

TRANSCRIPT

Mail By Rail

[sound of catcher arm snatching mailbag off of crane (three times)]

Tom Clifton:

The engineer would give you a certain whistle that let you know that the local was coming up.

Harold Coffman:

Listen for the long whistle on the train. BOOM! Take it off, throw it to the pouchman for distribution.

Tom Clifton:

Some people may think of us as railroad employees, but that's not true because we had to take a stiff, competitive exam that the post office put out for Railway Postal Clerks – RPO Clerks. And, if we passed it, we got the job, you know.

Harold Coffman:

You had to know your state, you had to know it 97% correct.

Don Shenefelt:

I heard it said that any RPO Clerk that was worth his salt was good for 10,000 post offices in his distribution area. One or the other direction of his distribution he would have to have a working knowledge of 10,000 post offices.

Tom Clifton:

Well, the doorman had to call in each pouch as they came in. Well, he'd cut it short. In other words he'd say something like, "Florida dies with a two from chic seven."

Don Shenefelt:

St. Albans and Monclo, St. Albans and Whitesville.

Tom Clifton:

76 pouch on the New York and Washington 110.

Don Shenefelt:

Going on further, you'd get Hagers and Roanoke at Waynesboro.

Tom Clifton:

Jack and Tampa

Don Shenefelt:

Durban and Ronceverte.

Tom Clifton:

The Dot and Ploka.

Don Shenefelt:

Ash and Lou.

Tom Clifton:

The Welch and Jenkin Jones.

Don Shenefelt:

From there on, Clifton Forge – you'd get Richmond and Clifton Forge.

Harold Coffman:

Suffolk and Dan.

Winston Lark:

Oh, Okay.

Harold Coffman:

Used to be, didn't it?

Don Shenefelt:

Nelson County's right out of Charlottesville.

Winston Lark:

You don't lose a whole lot of time, you just throw the name out or the address out, and everybody, as we're still working – somebody is going to try to figure it out. And so this was addressed to "Mr. Hot Dog, Washington, DC." And so we were all curious, "where in the world is Mr. Hot Dog?," because we broke the mail down. And so finally, before the trip was out, somebody said, "Oh, that's Chief Justice Frankfurter." And so we sent it in to the Chief Justice. That's what we decided it was, but somebody wrote on there, "Mr. Hot Dog."

Tom Clifton:

Most of the fellows, I'd say 99% of them, were all for one and one for all. Because anybody that was stuck – if somebody else got up on his mail, he'd go and help the fellow that was stuck. Because nobody sat down and rested, or laid asleep or anything else unless everybody was up. Nobody stopped to eat until everybody could eat. And it was just that, "I help you and you help me 'till we're done."

Winston Lark:

1977, that was the last working mail train that ever rode the rails. It was a glorious affair full of tears and all like that. But I think if the trains were running today, I would still be on there, and I'm sure some of the others would be,

because we were very, very dedicated. We loved that job. But that was the last run. And that's a sad story.

[sound of train whistle]