A HIGHER CALLING
the story of Western Pacific’s “Charles O. Sweetwood”

prepared by Eugene Vicknair
This is the story of a unique railroad passenger car. Built to be a travelling office for business executives in 1917, the “LearJet” of its day, it would later serve an extraordinary mission gathering life-saving blood for those troops engaged in the conflict in Korea. Named for a young Army medic, its ventures were followed in newspapers and radio broadcasts across the Western United States. This photo shows us the end of its journey in 1953. To fully understand the scope of what was achieved, we need to step back farther and review the context that led the creation of the “Charles O. Sweetwood”.
The Korean War: 1950 - 1953

At the end of World War II, the Korean Peninsula was occupied by United States forces in the south and Soviet Union forces in the north, dividing the nation at the 38th parallel.

In 1948, two new nations were formed: the communist Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (North Korea) and the Republic of Korea (South Korea).
On June 25, 1950, the Cold War turned hot as North Korean forces invaded, quickly pushing South Korean troops back.
US forces arrived in early July 1950, but by August the South Koreans had been pushed back to a small southern area around Pusan. The battles was brutal, with North Korean forces fighting back against newly landing US and UN troops.
An overview of how the fronts see-sawed back and forth, then stalemated near the 38th parallel. Note the village of Taegu, in the south near Pusan.

**North Korea Invades**
In June 1950, North Korea invades South Korea in an attempt to seize its territory. The United Nations, led by the United States, intervenes on the side of South Korea, but the South Korean capital, Seoul, quickly falls. By mid-September, North Korea occupies all but a small corner of South Korea surrounding Pusan.

1. **Maximum North Korean advance**: Sept. 15, 1950
   - North Korean Invasion June - Sept 1950

2. **U.N. counterattacks**

3. **Maximum United Nations advance**: Nov. 24, 1950
   - United Nations Offensive Sept - Nov 1950

**China enters war**
4. **China enters the war**: Nov. 24, 1950, U.N. forces withdraw into the south.

5. **Maximum Chinese/North Korean advance**: Jan. 21, 1951

**Stalemate**
6. The war continues for two more years until a truce is announced with a no man's land along the 38th parallel: July 27, 1953
As the US, South Korean and UN troops massed in the south, the push against the North made headway, but the toll was high.
One of the first units to arrive was the 7th Cavalry Regiment attached to the 1st Cavalry Division. One of the medics in the unit would become the inspiring force for our story. His name was Charles O. Sweetwood, a former Western Pacific carman in Elko, NV.
Sgt. Sweetwood had joined the Army in 1947 at the age of 18. His first hitch was up in December 1949 and he went home to Elko and got married.

1st Sgt. Charles Owen Sweetwood
born August 31, 1929
In the spring of 1950, he reenlisted and went to Korea as a field medic, treating wounded soldiers in the field, often in conditions like those seen in this photo.
Here we see a medic diving into a foxhole. He's that blur at the center. Imagine what this must have been like: with mortars and bullets flying, gunfire everywhere, you have to pull broken and bloody men to safety, keeping them alive. This is what Sgt. Sweetwood experienced. As the coalition forces pushed back, several large battles were occurring simultaneously in August 1950, including a major offensive near the town of Taegu.
On September 8, 1950, just after his 21st birthday, Charles Sweetwood was killed in action while helping wounded comrades under fire. He was the first resident of the state of Nevada, and the first member of the Western Pacific Railroad family, to be killed in Korea.
1st Sgt. Charles Owen Sweetwood
E05 Medical Technician
Medical Company
7th Cavalry Regiment
1st Cavalry Division

Sergeant Sweetwood was Killed in Action while tending his wounded comrades in South Korea on September 8, 1950.

For his actions under fire, he was awarded
- Purple Heart
- Combat Medical Badge
- Korean Service Medal
- United Nations Service Medal
- National Defense Service Medal
- Korean Presidential Unit Citation
- Republic of Korea War Service Medal
WP EMPLOYEE KILLED IN KOREA
Believed to be the first Nevadan, as well as the first Western Pacific employee, to be killed in action in Korea, Charles O. Sweetwood, 21, was reported lost in action September 8 while serving with the First Cavalry Division near Taegu, southern Korea.
Born August 31, 1929, Charles entered Western Pacific service October 24, 1946, as a carman helper, and upon being furloughed in January, 1947, he joined the Army. After serving three years with occupation forces in Japan, he returned home and re-enlisted early in the spring of 1950 and was again sent to Japan, from whence he was sent to Korea at the outbreak of the war.
A native of Elko, Charles received his education in the Elko schools before coming to Western Pacific.

Besides his mother, Mrs. Bonnie Grover, he is survived by two brothers, James Sweetwood, a World War II veteran, and Bud Sweetwood, carman for Western Pacific at Elko. All are residents of Elko. A sister, Mrs. Claude Barnes, lives in Redding, California.

IN THE ARMED FORCES
The following Western Pacific employees are now serving in the Armed Forces:

FRANK S. CLAWSON
   Assistant Accountant, Elko
JAMES C. DAVIS
   Switchman, Wendover
GUILIO P. FEBERGHI
   Messenger-Janitor, Sacramento
JOHN G. FORD
   Ticket Clerk, Elko
CLYDE E. GALLAGHER
   Machinist, Sacramento
MELVIN R. HELMICK
   Clerk, Reno
PETER L. JOSERAND
   Signalman, Traveling Outfit Car
WILLIAM N. MORTENSEN
   Carman, Oakland
KEITH A. PETTSON
   Assistant Timekeeper, Elko
HARRY SARAFAIN
   Stenographer-Clerk
   San Francisco
DONALD W. SMALE
   File Clerk, Elko
W. J. SOREL
   Revising Clerk (SN), Oakland
OSCAR J. STREETER
   Yard Clerk, Elko
HENRY DE P. TELLER
   Claim Investigator, San Francisco

Mileposts will be forwarded to all WP employees entering the service of their country, including overseas assignments, if they will keep the editor advised of their military addresses.
At this point, we need to touch on another thread in the story. Just prior to World War II, the nature of shock, a dangerous medical condition that occurs with major injury, had begun seeing heavy research. About 1940, it was realized that the most effective treatments was to quickly administer fluids, particularly blood.
This leads the US military to emphasize new methods of treatment, including rapid infusion of blood. Here we see a medic administering blood to a wounded soldier in the field during WWII.
This emphasis coincides with several major advances in the collection, storage and application of human blood for medical care. While blood transfusion had been discussed and attempted as early as 1818, the years right before World War II sees the last major advances needed to create the modern systems of blood donation and transfusion...

1935 – Doctors at the Mayo Clinic are the first to begin utilizing stored blood for transfusions within a hospital setting in the U.S.

1940 – The rH factor, a previously unknown blood element that had killed many transfusion recipients, is discovered and understood.

1940 – New processes and storage materials, developed in the US and abroad, allow for the long term transportation and storage of blood.

With these changes, and in response to the growing need, the American Red Cross begins the National Blood Donor Service to collect blood for the U.S. military in January 1941.
35 blood centers open around the country and several include small mobile trucks which allow collection within a 75 mile radius.
The Blood Donor Service is successful and credited with saving many lives during World War II.
While the WWII centers are all closed by the end of 1945, in 1948, the first blood center for civilian medical supply opens in Rochester, NY.
By 1948. Further advancements make large scale blood donation possible...

1948 - Dr. Carl W. Walter develops a stronger and more portable container using plastic which revolutionizes blood collection, opening the door to larger collection networks and longer distance transport of blood products.
In Korea, the lessons of World War II are expanded upon. New medical doctrines call for even more rapid treatment of soldiers, often near the front lines. MASH units and battlefield medics, such as Sgt. Sweetwood, are credited with saving thousands of soldiers who may have died under earlier practices.
At the war’s outset, the Red Cross is again designated as the blood collection agency for the military and blood drives begin.
As the war escalates, the Western Pacific Railroad considers ideas to support the troops overseas. An idea is proposed, often credited to WP’s innovative PR director Gilbert Kneiss, to work with the Red Cross to equip a passenger car as a rolling blood collection center.
While railcars had been used to support military medical needs before, this had been in the form of transporting supplies or wounded troops who had been stabilized.

The concept of a large, long distance travelling blood collection center, let alone one that was a railroad car, is an idea that had never been tried. Recall that previous blood collection centers were all in urban areas and the bloodmobiles attached to them stayed in very close proximity, less than 75 miles. The Blood Procurement Car would eventually, in some cases, see its collected blood travel over 1,300 miles to a processing center. The Western Pacific is proposing something much larger scale and very bold.
In 1942, the WP was seeking two new Superintendent’s cars. The “Davy Crockett” was purchased and based in Elko, Nevada for use by WP’s Eastern Division Superintendent Jack Duggan. Ironically, in 1946, one of the tasks assigned to newly hired carman Charles Sweetwood was the care of WP 106. To create its blood procurement car, the Western Pacific chose Eastern Division Superintendent’s Car 106, a Pullman executive observation car. The 106 had been built by Pullman in September 1917 as part of a set of three cars: the “Patriot”, the “Pilgrim” and the “Pioneer”, which was the future 106. All three were used in Pullman’s lease fleet, a steam era version of an executive jet timeshare.

In 1927, the “Pioneer” was renamed the “Davy Crockett”, fitting it in with a group of six new cars being built and named for famous explorers. It was later stationed around Chicago, but, perhaps due to its differences from the newer cars it was grouped with, was often used for company functions. Some reports suggest it became a favorite “party car” for Pullman workers.
With the idea of the blood procurement car approved, it was deemed only appropriate to name the car in honor of the first WP employee killed in the war, former WP carman and US medic Charles Sweetwood.
On January 10, 1951, in a huge ceremony in Oakland, WP President Frederick Whitman presents the newly christened “Charles O. Sweetwood” to Raymond H. Barrows of the American Red Cross.
The ceremony is attended by several members of the Sweetwood family, including Charles' mother Bonnie, sister Julia and brothers James and William. A plaque is placed inside the car honoring Charles.
Here we get an idea of the scope of the Oakland ceremony, with a view of the guest seating and a listing of some of the invited dignitaries. In the FRRS archives, we have the script for the Oakland event.
January 24, another ceremony is held in Elko, NV, Charles Sweetwood’s home town. We also have the script for this event in our archives. This rare color photo of the event is from the Northeastern Nevada Museum in Elko.
WP Eastern Division Superintendent James F. Lynch speaking at the Elko ceremony, with Red Cross nurses Vivian Rott, Julia Rigutto and Rosemarie Bulich.
PCF Charles Morse, childhood friend of Charles Sweetwood, greets Charlie’s mother. Sgt. Sweetwood saved PFC Morse’s life twice in Korea, the second time just days before his own death.
A member of the Shoshone-Paiute Indians, Owyhee tribe, donates blood in Elko.

The following images show how blood procurement was handled in the car.

Here, the blood collection is done is one of the four bedrooms (out of five in the car) set aside for procurement.
Donors wait in the observation lounge at the rear of the car.
The fifth bedroom acts as an office and exam room.
After donating blood, donors are allowed to rest in the Pullman beds.
After a rest, donors are taken to the car’s dining room for the now traditional post-donation orange juice and sugar cookies. Everyone also receives a donor pin like those pictured earlier in this presentation.
Here we see the “Charles O. Sweetwood” heading north after spending several days in Reno, Nevada.
Nevada Governor Charles Russell speaks from the observation platform of the car during its visit to Reno during February 19-21, 1951.
A member of Charles’ family, often his mother, rode on the car nearly every mile during its 2-3/4 years in blood service. Typically they were the first to donate at each stop, but in this care Governor Russell is given the honor.
Mrs. Frankie McCann holding a picture of her son Sgt. Robert Rich who was fighting and wounded in Korea. She was one of the first to donate when the car stopped in Keddie, California on February 26-27, 1951.
Western Pacific Porter Lewis Griffin, shown at center with several Red Cross nurses, rode the “Charles O. Sweetwood” on most of its journey, with only a brief time away due to illness. Several of the nurses also spent long spans of time with the car.
Blood collected on the car was transported for processing to Cutter Laboratory in Richmond, California via the Western Pacific’s flagship passenger train, the California Zephyr. The Zephyr would rendezvous with the “Sweetwood” and the blood was stored in the freezers of the Zephyr’s dining and lounge cars. Here we see Porter Griffin about to hand off several cases of the perishable blood.
Flyers like this one pictured on the next two pages were handed out on the California Zephyr to explain the operation.

Blood collected by American Red Cross is taken aboard a Military Air Transport Service plane at Fairfield-Suisun Air Force Base to be flown to the battlefronts of Korea.

Blood plasma is administered to a seriously wounded American GI aboard a jeep transporting him to a First Aid Station.

this train is carrying BLOOD to Korea
SOMEWHERE between Salt Lake City and San Francisco, the westbound “California Zephyr” will make a brief stop to pick up a shipment of whole blood from the Red Cross railroad car, “Charles O. Sweetwood”, the only blood procurement car of its kind in the country.

This unusual car was converted by Western Pacific into a blood bank on rails, and donated by the railroad to the American Red Cross. It consists of four bedrooms, lounge and dining room, and is staffed with four nurses, a porter, and Red Cross volunteers. This mobile military blood procurement unit assists in the collection of blood from small communities adjacent to W. P. tracks throughout Utah, Nevada and California, from areas where there are no other facilities for the collection of blood for the Armed Forces. Blood collections are made under the direction of local medical societies and with assistance of local doctors.

The car was christened the “Charles O. Sweetwood” in honor of the first Western Pacific employee to lose his life in the Korean War. Sgt. Sweetwood’s mother, Mrs. Bonnie Grover of Elko, Nevada, and her two sons, Bud and James, were the first donors to give blood.

Each day the westbound “California Zephyr” makes a stop at whatever town may be the temporary headquarters of the “Charles O. Sweetwood”. The units of whole blood that have been collected during the previous twenty-four hours are rushed from the car’s special refrigerators onto the “California Zephyr”, which speeds the vitally needed blood to Red Cross headquarters in San Francisco. Within a few hours the blood is on its way by plane to the battlefields of Korea.
IN MEMORIAM

This moving Blood Procuring Unit—said to be the only car of
its kind in the history of American railroading—was dedicated
early this year as a Memorial to Charles O. Sweetwood of Elko,
Nevada. Sgt. Sweetwood was the first Nevadan and first West-
ern Pacific employee to lose his life in the Korean conflict.

BLOOD SAVES LIVES

As a key unit in the Red Cross Blood Program for the Armed
Forces, the “Charles O. Sweetwood” car is now making sched-
uled stops along the Western Pacific’s entire system between San
Francisco and Salt Lake City. This all-out effort is being made
to secure thousands of pints of blood from patriotic citizens
living in scores of cities and towns in California, Nevada and
Utah where other facilities for the procurement of blood for the
Armed Forces do not exist.

... When this Red Cross Blood Procurement Car arrives in
your own community, be among the first to volunteer as a blood
donor. Watch your local newspaper for full details concerning
the “Charles O. Sweetwood” visit to your town.

WHO CAN GIVE BLOOD

Anyone between the ages of 21 and 60. Minors between 18 and
21 must have written permission of parents. Blood can be taken
from any person of normal health whose weight is 110 pounds
or over. Your local doctor on duty will quickly advise you if
you are eligible.

WHAT TO DO BEFORE GIVING BLOOD

Donors should not eat fatty foods for four hours before giving
blood. Fruit juices and coffee with sugar but without cream are
permitted.

WHEN TO GIVE BLOOD

Less than one hour of your time is needed to give blood. Please
make your appointment in advance by calling your local Red
Cross Chapter. The actual blood-giving operation takes only
6 to 7 minutes.

SHE WAS FIRST TO LOSE
. BUT FIRST TO GIVE!

MRS. BONNIE GROVER, the first Nevada mother to lose her
son in Korea, was also the first to donate her blood when
the Military Blood Procurement Car bearing the name of
her late son, Sgt. Charles O. Sweetwood, was recently dedi-
cated in Oakland.

Flyers like this one were
handed out from the
“Sweetwood” itself.
The car’s travels were extensively reported in the media of the day, including the Western Pacific’s own company news magazine.
This article tells of an exciting incident when the car went to Ely, Nevada and became trapped by a blizzard. To save the blood before it spoiled, two amateur pilots fly the collected blood to Elko through the teeth of the storm, nearly crashing in the attempt. They were later given Civil Air awards for their bravery.
The two pilots used a plane nearly identical to this one to transport the blood from Ely to Elko. It all arrived safely.
To commemorate the program, a large scale model of the "Sweetwood" was commissioned by the Western Pacific Railroad and donated to the American Red Cross. Here we see Western Pacific President Frederic Whitman, at right, inspecting the model. Today this model sits in the lobby of the Red Cross’ main blood laboratory.
This Citation
is awarded to
Western Pacific Railroad Company
by
The American National Red Cross
in recognition of
outstanding cooperation and public service
in making available and operating
The Charles Q. Sweetwood Blood Donor Car
to collect blood for national defense

November 04, 1992

[Signature]
President, American National Red Cross
On November 9, 1953, the “Charles O. Sweetwood” is formally decommissioned at Crissy Field in San Francisco, California.
The Sixth Army Band was present, along with veteran's of Sgt. Sweetwood's own 7th Cavalry unit.
On the observation platform at the decommissioning ceremony, from left to right: Red Cross Nurse Lois Kramer, Gerald Wesselius (American Red Cross), unknown man, WP President Frederic Whitman (speaking), Major General Frank H. Partridge - Sixth Army (behind President Whitman out of sight), Colonel Dan Gilmer – 7th Cavalry and Red Cross Nurse Julia Pagan, who staffed car during its entire blood service.
Members of Charles’ unit at the decommissioning ceremony.
Some of the places the “Charles O. Sweetwood” visited...

Oakland, CA  
San Francisco, CA (WP and State Belt)  
Herlong, CA  
Portola, CA  
Quincy, CA (Quincy Railroad)  
Winnemucca, NV  
Elko, NV  
Stockton, CA  
Sacramento, CA  
Marysville, CA  
Newark, CA  
San Leandro, CA  
Thornton, CA  
Berkeley, CA (Southern Pacific)  
Milpitas, CA  
San Jose, CA  
Alameda, CA  
Westwood, CA  
Little Valley, CA  
Bieber, CA  
Hayward, CA  
Westwood, CA  
Loyalton, CA  
Reno Junction, CA  
Reno, NV  
Carlin, NV  
Wells, NV  

Ely, NV (Nevada Northern)  
Ruth, NV (Nevada Northern)  
McGill, NV (Nevada Northern)  
Wendover, UT  
Tooele, UT (Tooele Valley Railroad)  
Warner, UT (Union Pacific)  
Garfield, UT (Union Pacific)  
Hill Field, UT (Union Pacific)  
Clearfield, UT (Bamberger Railroad)  
Bountiful, UT (Bamberger Railroad)  
Salt Lake City, UT  
Magna, UT (Kennecott Copper)  
Layton, UT  
Montrose, CO (Denver & Rio Grande Western)  
Delta, CO (DRGW)  
Grand Junction, CO (DRGW)  
Rifle, CO (DRGW)  
Glenwood Springs, CO (DRGW)  
Eagle, CO (DRGW)  
Minturn, CO (DRGW)  
Leadville, CO (DRGW)  
Buena Vista, CO (DRGW)  
Salida, CO (DRGW)  
Canon City, CO (DRGW)  
Florence, CO (DRGW)  
Pueblo, CO (DRGW)  
Denver, CO (DRGW)
Notebooks of newspaper clippings collected by the Sweetwood Family documenting the car's journey.
Military Blood Procurement Car

“Charles O. Sweetwood”

in operation: January 10, 1951 - November 9, 1953

travelled 28,488 miles over 11 railroads in 4 states

over 25,000 pints of blood collected

over 3125 gallons of blood

the average person has 12 pints of blood

this means that the “Charles O. Sweetwood” and the crews that worked the car collected enough blood to perform over 2100 complete transfusions

The car sees little service by the Western Pacific following 1953, except for being used as lodging on board the carferry “Las Plumas” when the ship was delivered from Portland to San Francisco Bay. The 106 / “Charles O. Sweetwood” is retired in February 1961 and sold into private ownership. In 2012, it is acquired by the Feather River Rail Society for operational restoration.
The “Charles O. Sweetwood” as it appears today in Portola, California
Looking into one of the bedrooms.
In room sink and medicine cabinet.
Convertible bed set up for daytime seating. Second bed is folded into ceiling and its curved underside can be seen above window.
Light fixtures and ceiling details
China cabinet in Dining Room with shower room visible at right.
Original coal fired stove in kitchen.
Observation lounge. This room is bigger than when in service due to prior owner removing two bedrooms. However, this is the only substantial change the car has seen and these bedrooms can be recreated.
Annunciator panel for calling car porters.
Today, the “Charles O. Sweetwood” waits for its chance to return to the rails and its calling of bringing people together to support and care for those who are in need. The goal of the Feather River Rail Society is to return this unique artifact to full operation and share its powerful story with the world.
A HIGHER CALLING

historic materials provided by...

Feather River Rail Society – Western Pacific RR Historical Society
Northeastern Nevada Museum
Department of Defense – National Archives
National Museum of the US Air Force
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Allan Huskins – CaliforniaZephyr.org

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The family of Charles O. Sweetwood

additional photography by Eugene John Vicknair
Dedicated to the men and women of “The Forgotten War”

Please support your local Red Cross and the restoration of the “Charles O. Sweetwood”.