

Remembering A Fallen Brother

By: Larry A. Fredeen

Tom Ormiston – SP/Amtrak/ MetroLink Conductor – R.I.P.

I have just heard (well, actually early this morning, but I can finally bring myself to type a few words) that the MetroLink Conductor killed in yesterday's collision was Mr. Tom Ormiston.

Sorry for the delay, I just told my wife about the news, and then I broke down again.

Here goes. Tom was a great person, and also a very good rail. He hired out with the Southern Pacific in the mid '70's in Los Angeles. At that time, and several years to come, he and his wife lived in Glendale, CA, not too far from Taylor Yard. Countless times I worked with him. He had a little more seniority than me, so I usually worked as a Brakeman for him. I always knew it would be a nice trip working with Tom. He usually worked the "Butcher Board" (Conductor's Extra Board) for the variety of the types of calls. Sometimes, he would bid a "West-End" job, L.A. to West Colton. When he did that, he would always give me a call to invite me to join him to work as his Brakeman. Sometimes I would get the bid, sometimes not, because a lot of fellow rails also enjoyed working with Tom.

Tom collected knives. Very ornate ones. He would often come to work with his latest find. Tom also collected some RR items, which led him to meet my father who lived a few blocks from Taylor. Tom would come by my folks house all the time. At that time, my father was retired, and a hobby of his (besides the RR) was making ceramic cups, dishes, and other Southern Pacific glassware. Tom would come by and check out my Dad's latest creations. They would just B.S. about the RR. My father (and Mom) really enjoyed Tom's visits.

Tom was always concerned about safety on the job, and attended all the local Union meetings. Since, I was the Local's L.R. (Safety Committee Chairman), Tom and I would discuss safety concerns. He was always very involved.

I can remember, very vividly, a minor derailment we had while taking out power to the Roundhouse at Taylor one hot summer day. A mis-aligned cross-over switch was missed as we moved up A-yard #8, toward Fletcher Drive ("Top-End-A Yard). We got thru it, and side-swiped a car of lumber. We had a couple of wheels on the ground, and it was quite embarrassing. No injuries, but the "suits" wanted someone to "pay" for the mishap. Tom stepped up, told them it was his fault as Conductor, got a 5 day suspension. They wanted to give the Engineer a few days off, also. Tom made a deal with them to take all the heat. So he had the Engineer's 5 day's added to his.

A real "class act", as our Female Engineer was a divorced Mom and couldn't afford days off without pay. Tom told me that he didn't mind a few "extra days" added because "it is

Summertime, and I'll go fishing!" I think he spent the time working on his knife collection!

He left the S P when Amtrak took bids from the ranks of operating employees to run their trains. (Prior to that, the RR's supplied the crews for their trains) That would make the year 1987.

It was easy to continue to "talk" to Tom even though he was on Amtrak. You knew when he was out there with you, nearby, or within 50 miles, because he had a bit of a "Texas accent". We would have short conversations over the radio. We would talk on the telephone every once-in-awhile.

During every call, he would bring up the "Safety Factor" of the "Cab-Car" operation. He would call it the "Bad News" of passenger operations. He felt it was very un-safe to RR that way. He was concerned of the lack of crash-worthiness and it's ability to stay on the rails . . . he had seen a lot from the cab of a freight locomotive to know the difference in design and weight makes all the difference in a collision.

When I heard of his death, I remembered our many conversations about "Cab-Cars".

How ironic . . . and so, so sad.

I know this for fact, he's now taking care of his passengers who joined him yesterday, and has greeted my Dad. Now, once again, they can discuss coffee cups and knives.

When his service is announced, I will post. I had heard that the news reports put his age at 62, Tom was only a few years ahead of me, I believe more like 58. For new I'll have to stop pecking I can't see my screen for the tears.

Larry