

THE PROGRESS REPORT

BY

John S. Rule

Box 5.

Pierceland.

Sask.

About one thousand words

THE PROGRESS REPORT

When we were young and impatient to be off on our own, the world seemed to be a far more romantic place than it does now. Adventures lay in wait round every corner, there were dangers to be overcome, wrongs to be righted, and risks to be taken. There were spies to be captured, deserts to be crossed, and the serum to be mushed through the howling wilderness to Nome.

But somehow things just didn't work out that way. Money is not found deep in the sand of a desert island to which one has been directed by an ancient map. It is earned alas, dollar by dollar by the sweat of one's brow, by ordinary uninteresting hard work. Our adventure and excitement comes to us vicariously, on film, on TV, and in books. How monotonous and prussic our common workaday world can be, and what a relief is afforded by reading the works of those who see the same world through more romantic spectacles than most of us possess.

Last fall, finding myself working, among other things, as timekeeper in a DNR construction camp, I beguiled the leisure hours by reading the usual assortment of literature to be found around the bunkhouses. Thus the evenings would be spent in riding the range, rounding up vast herds of bawling longhorns, or organizing a posse to trail the scoundrels who held up and robbed the Deadwood stage. One evening I was on the footplate of the Rocky Mountain Rail, my sure and confident hand on the throttle, gazing steadily down the track; the mighty monster rocking and lurching as the wheel flanges bit into the humming rails on the curves; the steam drumming in the gauges, the bark of the exhaust growing louder and ever louder as she breasts the inclines; and the mournful whistle echoing across the empty canyons, telling the lonely peaks that the mail was going through. Romance! Drama! Adventure! ...and with a shudder I thought of the Progress Report.

The Progress Report! That mundane, pedestrian document, which the manual says shall be written up each day without fail. Brief, pithy, and to the point. Matter of fact, commonplace, devoid of art or beauty; serving only to relay dull information to human calculating machines. This sort of thing.....

"Project Name – ML30. Making camp site at Loon Lake. (Sandy Beach) Nov. 8, 1963 - CB101 (1/2 ton truck) to town for supplies. Foreman took CB108 (3 ton truck) to Prince Albert for material for ML30. U88 (shovel cat) pulling and piling roots on beach. Men staking, cutting brush, putting in stub posts." And so on.

At least that is what the report for November 8 should have said. But... that night as I pulled the familiar lined pad towards me, something snapped, I was under a spell. Some demonic Muse unknown to Euripides breathed down my neck as I wrote. When the mist left my mind and I came to myself, this is what was on the report.

In the midst of the trackless forest of Northern Saskatchewan, CC23 lay peacefully under the waning stars of an early November morning. As the first

feeble rays of light filtered across the eastern hills the camp woke to pulsating life.

With an ear-shattering roar CB 101 leapt forward, scattering sand and rabbit tracks, heading down the trail to Loon Lake in a desperate attempt to bring supplies for a camp of ravenous men who had tasted neither food nor drink since breakfast time half an hour before. The prayers (?) of a dozen hard bitten Pulaski wielders went with her, and a hope that she would be back with the beef roast in time for dinner.

Meanwhile CB 108 which had left the night before, forged steadily on through the wild and barren wastes of Chitek, driven by the intrepid foreman, towards its distant goal of Prince Albert and the excitement offered there by the city lights and the Department of Natural Resources, Construction Branch. Through the brightening golden haze of early dawn the foreman, alert and tense, the packet of priceless TC's on the seat beside him, guided the hurtling monster with a sure and steady hand down the endless blacktop which uncoiled before him like a roll of friction tape. After a brief stop in civilization would come the equally dangerous journey back to Sandy Beach with a cargo of valuable toilet holes. Thus the wilderness is tamed, and the desert made to blossom like a rose.

Back at camp, U88, like some prehistoric monster recalled to life after countless ages, tore and gouged at roots and rocks lining the beach, gathering them into its capacious maw and spewing them out again on to an ever increasing mountain of trash. This vast pile would later be transformed into a raging inferno, a holocaust, vomiting smoke and flamed into the leaden sky.

The men, armed to the teeth with pulaskis, shovels, and measuring tapes, had already taken up strategic positions in the primeval forest that ringed the camp. Grimly determined, working against time, they attacked the encroaching bush; or with feverish haste they dug holes in the frozen ground and installed stub posts. All day long they held to their tasks with tenacious fortitude, stopping for nothing except coffee, dinner, coffee, supper, and coffee; till at last, tired, and drawn, driven to the utmost limits of endurance, they staggered to the trailers and collapsed into their bunks, to sleep the sleep of exhaustion till morning.

Will CB 101 win through? Can CB 108 possibly get back to camp with its precious load? Will the stub posts be installed in time?

Read our next exciting episode on November 9 in "Progress Report". On sale at all news stands. Order your copy today.