

Engineer Killed in Train Wreck

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By Willie Chalfant

Engineer Charles E. Fuller, aged 65 years, was killed when his locomotive ran into a washout near Ash Creek, four or five miles north of Cartago, about 11 o'clock Saturday morning. The fireman, Tomaier, saved himself by jumping, and while somewhat hurt was expected to be back on the run this week.

It is reported from Los Angeles that the cause of the washout was the bombardment of the aqueduct by tons of boulders from the hillside above, during the torrential rains of the closing days of last week. While the aqueduct there is concrete lined, its walls gave way when its already full channel was blocked by debris. Two sections of the ditch were cut through and breaks estimated at 200 and 500 feet in width opened. The flood of water, augmented by drainage from the higher country to the west, poured toward the lake bed, and undermined the tracks. This is said to have occurred about 5 o'clock in the morning. Whether no one was aware of the condition, or through reprehensible failure, no warning was given for the benefit of the trainmen who were to come along a few hours later. Fuller, driving his engine, ran into the break, and to his death. The locomotive, tender, baggage car and one coach were wrecked. The hole across the roadbed was 14 feet deep and 300 feet across.



Photo from "*Jawbone, Sunset on the Lone Pine*" by Phil Serpico - 2006

Reports reaching Los Angeles from the aqueduct break said that the breaks in the canal were from four to twelve feet deep, that one gap was 206 feet wide and another 560 feet. A camp was promptly established on the scene, and all available men were rushed there to repair the breaks, a work which will take several days at the best.

A report in Tuesday's *Examiner* stated that the gulch washed was 50 feet deep, and that 25,000 yards of earth would be put in before relining the aqueduct would begin, Mulholland explains that debris filled the channel and overflowing water then undermined the concrete.

Allegations made by those familiar with the wash-out section of the aqueduct are that the cement wall along there is but four inches thick, and its weakness is given as the cause of the damage. Inspection of the canal at the spillway and other points southerly shows a great deal of disintegration and unquestionable weakness.

"Pop" Fuller was a veteran on tat lie, as well as in railroad service, having been on runs between Mojave and Owenyo almost from the time the road was opened. Like many other engineers, the locomotive he drove was his pride, and he is quoted as having said that if anything happened to it he hoped he would go at the same time. His wish was fulfilled. Probably he had not more than an instant's time to realize what was happening, for when his body was taken from the wreckage it was found that a part of the cab had virtually sheared away part of his skull. Escaping steam cooked his exposed flesh. The remains were sent to Mojave. A son of Fuller's lost his life in something the same way six years ago.

It appears that the scene is not visible from the highway, so passing travelers saw nothing wrong.

Article courtesy of Pam Milligan Vaughan
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