

Western Pacific 106 “Charles O. Sweetwood”

Business Observation Passenger Car

The unique history of this passenger car makes it one of the most important artifacts in the museum’s collection. When built by the famous Pullman Company in 1917, this car was named the “Pioneer” and was part of Pullman’s executive lease fleet, the early 20th century equivalent of today’s fancy business jets. Companies would charter such cars, complete with on-board staff including porters and cooks, for executive travel. The car was renamed “Davy Crockett” in 1927 and spent time at the Pullman shops near Chicago being used as a “party car” by employees. In 1942, the Western Pacific purchased it for use as their Superintendent’s Car for its Eastern Division. Renumbered 106, its new home was Elko, Nevada.

In 1946, a young Elko resident named Charles Sweetwood joined the WP as a carman. One of his duties was caring for the 106. In 1947, he enlisted in the Army as a medic. After getting married in early 1950, he returned to duty and on September 8, 1950, while serving in the Korean Conflict, was killed in action saving the lives of wounded comrades. Charles had just turned 21.

The Western Pacific had decided to support the troops in Korea by pursuing an audacious plan to use a railroad car as a rolling blood bank in cooperation with the Red Cross. Nothing like this had ever been tried before and the car chosen, WP 106, was renamed in Sgt. Sweetwood’s honor. He was the first WP family member killed in Korea. The car was dedicated in two big ceremonies, one in Oakland, California, the other in Elko, then it spent nearly 3 years travelling over 28,000 miles between California and Colorado. Typically, a member of Charles’ family rode the car and was the first to donate blood wherever it stopped. Blood collected on the car was sped to Oakland via the *California Zephyr*, then processed to be sent overseas. The work done using this car is considered to have helped save the lives of thousands of soldiers.

It was retired in 1961 and in the 2010s was acquired by the FRRS. The long term plan is to return the car to service and use its extraordinary story to inspire support for blood donation and veterans care programs. It is dedicated to the memory of Charles Sweetwood and his comrades.

builder
Pullman Company

built
September, 1917

type
Business Observation

plan number
2502C

serial number
4490-3

overall length
81’ 11”

operating weight
185,880 lbs

acquisition
acquired by FRRS