

## Train

My Navy fighter pilot buds christened me with that name after I was run over by one. No matter how hard I tried to wiggle out of that namesake, the noose just tightened. Eventually, I relented and the name stuck. Here's the story behind my name, Train:

Before I begin this story, let me tell you a little about myself first. This accident took place over thirty five years ago. Thirty five years ago, I was a different person in a different time and a different war. Vietnam was blazing, and I was caught up right in the middle of all the insanity. Along with many others, I became more monster than human. I actually thought that I could, out-drink, out-fly, out-fight, out-womanize, and out-lie any other man alive. In other words, I was a fighter pilot on steroids. To me, the war was nothing more than an arcade game, and the people were like disposable pawns. After all, I was convinced I was just "another dead man walking."

I stopped counting the people I killed when I was rudely interrupted at my 250th kill party. The USS Hancock's protestant chaplain somehow found out about this little celebration and decided to pay me a visit. Refusing to join, he beckoned me into the passageway and asked me a simple question, "How many babies have you held?"

My answer was "Probably two."

With that, he turned and left. That put a damper on my counting, but not my killings. The deadly reality game of war continued, and I enjoyed every minute.

The war ended and the Navy awarded me my first choice of assignments, F-14 flight instructor, NAS Miramar, California. By then, I had drunk and whored my loving wife away and was now a bachelor in a bachelor's paradise. That was when God stepped in.

It was a Friday night in September of 1974. My best friend, Rick Yeates, and I had just finished debriefing an early evening intercept flight and decided to clean up and head out to the "Crud" club, MCRD. This particular open Marine military club was renowned for available loose women and cheap booze. First, we had to dump the bikes and uniforms at Rick's and then cruise down there in Rick's corvette. I was to find my own way home.

Rick had the bigger bike and was leading the race out of Miramar's west gate. Only a quarter of mile down the main road was a service road that ran between several large storage buildings. Behind these storage buildings and running parallel to our road was a cargo train.

Rick's bike sparked going around the hard right turn with me following. The railroad crossing didn't have drawbars, just red flashing lights. Rick noticed the flashing lights, but they stopped only after a few flashes. Prudence being the better part of valor, Rick correctly decided to stop. I didn't see the flashing lights at all. I just saw Rick braking hard and decided to catch up with him. The lights started flashing again, and this time I saw them. Too late to

stop, I had to lean to the left to keep from tailgating Rick. My right-hand brake lever tore his sleeve as I cruised by.

Once past Rick, I noticed a very bright light off to my right. It was the train, and it was approaching faster than I could cross the track. Impact imminent, I instinctively stood up. I don't really know why I did that. Perhaps I realized I was about to die and wanted to go standing up. The train hit me. Hit me hard. So hard I knew that I had died.

Next I, being my soul, was in a black tunnel going very fast. The most impressionable feeling was one of complete and absolute serenity. No regrets, no sadness, just complete peace. There was no light at the end of my tunnel, just total blackness.

In just an instant, I was back on earth laying on my right side. Not believing I was back, I reached out to clutch earth, but all I got was coarse gravel. I didn't realize where I was until the ground started shaking. I knew the train was bearing down on me, and I was right in the middle of its tracks. I quickly learned a basic lesson in physics: no matter how fast you're traveling on a motorcycle, if a train hits you, you're going its way, which is right down the tracks.

Then there was another fierce impact, not as severe as the first, but this time from my back. My motorcycle fortunately got hung up on one of the train's anti-derailer bars and was being pushed along. The second impact was actually with the motorcycle's gas tank, which left my spinal imprint embedded along the top. Disturbingly, the collapsing gas tank blew its cap and soaked me with a full tank of gasoline.

Now I was being pushed and tumbled by the motorcycle along the track. Each sleeper, or cross track, extended an inch or two above the gravel and performed the function of a massive baseball bat by smacking my body with each pass. The gravel did the sandpaper work and shredded about five pounds of meat off my body. My right leg was quickly overcome and became stuck underneath the motorcycle. Venturing to put my hands down on the moving tracks, I pushed my upper torso on top of the bike. My right leg was hopelessly stuck under the bike and I was just waiting for it to be ground off before I could slide off the bike and track. Fortunately before my right leg was completely severed, the train finally stopped.

Rick arrived to my aid about the same time the conductors reached me. I was soaked in gasoline and I could hear the sizzle of gas on the motorcycle's hot exhaust. Rick asked me if I was okay. I spouted a couple of expletives expressing my current feelings and concerns. I was absolutely livid. I just knew I had been set up, big time. One of the conductors ran back to the train's engine car to modify his call for a morgue wagon to an ambulance.

Rick and the remaining conductor pried the motorcycle from the train, threw the wreckage to the side, and helped me stand up. The second statement from me was, "Where's the tunnel?"

Rick and the conductor looked at each other before the conductor stated that I needed help. The gas on open wounds, exposed bones and no desire to stick around prompted me to tell Rick to help me to his bike and take me to Miramar's infirmary.

That was another colossally bad decision. The cold air blowing on exposed bones was very similar to a dentist blowing cold air on a raw tooth nerve but many times more painful. The pain finally resided when the medics at the infirmary overdosed me on morphine. Amazingly, I walked away, and today I haven't one scar to brag about.

My commanding officer ordered a JAG investigation for my sake. He did this to create a permanent legal record in case I need to file future litigation against Union Pacific. This was not necessary, but I did get a new motorcycle out of the deal.

During the JAG investigation, the senior officer advised me to remove my recollections about the tunnel. He felt that such a statement might have a derogative impact on my security clearance. I told him that if he removed that portion, he could sign it himself. The report remained unabridged, and I retained my clearance. However, several men in black later interviewed me about the black tunnel. When I asked if my experience was much different than others, one of them replied somewhat startled, "Why yes. You're the only one recorded that didn't have a white light at the end, and that's why we're here. To see what kind of person you are."

I've had plenty of time to analyze, research, and ponder this experience of mine. To this day, the most significant occurrence was not the pain, nor the mental trauma of near death, but the feeling of peace. This was no doubt the turning point of my life. I realized that there is something beyond death, and I was given a second chance. How I spend this second chance is still being decided.

May this peace be with you,

*Steve Hendry*

P.S. If you stumbled across this story on the net and haven't a clue where it came from, it originated from my website, [www.stevhendry.com](http://www.stevhendry.com). You're welcome to use this story however you wish; however, please refrain from adding any personal edits and comments within the body of the text. Also, I request that you don't take any part out of context.