

A STEAM LOCOMOTIVE CREW MEMBER

by

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When I heard in May 2017 that Gramling Locomotive Works would bring their 0-4-0T 1928 Vulcan Iron Works steam locomotive to Bluegrass Railroad Museum for three weekends of passenger operations in September, I immediately put my name in to be part of her crew. I was fortunate to have my name marked up as part of her crew for two runs as Lead Conductor and one run as Assistant Fireman. Mary Ann was marked off as a car host, in the open window cars, for these three runs.

The Gramling Locomotive Works 0-4-0T was built in 1928 for the A.E. Dick Construction Company by Vulcan Iron Works. A.E. Dick Construction was located near Scranton, Pennsylvania, and used the locomotive to move cars of rock within their stone quarry. Circa 1933, she was sold to the Jeddo-Highland Coal Company of Hazelton, Pennsylvania, who numbered her 85 for use within their fleet. As Jeddo 85, she saw service at Hazelton until circa 1964 when she was laid up. Shortly thereafter, she was sold to Gordon Brinthrop who moved her to Horseheads, New York. In 2007, she was sold by Mr. Brinthrop to Gramling Locomotive Works of Ashley, Indiana, who spent the next ten years rebuilding her so that she could return to steam service.

I made my two runs as Lead Conductor on Sunday, September 14, at 2:00 PM and 5:00 PM, as part of Jeddo 85 operating crew. The train consisted of four coaches, two open window cars and two airconditioned cars. To ride in an airconditioned car, one paid about 20 percent over the cost of riding in an open window car. It is still beyond my comprehension that all of the airconditioned cars had full loads while the open window cars operated at less than full capacity. Why would you want to ride in an aluminum cocoon where you could not see, taste, smell, feel, or hear the steam locomotive working?

Locomotive #85, while operating at BGRM in passenger service, was placed at the head of the consists' open window cars. BGRM 1314, our MU car, was placed directly in back of Jeddo 85 so one could stand in the MU cab and look directly into the footplate of Jeddo 85, while ACL 203, an airconditioned coach, was located at the west end of the train. Train operation was push/pull with the Jeddo 85 pushing west as we left the West Versailles Depot for Milner and pulling east as we returned from Milner to West Versailles. Length of the trip was 6-miles, 3-miles from West Versailles to Milner and 3-miles back.

The steam operation worked as follows: The airconditioned cars were on the west end of the train and the open air on the east end. Jeddo 85 was to hold to the east of the train for photo shoots until 1:50 PM when she was coupled to the train. At 1:00 PM, N&W 675, a GP9, was attached to the west end of the train. She was used to bring the train's brake air lines up to full capacity. Once the engineer of N&W 675 announced we were at train line pressure, I as Conductor, at 1:20 PM, undertook a train brake test. Passenger loading started at 1:30 PM. At 1:50 PM, I gave permission for Jeddo #85 to come west to couple to the train. Once Jeddo #85 was coupled and cut into the train's brake air line, N&W 675 cut itself from the train's brake air line and uncoupled from the train. The crew of N&W 675 then rigged a Monkey Tail to the west vestibule of ACL 203 and, after checking in with the Station Master, pulled west for Mile 5.9.

N&W 675 was to remain clear of Jeddo 85 and her train consist but to be in place in case we needed emergency power. Once the Monkey Tail was in place on ACL 203, I conducted a brake test of her wheels.

With a successful brake test, I took my place in the open vestibule of ACL 203 and at 1:59 PM had the Engineer blow a Call for Signals. It was 2:04 before the Station Master granted me permission to leave the Depot. Once I had permission to leave, I gave Jeddo 85 the Highball for Mile 6.1. We now headed west from the Depot with Jeddo 85 pushing for Milner. The 3-mile trip from the Depot to Mile 6.1 saw me standing in the vestibule calling crossings and switches, via hand held radio, to the locomotive crew. Every crossing along the way had railfans trackside shooting video and photos. (These can be seen on Youtube). At Mile 6.1, I brought the steam train to a halt. N&W 675 was in the clear .2 miles to the west. I held the train in place at Milner until I walked forward to the MU cab so I could experience the working of Jeddo 85 as we headed east.

Once in the MU cab, I gave Jeddo 85 the Highball for Mile 7.1 where we planned to stop to do a photo run-by. My time in the MU cab was short as I had to make my way to mid-train to spot the train for unloading at Mile 7.1. Spotting the doorways of both the trailing open window and leading airconditioned car on an 8-foot pavement was a chore, as Jeddo 85 did not stop like the diesels I was used to working with. We had to do some to and froing to hit the spot on the 8-foot wide road from which I could off load from both doorways. (I did better on the second run.)

To my surprise, while everyone in the open window cars got off and headed for the photo line, only about 70 percent of those in the airconditioned cars got off, and those who got off just stood around in the road. The photo line was under the control of Mary Ann. For some reason, not everyone understands the concept of a Photo Line, but Mary Ann was helped by some railfans to maintain it. Once everyone was off, I made my way to the vestibule of ACL 203 and instructed my engineer to head west to Mile 6.9. Once at Mile 6.9, I brought the train to a stop and hurried forward to the MU cab. Here I gave the engineer a Highball to head east to Mile 7.2. Then Jeddo 85, with a lot of whistle blowing and bell ringing, thundered at 10 MPH over the 7.1 trestle past the photo line. At Mile 7.2, the train was brought to a halt and I then returned to the vestibule of ACL 203. Here I gave instructions to the Engineer to head west under the instructions of the Assistant Conductor who would be on the ground to spot the train at the Mile 6.9 road crossing for loading.

Once the train was spotted for loading, I contacted N&W 675 and told her she could come east to Mile 6.8 and stop. I also told N&W 675 that once I had given Jeddo 85 permission to run east for the West Versailles Depot, N&W 675 could follow us back to the Depot, keeping a safe distance behind. At the West Versailles Depot, we again had to do some to and froing to line up the cars' doors with the station platform. By 3:20 PM all my passengers were off the train and N&W 675 was then coupled to the west end of the train to maintain our train's brake line air pressure. Once N&W was attached to the brake lines, Jeddo 85 was cut loose of the train and moved east for servicing. This servicing consisted of dumping ash and making a locomotive crew change. At 4:15 PM, we repeated putting the train back together in preparation for the 5:00 PM run, and at 5:03 PM, with the Station Master's blessings, we left West Versailles for my second run of the day as Lead Conductor for Jeddo 85. Again, for the photo run-by, all in the open window cars got off but only about 60 percent of those in the airconditioned cars did so.

The pictures below were taken on Saturday, 23 September, during the 2:00 PM run, when Mary Ann and I chased the train.



Jeddo 85



Me in my C&O Conductor's uniform



Lead Conductor Joe Brent in the vestibule at the rear of ACL 203 calling signals to Jeddo 85



Jeddo 85 heading west for Milner from West Versailles



Above and below: Jeddo 85 out along the line





Jeddo 85 posing on the trestle at Mile 7.0



Mary Ann trackside, recording for Youtube; Jeddo 85 heading for West Versailles

ASSISTANT FIREMAN ON JEDDO 85

I was marked up to be the Assistant Fireman for the Saturday, 24 September 5:00 PM run. The crew was Chris Frederick as Engineer, Steve Walker as Assistant Engineer, Joe Nugent as Lead Fireman, and me as Assistant Fireman. Mary Ann had been totally against the idea of me acting as Assistant Fireman onboard Jeddo 85 as I had been in the doctor's office earlier that week due to my back acting up. (For those who do not know, I have two rods, two discs, and six screws in my back, and the doctor wants to duplicate this surgery on the next two vertebrae.) I was told by Mary Ann to expect no sympathy from her if my back gave out, that I could just lie on the ground hurting for the rest of the week for all she cared. I should not expect any help from her for getting home, and that I was now on my own, and she was going to find someone who was not an idiot. Ah, true love!

Jeddo 85 had a healthy appetite, consuming 500 pounds of coal and 500 gallons of water during each 6-mile run. I, at the most, with twelve shovel loads of coal, tossed about 25 pounds of coal into her fire box. The fire box opening was too close to the floor for my back to allow me to bend over without feeling pain. I found it impossible to toss the coal into the firebox so that it landed where it needed to go in the fire. I never did get down coordinating opening the fire box door and shoveling the coal in with one easy swing. Instead of making the fire burn better, I was making things worse with each shovel full of coal, (okay, partially full shovel of coal), I tossed into the firebox. According to Joe, I kept the furnace door open too long thus allowing too much cold air in, while the coal I was tossing in was not being spread evenly around the firebox. Instead, I was heaping too much coal in one place and allowing holes to develop elsewhere within the fire. The result of all of this was I was relieved of my Fireman duties and Joe kept the firebox hot for the entire run. I should mention I did not realize how hot the inside of the firebox would be until I bent down at its level to toss coal in it. The heat was mind boggling. In addition, everything in the cab was hot and dirty, plus the noise was constant. I was glad I had on boots, a long-sleeved shirt, gloves, and eye and hearing protection. In addition, just as Mary Ann had told me it would, my back began to hurt. I had forgotten how a steam locomotive bounces. Fortunately, I had secreted in my pocket some extra strength Tylenol pills and took a couple of these to cut the pain in my back. Even though I was not working keeping Jeddo 85 running after the first 10-minutes of her run, I felt like I was part of the crew and consider that I have the right to say I fired a steam locomotive. The photo run-by from within the cab was a thing to experience. My part was to ring the bell.

Once back at West Versailles after uncoupling from the train, I was helped out of the cab and onto the ground. Once on the ground I found a chair to sit in so my back had some support. Mary Ann came over as I sat in the chair and said to me, "Your back is killing you, isn't it?" I in reply said to her, "NO, I feel OK, I just want to sit here for a while and watch them service the locomotive." Some 15-minutes later, with some help, I got up and out of the chair and made it to our automobile. One great thing about a Trailblazer is the seat gives you good back support. Once home it was get in bed.

Would I do it all over again? YES, I WOULD.



Me as Assistant Fireman in the cab of Jeddo 85. That's a C&LE hat; it was much dirtier at the end of the day.



Me shoveling some coal into Jeddo 85's firebox



Close the door. You are leaving it open too long.



Joe Nugent our Fireman, checking the firebox's fire to see how bad I messed it up.



Chris Frederick, Engineer, and Steve Walker, Assistant Engineer



Mary Ann trying to form a Photo Line



Above and below: Jeddo 85 from the Fireman's side of the cab

