

Your Postal Podcast 66th Edition Transcript – November 2013

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Richard Watkins: Welcome to Your Postal Podcast. This is Richard Watkins of U.S. Postal Service Corporate Communications. In this November 2013 edition, we'll speak to a surviving World War II Medal of Honor recipient who also is a postal retiree. And you'll learn how the Postal Service is helping "muggles" bring a little magic to their mail.

Medal of Honor Segment

It was 1944 and George Sakato was on the frontlines in France when his platoon was pinned down by enemy fire. He charged the enemy stronghold, which encouraged his platoon on to a victory against the odds. For his actions he was awarded the nation's highest honor. He was recently featured on the new Medal of Honor Forever Stamp sheet. David Rupert was at a ceremony held in Mr. Sakato's honor at the Denver Post Office and has this story.

David Rupert: They first served America in the U.S. Military. Then they served their country in the U.S. Postal Service. It's a fact -- USPS is one of the nation's largest employers of veterans. Over the years, hundreds of thousands of vets have worked by our sides,

One of these veterans, George Sakato of Denver, is an extraordinary example of service. He's one of 12 surviving recipients recently featured on the Medal of Honor Forever Stamp sheet. He spent 27 years in postal employment before retiring in 1980.

He was recently invited to Washington, D.C., to unveil the stamp at the WWII Memorial on the National Mall. But before his trip, Sakato was invited to stop by his old Post Office, Denver's Stockyards Station, to meet postal employees and others for a proper sendoff.

Denver Postmaster Mark Talbott opened wide the doors for the returning hero.

Mark Talbott: It's a great honor for the Denver Post Office and the employees of the Denver, CO stations. He's come back here and shared his stories, shared his friendship, shared his humbleness. And with the turnout today, it's very obvious that he's a wonderful man who served his country and the United States Postal Service.

Rupert: He was surprised to hear that one of Denver's employees would be depicted on the stamp sheet.

Talbott: We realized that not many of them that are still alive. To have one of them depicted on the stamp and from the Denver Post Office, the entire Denver community, the postal community was ecstatic.

Rupert: Area media converged on the station along with several employees who had worked with George Sakato. Jerry Heren was a fellow clerk with him in the 70s, and the two have maintained a friendship ever since.

Jerry Heren: He always worked hard. He's real laid-back. There's not a mean bone in that guy's body. Funny. He's humble (chuckles). Definitely, definitely humble.

Rupert: Gilbert Villaviza worked with Sakato for 15 years. For a long time, the battle deeds were unknown to others. George just put his head down and went to work.

Gilbert Villaviza: He was a real straight guy -- a good one. He took good care of us.

Rupert: George Sakato's story goes far beyond the postal employee who's also a war hero, as if that isn't enough. He's a Japanese American, and he joined the military instead of reporting to detainment camps. He fought alongside other Japanese Americans in the 442nd Regimental Combat Team. George Sakato has a fond recall of his days at the Post Office.

Sakato: Lots of memories. Days that we get together. Good friends. Camaraderie. We always had competition with the carriers, though. Us clerks, they had to get out there in the snow. We'd say, "How's the snow out there? How's the weather out there?"

Rupert: Before reporting to Washington, D.C., he planned to carry the proud banner of both his career at the Postal Service and his military pedigree.

Sakato: Yes, I'm going to represent postal employees *and* the Medal of Honor recipients.

Rupert: Western Area Vice President Drew Aliperto was on hand at the ceremony and was moved by Sakato's attitude.

Drew Aliperto: It's really an inspiration just to read what he did to save his friends in battle and the guys he was fighting alongside. It's really remarkable. It's an inspiration to be able to work with people like this and know people like this. To know that just regular guys that when duty calls, they step up. You know, we've got a lot of that in the Postal Service, too. When conditions are rough and we need someone to give that discretionary, extraordinary effort and we get it. That's great. Because we're here to serve the public and we do it with integrity and humility. It's just part of being a postal employee. He's the epitome -- at the highest level -- of what it's about. It's very humbling to be part of it.

Rupert: Mr. Sakato was helped out of the Post Office to his awaiting car.

Talbott: Thank you so very much for coming in here. You have a great trip over the weekend, all right?

Sakato: Thank you, thank you.

Rupert: He turned to the gathered employees, gave a salute and some final words of cheer.

Sakato: Everybody get back to work! (laughter).

Harry Potter Forever Stamps Segment

Watkins: Along with the traditional holiday stamps available to customers each winter, the Postal Service is offering a little extra magic this season. Peter Hass is here to explain.

Peter Hass: The world came to know the magic of Harry Potter thanks to a series of seven best-selling books, which spawned eight blockbuster films. Now, his wizardly world comes alive again on 20 Forever Stamps -- sure to be sought after by fans both young and young-at-heart.

The unique souvenir stamp booklet features highlights from the Warner Bros. movies chronicling Harry Potter's adventures and was unveiled on November 19th in an Orlando, Florida, ceremony.

Among the many "muggles" (or humans) who took the opportunity to pre-order the stamp booklets online at USPS-dot-com was Carolina del Busto, a recent college graduate and freelance writer from Miami, Florida -- and she could barely contain her excitement.

Carolina Del Busto: This is the first, like, I don't really collect stamps. So this will be the first kind of like stamps to add to like my Harry Potter collection because of Harry Potter. So yeah, I had to like pre-order them because I needed to get my hands on them and make sure they don't sell out.

Hass: An avowed Harry Potter fanatic, del Busto said her fascination with the characters in the books came the year the movies were released, when she was 11 years old. She said the stamps will be added to her vast collection of various Potter memorabilia and characters depicted in the stamps, including Harry, Hermione, Hagrid and Dumbledore, add to the appeal.

del Busto: I think they're really great images to choose from, especially the Hermione one -- she's obviously one of my favorite characters. I think with these stamps, what they're doing especially like myself being someone of the older generations of Harry Potter fans who've been there from the beginning, versus 10- or 13-year-olds now discovering the world -- I think it's actually going to give us a bit of nostalgia and like, you know, for me it's going to make me really happy to have that as part of my Harry Potter collection and happy that so many years after the books came out -- I think it's been 15 years now -- so, 15 years after the book came out, you know, 12 years after the first movie came out, that there's still, people still care about Harry Potter and they're still circulating things, and new things about it. So, you know, it's not just the old toys or the old things that are on the market, it's new things that are coming out and just keeping this world and the fandom alive. I think that for me, that's what I love about it.

Hass: The Postal Service printed five million Harry Potter Forever Stamp Souvenir Booklets and they are available while supplies last at selected Post Offices nationwide. Harry Potter fans are advised the best way to obtain their own souvenir booklets is to order them online at USPS-dot-com.

News Roundup

Watkins: And now here's a roundup of recent Postal Service news. From an article in *USA Today* -- Amazon.com unveiled a new partnership with the Postal Service to deliver online orders from the world's largest Internet retailer on Sunday for the first time. The service started in the Los Angeles and New York metropolitan areas and Amazon plans to expand it to a large portion of the U.S. population in 2014, including Dallas, Houston, New Orleans and Phoenix.

Quoting Postmaster General Patrick Donahoe, "It will certainly help. The fastest-growing segment is the package business. The future of package delivery is a seven-day-a-week schedule. We've got the capacity to do it."

Finally, the Postal Service ended the 2013 fiscal year with a net loss of \$5 billion. This marks the seventh consecutive year in which the Postal Service incurred a net loss, highlighting the need to continue to capitalize on growth opportunities, reduce costs, and enact comprehensive legislation to provide a long-term solution to the agency's financial challenges.

Even though the Postal Service has implemented a number of strategies that resulted in \$15 billion in annual expense reductions since the Postal Accountability and Enhancement Act was passed in 2006, the combination of onerous mandates in existing law and continued First-Class Mail volume declines threaten the Postal Service's financial viability.

Thanks for listening to *Your Postal Podcast*. Now, we'd like to hear from you. Please email your feedback and story ideas to YourPostalPodcast@USPS.com.

One lucky listener who emails a comment about this month's podcast will be picked at random to receive a collectible Harry Potter Forever Stamps First Day of Issue Program. The winner will be selected from all qualifying comments emailed to YourPostalPodcast@usps.com by Friday, December 13th, 2013.

Our congratulations go out to John Schlimmer of Waterloo, Iowa, who emailed a comment about October's podcast and has won a set of ten Twentieth-Century Poets Note Cards, envelopes and Forever Stamps.

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