Fred Olds Interview Transcript

Fred Olds: My name is Fred Olds and I was a railway postal clerk on the St. Louis Railway Post Office from 1958 to 1967. And I ran basically on the night trains as a junior clerk, leaving St. Louis on Train 32 about 7:20 in the evening and arriving in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania at about eight o’clock in the morning. That would be Eastern Time.

INTERVIEWER: Were there any other rail lines that you worked on?
Fred Olds: No. I ran on a couple of others, but only because there was a strike during the ‘60s. And we still ran on the Pennsylvania cars but on a different line.

INTERVIEWER: And what are some of the locations that you traveled to?
Fred Olds: Well the Pitts and St. Louis runs through Effingham, Illinois. We stopped at Effingham -- we stopped at East St. Louis; Effingham; Terre Haute, Indiana; Indianapolis, Indiana; Richmond, Indiana; Dayton, Ohio; Columbus, Ohio; and then Pittsburgh. Those were the stops on the line, the connections we had with other railway post office mail.

INTERVIEWER: What made you want to become a railway postal office clerk?
Fred Olds: Well it was a good -- it paid better than anything else I had. They had a good layoff. A lot of your work you did at home because you had to prepare labels, you had to study for exams and so forth. And so you could be home while you did those things. And then you work long hours when you were gone on your working assignment and then you had several days off in between. So it was like a little mini-vacation between your long periods of work. I liked that. That was attractive to me.

INTERVIEWER: And what was your normal schedule?
Fred Olds: My normal schedule after I became a regular, of course, was -- you mean days on, days off?
INTERVIEWER: Yes.
Fred Olds: Well originally I would work five days from Indianapolis to Pittsburgh and back. And then you’d have two runs where you would go to Pittsburgh and then all the way back to St. Louis and then back to Indianapolis. It was a seven-day tour. Let’s see. I have to think back. Yes, we would run six trips, and then the seventh trip, we would go all the way around. And we had westerns runs where we would go and head out of Indianapolis and we’ll go to St. Louis and turn right around and come back on the evening train. So you’d have a few hours off and then you come back and you just kept making that little turnaround. It was the short end of the run. And, of course, you had to try to get some rest in between, but you just did the best you could.

INTERVIEWER: How many days off did you have after your seven-day run?
Fred Olds: Well it was -- they were all scheduled on seven weeks because there are seven days in a week and a seven-week schedule. I’m trying to think. Because I run as a basic -- called a basic crew -- out of Indianapolis where you would run with six different crews out of St. Louis, and each night you would catch a different crew. So it was kind of different that way. We would run -- let’s see. You make three roundtrips in one week and then you’d be off a week and then you make three more roundtrips and then you’d be off a week. I wish I had known you’re going to ask these questions. I could have maybe determined the schedule a little more -- I had it more on the tip of my tongue. And then in the seventh trip, you’ll make the trip all the way from Indianapolis to Pittsburgh and then all the way back to St. Louis and then turn right round and come back to Indianapolis that night. So that was a long trip and it was tiring, but you had good layoffs. I’d have to do some figuring to give you the exact schedule, and I’m not sure I can even figure it out. But then after I was on that run a while, I did another run which was from St. Louis. You’d start at St. Louis and go all way to Pittsburgh, lay over there or get a rest, and then go all the way back to St. Louis. And you did two trips a week on that one. And then you’d have off a week and then you do two more. And then you -- there was six. That crew worked six days. On Sunday night, they did a night run. It was a little different setup. But the St. Louis crew only run six days. And so that’s two trips a week, two trips for one week. We have only two trips for a week and then it worked out that way.

INTERVIEWER: And earlier you said that you were a junior clerk. What types of job did a junior clerk have on the rail cars?
Fred Olds: Well the junior clerk he didn’t know anything. When you first get on a train you just dump pouches and you hang sacks and you tie them out and store them in the storage room. You’re just kind of a gofer and they assign you a study scheme for whatever states you were running through. Basically as a substitute, you would just initially learn the states you ran through because that was the most useful schemes. When you get to be a regular and you had a regular run, the same every trip, you work the same mails, then you would have like further on Pennsylvania, three sections of Pennsylvania or Missouri, Texas, Kansas, and midwestern states. So as a junior
clerk, you just more or less work wherever they assigned you and you would work initial bundles of mail where you could pick up the big towns and stuff like that because you didn’t know any and just really distribution. So that’s basically what you did. And as a sub, you were just kind of a flunky. Until after a while or maybe after a year, you’d kind of get some scheme knowledge of distribution of the different states and you will finally become a useful clerk. But as a sub, you went wherever they sent you on several different trains. So they would just send you orders through the mail and you would report. If you were supposed to head out to St. Louis, you’d be down there and report or if you were supposed to head out of Indianapolis, you’d go over there and report. So that’s pretty much the way it was.

INTERVIEWER: And we’re leading into my next question with your previous answer. For any one of the jobs that you worked, could you walk me through a typical day on the railcar starting from when you first went in until getting off at the end of the run?

Fred Olds: Yes, I can do that. Well typically when I headed out of St. Louis which was most of the time, as a regular on the road. A typical day on a summer day the -- I don’t know if you’re familiar with St. Louis terminal, but Union Station had a big canopy, a round grooved canopy over it. And they’ve got extremely hot in they are in July and August, and of course, there’s no air movement. The trains backed in and pulled out. And we had two hours’ advance time. We’d go to work at 5:20 and the train didn’t leave until 7:20. So we had two hours advance where the St. Louis post office would send mail down for you to work after you got all the sacks on and the pouches hung and all your headers in and everything. And you work under that canopy for two hours and it was hot so everybody would be sweating and we would leave.

We always waited for the Wabash train to come in from the West, from Kansas City, and their passengers would continue on in our train, Train 32. And so by the time the train pulled out everybody was just really pouring off heat. And we would pull out of the station at 7:20 if the Wabash was on time for the connection, and we would go past Busch Stadium and then enter a tunnel that went underneath part of the city just south of the Gateway Arch where it is now. And then we’d exit the tunnel and come out onto McKinley Bridge and -- MacArthur Bridge, I should say and that breath of fresh air that would come in off the river was -- everybody was in the doorway trying to get a few cool breezes, the effects of a cool breeze. And then we would stop briefly at East St. Louis and pick up mail and then we’d start rolling and once we get rolling, we’d cool off quite a bit and stop at Effingham and pick up mail from the Chic and Memphis. They always give us some bags stuffed full of mail and then we’d work that up as fast as we could and then stop at Terre Haute and connect with the Chic and Evens, and they have a bunch of mail for us. And then in Indianapolis, of course, we pick up a lot of mail and then the basic crew would get on there. They would exchange with exchange clerks there and then continue onto Richmond, pick up mail there [indiscernible]. We’d go onto Dayton and pick up mail there and Columbus. And then after we left Columbus, we didn’t stop anymore; briefly at Steubenville, Ohio, but that was pretty much it.

I then we just worked like crazy to get caught up, and everybody worked really, really hard so you could sit down towards the last half hour of your trip. And then nobody sits down until everybody was done. I mean you always work. If you got done and tied out, you would go over and help the next guy. And then we had a lot of card players who like to play penny ante poker and those guys really worked hard. They wanted to sit down and play some cards. So we would typically -- the sun would come up about after you get close to Steubenville and then you’d stop there briefly and then go on into Pittsburgh. And, of course, to the hilly part of extreme eastern of Western Pennsylvania, the train would go pretty slow and then you kind of snake around the hills and stuff. So that’s pretty much the trip. We get to Pittsburgh and pull in the station there and unload the car because everything was tied out and the sacks and the pouches and we’d get rid of all that mail, put it off on the tracks, and then we’d go out and eat something before we went to what we call the do -- hi, are you still there?

INTERVIEWER: I’m still here.

Fred Olds: Okay. I hit a button down on my ear. And we would get off the train. And after unloading, we’d go eat and typically we would stop at a restaurant called the Dinner Bell which was on the way to this dormitory and we’d have some breakfast and then go on up and go to bed for the day. Then we’d report -- I believe we reported about 11:15 or so at night and wait for the New York and Pitts to come in and then our RPO would connect onto it for the return trip.

INTERVIEWER: Was there any one job that you liked working the most out of the others?

Fred Olds: Well it was enjoyable to work all the way around because different assignments required a little more schemes, but I think I like -- I worked in Pennsylvania and Texas three sections of each state, and once you get those learned and down pat, it was just steady work. I’ve kind of liked -- I was a registry clerk for a while and that
was kind of interesting because there’s a lot of variety to the job because you had to keep track of the registered
and dispatch them to the zips and places they were going to, and you had to work a little mail on the side and you
help out wherever you could. But I kind of liked that job pretty well.
INTERVIEWER: And was there anything that you ever disliked about any of your positions or jobs and this could be
just something small that you just brushed off to the side?
Fred Olds: No, truthfully, I just enjoyed the work so much because it was a camaraderie about the postal clerks
that was just quite like being in the army where you depended on each other and there was just a friendship there
that was pretty good. I mean it just made the work enjoyable. Of course, you always had a few rotten apples that
were kind of hard to work with, but by and large, 99 percent of the guys were just really nice, hardworking guys
and had families and just typical workmates.
INTERVIEWER: What type of railcar did you work on?
Fred Olds: I always worked in the 60-foot car, 60-foot RPO, and that was the biggest they had. And we had 10, 11,
or 12 guys in there who just all had something to do. There wouldn’t be anybody sitting around. It’s just that
everybody was busy and that’s pretty much all I can say. I can’t remember any. But the only answer that I can
think of that happened, it wasn’t any fighting or anything but we had one fellow and we called him Prez because
his name was like the president, like a former president and he was really, really quiet. He’s an African-American
guy, and he’s very nice, and he was very, very quiet. During the 14-hour trip over to Pittsburgh, he would hardly
say a word. He just worked hard and did his job. And I think one night when we had a crew got on in Indianapolis.
We had a new basic crew got on there. The St. Louis guys just stayed on there all the way to Pittsburgh, but they
change crews in Indianapolis and got five new guys on there. And they had one guy on the pouch rack who was
really lippy and he was just giving Prez a hard time. Prez never said a word. And finally he had enough of it and he
told this guy. He said, “If you don’t shut up, I’m going to put an ou-ee knot [sounds like] on your head.” And this
guy started, “What’s ou-ee hey knot?” And he said, “That’s a knot that when people see it they’re going to say, ou-
ee look at that knot on that guy’s head.” That was about the closest that I got to any disturbances on the train.
Everybody worked good together.
INTERVIEWER: When you worked on the railways, do you remember what your starting salary was?
Fred Olds: I think I started at $1.67 an hour.
INTERVIEWER: And do you remember what your ending salary on the railway was?
Fred Olds: Oh geez, no, I don’t remember. I think we got up over $2, two something an hour. I can’t remember
exactly because I have to go back and look at my old pay stub, so I really can’t tell you, but it was steady. Every
two weeks, you get that paycheck and that was one of the features I liked about it. I never had to worry about
being on strike. The railroad guys did, but not the postal guys. And so I could count on paying my bills.
INTERVIEWER: And -- but you remember about the pay, do you believe that it was fair for the amount of work that
you had to do?
Fred Olds: I had no argument about it. I knew what it was when I went in and I was just happy to have a job. Well
it got better after a while. I mean the pay got more equitable to other industries, but I had no argument about it.
The layoff was good. The guys I worked with were really good. It was just a good life. I wouldn’t trade those years
for anything.
INTERVIEWER: What were you doing before you came onto the railway?
Fred Olds: I drove a gas truck, a propane gas truck, and then I had a few near mishaps on it and I might have
gotten killed if I had stayed on that thing because it’s a dangerous job, a propane gas truck. So I was glad to have
this railway job.
INTERVIEWER: What did you typically carry with you and your grip while you were on trip?
Fred Olds: Well you carry a change of clothes. You always had something a little nicer than what you worked in
and you carry a second pair of shoes. You have, of course, your headers for your distribution. Your weapon. I
always carried a weapon. Labels and the stamp. You had to have a stamp for identifying your labels and your
lunch, of course. Pretty much a change of underwear. Stuff like that. Just basic stuff. You didn’t have much room
and you didn’t want to pack. You had to carry your grip with you. It’s kind of the more you took with you, the
more you had to carry. So you just travel as light as possible.
INTERVIEWER: What was the longest trip you ever worked?
Fred Olds: Well we had some floods there in Ohio. I remember one trip we made and they detoured us up
through -- we got to Columbus and we had to bypass Dayton, I think. We had a detour up to Bel-Aire or
somewhere up north. And then I think they made a big loop around the track which washed out, I think, and then
back around. So that trip probably lasted 20 hours, maybe. I'm guessing about 20 hours. And of course, naturally, when we got to St. Louis everything was out of schedule and that was probably the longest trip I made.

INTERVIEWER: And while you were working as a railway post office clerk, did you have a family?

Fred Olds: Oh yes, yes. I always had a family. And I remember once in a while we would get in to St. Louis, there was a train, I think Train 30. I ran in 32 and 31 and those were the trains I worked on. But there was a Train 30 going east out of the St. Louis that left just about the time we pulled in from the east. The 31 would pull into the station and 30 would probably be ready to take off. But once in a while I had to deadhead to Effingham because I live in St. Elmo which was the closest head out like I can deadhead from. And once in a while, we would get in there a little early and you would have time to make a run right over there in couple of tracks over to catch 30. In that way you'd get home about five hours earlier than if you have to wait for the evening train. And once in a while we'd make it and I had a little sign in my grip that I hold up to the window. When we went through St. Elmo, my wife would be on the porch and she'd look in case I made that train and she would know whether I did or not. I hold a sign up in the window, and if she saw the sign with the big X on it she'd say, "Oh, he made it." So she had to come over and get me in the car. Otherwise, she'd pick me up at night. So that was kind of a sidelight.

INTERVIEWER: And how did you cope with leaving your family behind on long trips?

Fred Olds: Well in general like anything you'd do what you have to do. You just get used to it. It's like a soldier. He goes away in the military and he's gone for a while. You just kind of suck it up and say, "Oh this is the way it is and I can't do anything about it." So I'll just make the best of it." And that's pretty much what we did. And of course when you were home, you can catch up on all the stuff that had to wait until you get there, home maintenance and stuff like that.

INTERVIEWER: And how did your family cope while you were away on long trips, like what was their attitude towards your job?

Fred Olds: Oh well it paid the bills and you were grateful to have -- you just made what made do. The attitude was, well, that's the way it is and so we'll just do the best we can. It wasn't like you argue about, well, I wish you had a different job or something like that. It was nice that you can depend on that paycheck and you knew when you were going to be home. It was worse when you were a sub because in a minute or so you could be gone because someone got sick and they need you to show up to fill the job or fill a spot, but pretty much I think everybody just pretty much accepted the fact that you're going to be gone and when you get home, well, you'll be there.

INTERVIEWER: And what were some of the things that your family did to keep themselves busy while you were away?

Fred Olds: Well the children were not a problem and they had other, you know, grandparents and stuff and just filled in the time. You just pretty much adjusted, I guess you'd say, to the situation.

INTERVIEWER: What are some of your fondest memories of working on the railroad?

Fred Olds: Well just the fact that everybody had the same goal. You want to get the mail out. You didn't want to go stuck. Everybody worked together and cooperated with each other. Something you don't always see these days is you don't see a lot of co-workers having an attitude of, "I'm going to do just the least amount I can get by." But that wasn't the way it was. Of course, there was a little incentive too because we had a clerk in charge who was the boss. He had great, great power and he could write an evaluation on you and you could be dismissed.

As a matter of fact, there's a little story that goes with that. When I first started out it was right after my birthday in April, I got assigned to the Pitts and St. Louis, and of course, each clerk in charge you worked on would evaluate you, and of course, as the new clerk I didn’t know anything. I just did the best I could. Well I got a letter in the mail when I was going out that night on 32. I was deadheading over from Effingham to Indianapolis where I would start my clerk job. And I got this letter in the mail that said, "Do you know that I like [indiscernible] and all this?" It's just a derogatory letter that really made me feel like I was worthless and I was moping about it and I got on the train and I'm pouting about it all the way over to Terre Haute. Well another kid, another guy a young clerk, he was a sub too. He got on at Terre Haute and he saw me and sat down beside me. He said, "What's the he matter, Fred? So why are you looking so down in the mouth?" I said, "Well, I got this letter today, and I thought I probably won't see you again. I'll probably be fired after this trip." And I showed to him the letter and he said, "Oh don't worry about it." He says, "I got a drawer of all those things. They just sent them out as a matter of rule." So I quit worrying and they didn't fire me. I started to get smarter about the job and what to do and did well. I don't know if that has anything to do with the question you asked me.
INTERVIEWER: No that’s fine. We are welcome to any stories that you can remember. Do you still keep in touch with any of the former clerks?
Fred Olds: Yes, I have a newsletter that comes out periodically that keeps in touch with some of the surviving clerks. And we keep in touch pretty much through that where you write in stuff and what are you doing. A lot of times it might be health issues or some trip you took that was special, just the newsy stuff, and they put it in the newsletter. They call it the Mobile Letter. And I think there’s two or three of the stores around the country that’s still surviving, but one by one they’re dying out, but we still get one now and then. You contribute a little few bucks every now and then to help pay the cost. Actually we have a meeting. We meet annually in Terre Haute and eat together and just rehash old times and recall memories and stuff like that, and this comes up next month as a matter of fact, in September. And there’s one clerk in the area that I used to work near. He worked in Champaign. I worked in Urbana. And he’s still around. We don’t really talk because we never ran around in the same crew. We never got that close.
As far as stories, there was one story that was kind of funny. Because each crew had somebody to carry the coffee; they carry the coffee because you just -- on the night line you really had to have a coffee. The guy that carried the coffee -- because he had to carry the grounds and like the sugar and the powdered creamer and everything so you had your grip and all your other equipment. So this is an added burden to carry. So, one trip, he made the coffee and took it off and the guys would come up and he’d pour them a cup. Of course, cream and sugar you took just the least amount you can take. And this one kid he poured in the cream and then he put in six tablespoons of sugar and he started to drink it. And the guy that carry the bucket of the coffee can, he says, “Aren’t you going to stir that?” He said, “No.” He says, “I don’t like it too sweet.” So that was kind of funny. Put all that sugar in and didn’t stir it. But that was just a joke.
INTERVIEWER: Did the post office ever issue you anything either for your safety or for the position?
Fred Olds: For your safety. I don’t follow you on that one.
INTERVIEWER: Do they ever provide you with any type of supplies for the job?
Fred Olds: Well you have a scheme book that you have to keep up to date and they send you updates and information periodically and they issued a weapon and a badge. Outside of that, they didn’t get any other, you had a supply of labels for your job. You had facing slips. You had to stamp those up. You had to provide your own cards to study and you make up your own headers. Basically that was it. They didn’t give you any equipment.
INTERVIEWER: Did you ever experience any type of bad or dangerous situation while on the railway?
Fred Olds: I’d say I was very lucky. We never were in a wreck. I mean we never went off the rail or anything. We did have some fatalities. A train hit a car one night and killed the occupants and also down near [indiscernible] we hit a pickup truck, farmer who tried to cross the tracks, places where the train really, really went fast, and we were doing 70 miles an hour which by some standard not very fast, but pretty fast for us. It was certain straight aways where they could really make up some time. And when you hit a car at that speed, it’s always fatal. But as far as wrecks, fortunately, I had never been involved in that. So I don’t have any stories.
INTERVIEWER: Did you ever hear any of the other clerks’ stories when they experienced a dangerous or a bad situation? And this can be from when you were a post office clerk or just something that occurred before you came along the road.
Fred Olds: I really can’t tell you. I don’t recall, just a little hearsay stuff, but I don’t remember any of the stories that I can give you any detailed information about. It wouldn’t be any accurate. So I’d rather not touch on that because I couldn’t give you any specific stuff.
INTERVIEWER: Did you ever faced or witness any type of racial discrimination as a railway post office clerk?
Fred Olds: That I never did. There were very few African American clerks. We had maybe a dozen that I ran with, and I never heard any racial slurs or any derogatory stuff. There was never any racial issues not that I ever saw or ever witnessed or even heard about. You were just another clerk and you had a job to do and you just did the best you could and as fast as you could. So I considered myself fortunate that we did have a good relationship in that way. We didn’t have any of that tension.
INTERVIEWER: Were you ever a member of any type of outside organization such as a union or club that was affiliated with the railway postal clerks?
Fred Olds: Yes, I was always a member of the union, postal union from the day one. So I was always a member of the union.
INTERVIEWER: And what types of activities did the union do?
Fred Olds: Well the only thing the union that I can consider that was of any benefit was the fact that they have a healthcare plan which I was in for a long, long time. Then finally the post office come up with multiple healthcare plans which you would have a local access to local healthcare plans where the postal union healthcare plan was based out in New Hampshire, I believe. So it was kind of a hassle to -- a lot of communication back and forth if you had some kind of a claim. So once they come out with the local healthcare plans, then we opted to go with that. But as far as the union having any programs, I can’t think of anything special that I can say was any special benefit to me other than the fact that I knew that if I got unfairly treated that I would have somebody to go to bat for me. That was the biggest thing with the union.

INTERVIEWER: Was there anything that you ever wanted to change about your position with the railway mail service?

Fred Olds: Well that’s a good question. There was ... a couple of things. The weather, of course, was a big factor in your job. In the winter time you would have loose windows and drafty doors and it was always cold in the dead of winter. And in the summer it was extremely hot. If I could have made some improvements, well, for one would be to have an air conditioning in the car which if coaches were air conditioned why couldn’t the postal car be air conditioned. And also the heat, we had good heat, steam heat. It was always attached near the engine so we always had steam heat, but the car is always very, very drafty and you had the side doors and indoors and there was a lot of places that the air will get in. And once you get rolling 60 to 70 miles an hour, the wind would blow through there and it will be cool. But as far as the setup of the car, I don’t know how they could have improved it any to accommodate handling the mail. The only thing would be to make a bigger car and I don’t think they could have done that because it was just logistically impossible.

INTERVIEWER: What do you miss the most about being a railway post office clerk?

Fred Olds: What’s -- say it again.

INTERVIEWER: What do you miss the most about being --

Fred Olds: What do I miss the most? Well the layoff for one thing because I’m retired now so I have a lot of layoff. But I really enjoyed the layoffs. You could take a little mini-vacation during the time you’re off while if you had a week job and just had the weekends, you were pretty limited. But with the layoff you can kind of -- you would have a lot of flexibility and your work at home because you had so many hours you could work at home. You had to prepare labels. You had to study for exams and make updates to your book and you were allotted a certain amount of time, paid time for that. So you could say, “Well I’ll do that next week or something.” You could get flexibility when you did your work at home. So that gave you a lot of leeway and I liked that. That was one of the best parts. It was the layoff.

INTERVIEWER: And going into the last question. Is there any other information that you would like to make accessible to researchers about your experience or position with the railway post office? And this can be anything from interesting sites that you saw, weird things you found in the mail, or funny stories that you remember.

Fred Olds: Well I remember seeing the Gateway Arch go up slowly as they built it because we would come down out of Collinsville and down into the riverbanks and you could see the progress going up. And also Busch Stadium when they built it, you can see it going up. Let’s see other sites... I can’t think right off at the top of my head. One thing the crews I worked in would usually have one guy who would pick up food for your trip coming back. When you left home, of course you took your own lunch, but coming back from Pittsburgh the basic crew and usually one guy would buy groceries for everybody and you’d kick in two or three bucks, and he would buy a loaf of bread and some lunch meat and cheese and cake or something like that and bring it to the car to the mail car. And then two times during the trip, you’d sit down and have food because you always had coffee so that was handy too.

INTERVIEWER: You guys ever played pranks to one another?

Fred Olds: Yes, well there was a few. We have one clerk in charge, believe it or not and he was a cut up and he had a couple of little tricks up his sleeve. Well one was with the old straw brooms. We always had a straw broom in the car with a big thick handle on it. And he would wait until everyone was working really hard and paying attention to their mail distribution and he would get this broom and put his foot on the bristles and bend the handle up. And then he would say, “Don’t shoot!” And then he’d let that thing hit the floor, and of course, the sound was just like a shot. And, boy, you talked about people waking up. It wasn’t too funny, but he got a big kick out of it. That was one little anecdote. Let’s see. Of course there was a lot who drank who had bottles in their grip and they’ll just sneak a sniff every now and then. And of course you could smoke in the car. You couldn’t do that nowadays, but some of them smoke old stogies that were pretty raunchy smelling, but, oh gee whiz.
INTERVIEWER: Did you ever see any interesting things go through the mail something that we may not transport today?
Fred Olds: Well baby chicks were the ones that’s kind of interesting. They’d always have those things in the springtime and they would put them the tent put in. They called it tent put in which was a storage area in the mail car and they were really kind of interesting. There was a story about one day they were supposed to put them off in Effingham and somebody forgot them until the train was starting to move out and the train was going along I guess about 10 miles an hour. It wasn’t really going really fast, but the clerk that was responsible for it he grabbed the mail, tied it up with this rope and a string, and it was two together, stuck on top of each other and he laid down on the doorway and held them up the door and just laid them so they would just kind of skid along the platform. I guess they got there. But that was about the only thing. I can’t think of anything unusual. Well there were turtles. We got turtles once in a while. We would joke about that then passing the turtles out and it was in a little cardboard box up in Pittsburgh and they were passing them like a chain gang and you would pass the bags and mail down and out the door through the railway cart there. And someone said, “Hey, these turtles don’t have any tails.” “Oh come on, what are you talking about?” “Yeah it says right there. Details to follow.” So that was kind of a funny anecdote. I can’t think of anything else that’s unusual. They would have bodies, but they were always over in the storage car. They weren’t in the mail car, but they’d have bodies over at the storage car every now and then they would transport. I don’t know. We have one guy and he said he wouldn’t go over. He was supposed to get some mail that I was to bring it over. And then he said, “I won’t go over there because there’s a dead body in there.” So different people did act different.
INTERVIEWER: Is there anything else that you would like to share with researchers about the railway mail service?
Fred Olds: No, I can’t think of anything else that would be of interest. Pretty much, I guess, personal stuff. I know I initially got interested in the railway mail service was when the clerk who lived in the same town I did and he kept telling me, “You want to go out for it?” So I took the test at the post office and I applied for the job and they sent me all my equipment and everything. And they sent me a pass to go over to Indianapolis to pick up the equipment. So I went over there and got it. I came back home and no sooner I had gotten started lining up to study a scheme and I got a letter that said, “Oops, sorry. We had just double checked and the test you took at the railway post office wasn’t the one that we accept. So you have to take it again, the right one.” Which meant that I have to turn all my stuff back in and I had to wait about four months and then I had to go to Chicago that time. And I had to go up there for six months. And I hated that. So that delayed my entry in the railway postal service for about -- are you still there?
INTERVIEWER: I’m still here.
Fred Olds: Okay. I keep hitting a button with my ear. And that’s pretty much it.