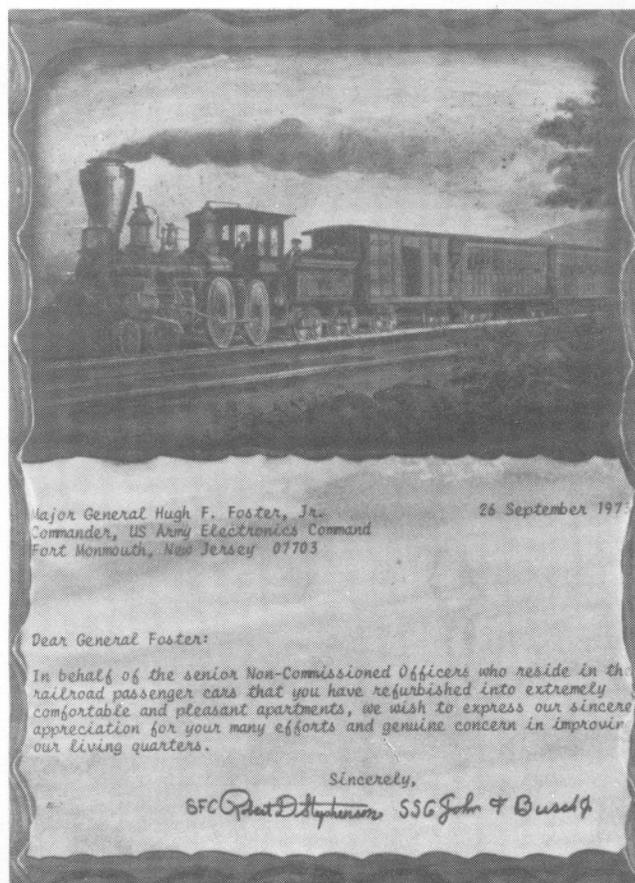
Two Project RAILFAN occupants were Sergeant First Class Robert D. Stephenson and Staff Sergeant John T. Busch, Jr. The effect RAILFAN had on morale was indicated, when they invited me and my wife to dine with them in their rail car accommodations.

On the appointed date we were ushered into a tastefully decorated apartment. After hors d'oeuvres and beverages, a dinner prepared by the sergeants was served on a table set with cloth, napkins, shiny crystal and cutlery and a single rosebud before the Commanding General's wife. The rosebud was done at the insistence of one sergeant's mother, who had discussed the dinner in detail with her son.

SFC Stephenson had installed a small electric range in the former lounge area and produced a delectable meal including fresh cranberries flown in from Alaska where his sister was living. After dinner, the party stepped across the vestibule to the other apartment, where after-dinner drinks were served. The sergeants surprised me by presenting a plaque in appreciation of Project RAILFAN.

It was a delightful evening. There was little in the surroundings to suggest the festivities took place in a railroad car, except for the brief passage through the vestibule.

*General Foster was graduated from the U.S. Military Academy at West Point in 1941. He served as a company commander in North Africa and Italy; commanded a battalion in Austria; commanded a Signal Group in Korea and the 18,500-man 1st Signal Brigade in Viet Nam. Besides commanding Fort Monmouth, General Foster served as Chief of Operations Research at the Army Electronics Proving Ground, Chief of Automatic Data Processing Systems Division in the Office of the Comptroller of the Army and as Signal Officer of the United Nations Command in Korea. He taught electrical engineering at West Point for three years and for two years at the U.S. Naval Academy at Annapolis. He is writing a book on Army Hospital cars.*



Major General Hugh F. Foster, Jr.  
Commander, US Army Electronics Command  
Fort Monmouth, New Jersey 07703

26 September 1975

Dear General Foster:

In behalf of the senior Non-Commissioned Officers who reside in the railroad passenger cars that you have refurbished into extremely comfortable and pleasant apartments, we wish to express our sincere appreciation for your many efforts and genuine concern in improving our living quarters.

Sincerely,

SFC Robert D. Stephenson SSG John T. Busch, Jr.