

The Long Trains Roll

When the United States entered World War II in late 1941, Altoona became an important part of the war effort being the most important rail connection between the Midwest and the east coast's shipping ports. To strike at the Pennsylvania Railroad and specifically the Horseshoe Curve would have hindered America's ability to move troops, war material, and natural resources necessary to support the fighting in both theaters. Most important was the propaganda value of such a terror attack, at least as Hitler saw it.

In June of 1942, four highly trained Nazi saboteurs came ashore in Long Island, and tried to move inland to their assigned targets across the eastern seaboard, but were foiled along the way. Horseshoe Curve proved so vital in its military value that it was fenced off and under 24-hour military guard until 1946. The tale of these Germans is little known, but fascinating, and reflected now in a time of international terror attacks across the globe.

A fictionalized version of this tale of espionage was manifested in "The Long Trains Roll" by Stephen Meader, giving a young railroader's personal account of not only working in and around "The Curve" and the Penny's Altoona yard, but fashioning a story about a Nazi spy's attempt to destroy this valuable asset to our inevitable victory over fascism in 1945.

Telling the story for you as a PRR trainman, Ken will rely on historical research and his own practical experience as a railroad brakeman with the tourist railroad at Strasburg PA, to give a credible account of those times on the "Standard Railroad of the World", and the stress and excitement of working with steam locomotives in this interesting period. Enjoy the combination of history in railroading, World War Two, and even the politics of fighting terrorism as the stories tie together the plight of the Nazi attempts on some of our most important assets of the 1940s.

General Grant and Civil War Rail Roads

The successful military commander wins because he is able to adapt to changing situations, and so it was during the civil war and the developments in rail road technology and utility. General Grant enjoys a reputation as a fine horseman, but it's not just flesh and blood horses, but the Iron Horse as well that Grant appreciates.

In this meeting with the Lincoln's General In Chief, he will give some background on the development of rail roads in America during his own formative years, and will describe how the nation and its rail roads grew up together, in those tumultuous years of the American Civil War. Gen. Grant will relate his own experiences with trains and railroading from his youth through becoming the victor of the civil war through stories and artifacts from the period.

If you are a fan of US history, no matter a student of the civil war, or America's rail roads, or life in the 1800's, this encounter will engage and cross over to many areas of interest.