

EDITOR'S DESK

Save a mail carrier; buy a stamp

Let's talk about the U.S. Postal Service.

The centuries-old institution has been in the news lately after being caught in the crossfire between Republicans and Democrats negotiating a new round of COVID-19 relief bills.



Jade McDowell
NEWS EDITOR

Although voting by mail has been at the center of this controversy, I'd like to set that issue aside for now to talk about other functions of USPS that have not become such a partisan debate. The truth is, the postal service was in trouble long before this election year and will continue to face challenges after Nov. 3.

USPS announced its 13th straight year of financial losses for 2019, adding up to \$75 billion in losses since 2007. Some of those losses have been spurred on by a 2006 mandate from Congress that USPS start setting aside funding for retirement benefits promised to employees in the future rather than paying as it went. Easing up on aspects of those requirements — such as lengthening out the amount of time USPS has to meet those obligations — would help.

USPS's problems go beyond pensions and retiree health care, however. The agency reported its peak year of mail volume in 2006, at 213 billion units delivered. That number was down to 143 billion in 2019.



HH file photo

USPS carrier Diane Barton grabs a bin of parcels while delivering the mail on her route in Hermiston in 2018.

Every time you check a box online saying you would no longer like to be mailed paper statements for your water bill or phone bill, that is less revenue for the U.S. Postal Service.

As the internet continues to undermine mail revenue, there are some changes to its business model that USPS could make to help diversify its revenue base. Some politicians have proposed allowing USPS to provide basic financial services, such as savings accounts and check cashing, for example, and to offer new mail-related services, such as gift wrapping.

If USPS continues to lose money, however, our country will eventually face a choice: Allow the private sec-

tor to take over all mail service in our country, or decide that mail delivery is an essential service worth subsidizing with tax dollars.

For some people, their mailbox is a lifeline. Those who can't afford to pay for internet or live in a rural area without reliable internet access still depend on sending and receiving mail in a timely manner in order to pay their mortgage, utility and medical bills before they are sent to collections and ruin their credit. Others rely on life-saving medications delivered through the mail, or Social Security checks.

Most newspapers, including the *Hermiston Herald*, now use the postal service to deliver papers

because we could no longer afford newspaper carriers. Many other small businesses, including home-based businesses, also rely on the low rates of USPS to carry out their work.

If all mail delivery is left to private shipping companies, all indications are those things would become much more expensive. There is also no guarantee that mail service remains available to all Americans, any more than rural swaths of our country are currently guaranteed internet access or cellphone service. A CEO focused on profits for shareholders wouldn't keep in mind the same considerations that have led USPS to keep post offices open in small towns, such as Echo, or deliver mail to unprofitable rural routes.

The federal government frequently uses tax dollars to subsidize other services that don't completely support themselves. You may get charged a fee to enter a national park, for example, but that revenue is also supplemented by appropriations that the park system gets directly from Congress to help maintain and staff those parks at an appropriate level. It doesn't seem so crazy that mail service might work the same way.

For now, however, USPS is expected to be self-sufficient, meaning one of the ways you can personally help them right at this moment is by supporting them financially. If you're running low on stamps, now would be a great time to buy some.

COLUMN

Remembering my father killed in WWII

By ROBERT BOWMAN
For the Hermiston Herald

This column is part of a longer history submitted by Robert Bowman, a former Echo resident, about his father, Asa Mitchell Bowman Jr., who was killed in action in World War II on Oct. 4, 1944, in Hongen, Germany, after growing up in Eastern Oregon. It is republished here in honor of the 75th anniversary of the end of WWII.

My father joined the Army in January of 1944, entering the service at Fort MacArthur, California, where he was sworn in, and then sent to Fort McClellan, Alabama, for 13 weeks of infantry basic training. Upon completion of basic training, he returned home to California for a one-week leave, and then was assigned to join the 29th Division training in southern England, and continued daily training until D-Day.

My father and his company landed in Normandy, France, during the D-Day invasion, but his platoon was in D-Day reserve on June 6 and did not go ashore and engage in combat until June 7, 1944, just one day after the initial invasion of Europe by the allied armies. This was the first time the division had been involved in direct WWII military combat action against the enemy. He and his unit fought hedgerow warfare from the beachfront to the St. Lo area until the town was finally liberated on July 20, 1944. They faced heavy hedgerow combat for months after.

On Oct. 4 my father's company

was ordered into the area of Hastenrath-Hongen and Breberen. My father, as a member of Company I, a rifle platoon, was ordered to move across the German border and assess the enemy strength. The platoon moved across open terrain and into wooded areas with little resistance until they reach the village of Hongen, where they encountered "serious resistance" followed by a night German counterattack. It was determined later that the Germans had launched an offensive that ran head on into Company I.

My father was killed in the late evening of Oct. 4 just inside the small German town of Hongen. His unit was completely wiped out by the German offensive; all the members were either taken prisoner or killed. Exact details of his death are unknown. What is known is that on Oct. 5 his body was behind enemy lines so there were no members of the allied armies who could recover his body or confirm his death. The only official U.S. Military report listed him as missing in action from 4 October 1944. Official city hall records in Hongen recorded that his body was found in the town, which was in German-held territory, and buried Oct. 5 by two elderly German residents of Hongen.

In May 1945, the Allies liberated the area and found a record of the two local German residents having found and buried three American GIs. The U.S. Military then located and recovered my father's remains and shipped them to the nearest cemetery, which was The American Military Netherlands Ceme-

tery, Margraten.

It took the Army until Sept. 20, 1945, to officially confirm identity and status, and to finally notify Mom that my father had been confirmed killed in action.

On May 30, 1993, I had the privilege of attending the Memorial Day services at the American Cemetery at Margraten, the Netherlands. There were approximately 2,500 persons in attendance. Some were American military active duty and retired personnel, but mostly Dutch war veterans. It was clear that the people present appreciated the dedication and sacrifice made by the Americans during WWII. I was very proud to be there and to know that my father's efforts are appreciated to this day.

In 1994, I attended the 50th anniversary of the Normandy Invasion on Omaha Beach as a guest of the 29 Division. On June 6, we attended the official 50th anniversary ceremony on Omaha Beach. President Bill Clinton gave the keynote address, but Walter Cronkite got the bigger hand. We had front and center seats with the 29th group, just behind the VIPs.

I was very proud of my father and to have been included in the 50th anniversary ceremonies. Although my father never returned from his service with the 29th, I had never felt so close to him as I did during my time with the veterans of the 29th. I also know that he would have been very proud of the accomplishments of the 29th and the kindness and generosity of the French citizens who hosted our stay.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Quarantine is hard for everyone; use this time to build better relationships

I know this quarantine thing is hard. It is hurting small businesses, restaurants and schools.

Parents are also stressed about balancing work and their kids' education. That is definitely stressful on the mind and to stay on task thinking about it.

But, this is a time we can make better relationships with others that are dealing with this situation to make them feel better, which is what friends are for. As an example, my grandma is putting smiley faces on watermelons and cantaloupes and giving them to worried mothers. This is a nice gesture to make the world a happier place during this tough time. Things like that make people feel like you are right there beside them and that is a comfortable feeling.

I would like to share with you the pros and cons of online learning. First, some cons are no classmates beside you, no face-to-face teaching/help from teachers and no non-curriculum activities. A few pros would be staying safe at home, working at your own pace, and more time to work on that assignment if needed.

Finally, here are some things you can do to calm yourself. Take some time to meditate, do some yoga, watch a funny television program and spend time with close friends and family. All these things calm you and take your mind off of the virus. Think happy thoughts and count your blessings.

We all need to learn how to relieve stress during this time, and show kindness to people around you. Now, we are ready to help our local community and the world.

Colby Lerten
Sandstone Middle School seventh grader
Hermiston



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Andrew Cutler | Publisher • acutler@eomediagroup.com • 541-278-2673

Jade McDowell | News Editor • jmcowell@eastoregonian.com • 541-564-4536

Jeanne Jewett | Multi-Media consultant • jjewett@hermistonherald.com • 541-564-4531

Audra Workman | Multi-Media consultant • aworkman@eastoregonian.com • 541-564-4538

To contact the Hermiston Herald for news, advertising or subscription information:
• call 541-567-6457
• e-mail info@hermistonherald.com
• stop by our offices at 333 E. Main St.
• visit us online at: hermistonherald.com

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No personal attacks; challenge the opinion, not the person. The Hermiston Herald reserves the right to edit letters for length and for content.

Letters must be original and signed by the writer or writers. Anonymous letters will not be printed. Writers should include a telephone number so they can be reached for questions. Only the letter writer's name and city of residence will be published.

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