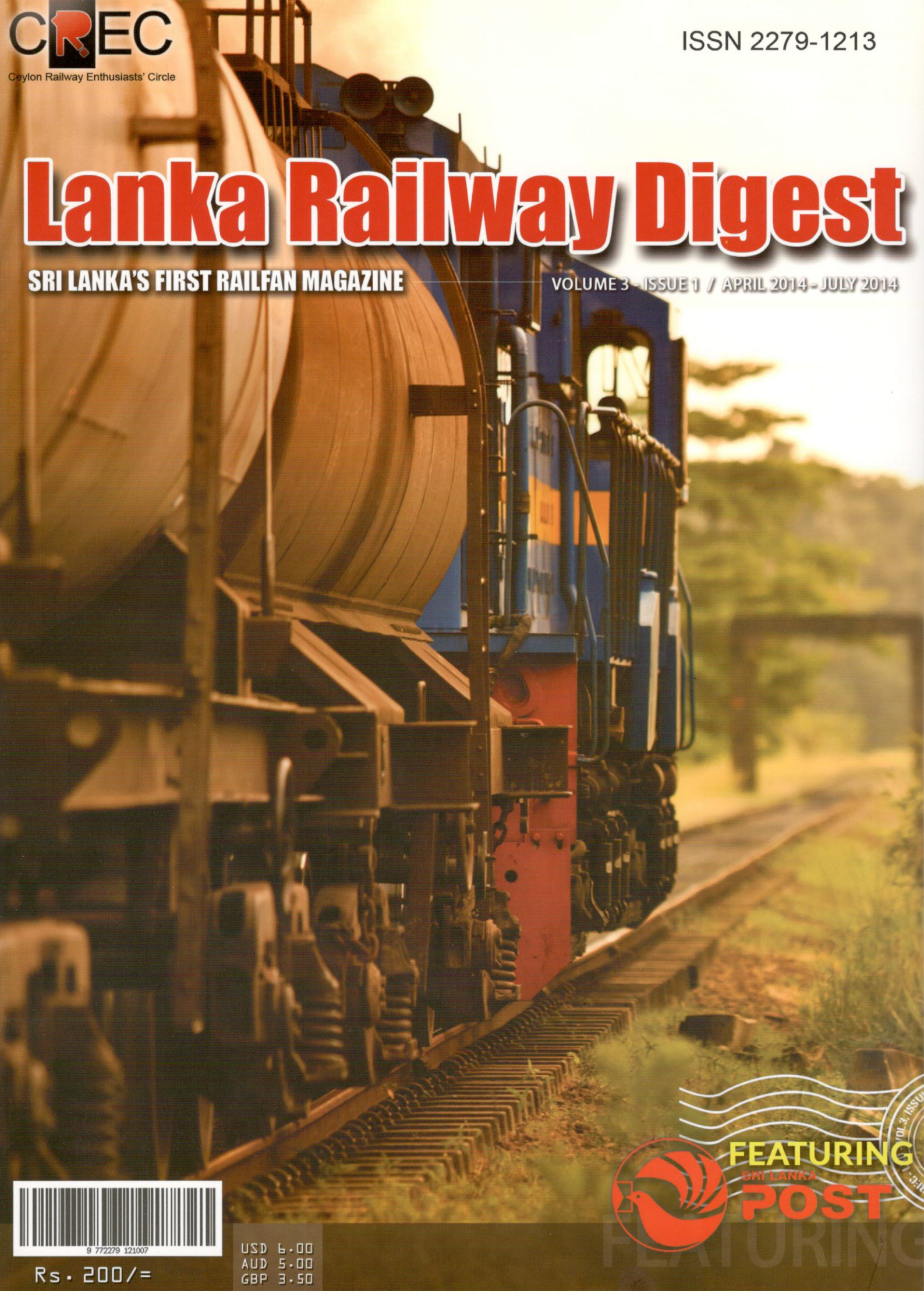


Lanka Railway Digest

SRI LANKA'S FIRST RAILFAN MAGAZINE

VOLUME 3 - ISSUE 1 / APRIL 2014 - JULY 2014



Rs. 200/=

USD 6.00
AUD 5.00
GBP 3.50



FEATURING
SRI LANKA
POST



We present Volume 3 Issue No. 1, which is the 7th magazine in our series. From the last issue our printer has given us a gloss cover giving our magazine a richer look, a far cry from our first magazine.

On the 28th of February the Postal Department issued 2 stamps on the Nine Arch Viaduct of Gotuwela and the Demodera Railway Station. This event was held at the Demodera Railway Station. Mr. Hemasiri Fernando, Secretary, Ministry of Posts officiated at the ceremony along with the General Manager of Railways and the Post Master General.

In this issue we present some information and drawing of a Post Office Van. Isuru Madurapperuma's (Grade 5 student) collection of stamps and Royston Ellis' comments on the book "Travelling Post Offices of Ceylon" which mentions that our first mail coaches had been introduced in the 1890s. The Railway Post Office Vans still play a major role in distribution of mail to the highlands and other distant locations.

The Northern Railway has been completed almost up to Jaffna town, but not yet aligned fully. The main contractor is IRCON of India. I was in the ceremonial "first run" train from Kilinochchi

to Pallai on 4th of March, the train being an S11 DMU set. The train was running at nearly 100 km/h although the track has a designed speed of 120 km/h. The line up to Kankesanthurai is expected to be operational by June 2014. The Talaimannar line is also visibly being laid quite rapidly.

The Kataragama Line being built by the Chinese has progress visible in mixed sections. Currently in the Kekanadura section a tunnel is under construction, which will be Sri Lanka's longest. It was heartening to see many Chinese engineering staff having LRD 3 in their hands.

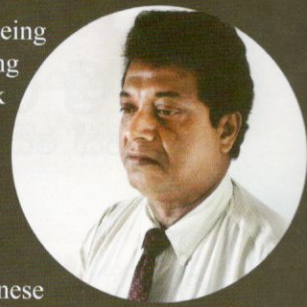
The magazine is expanding its readership in countries where ex-Sri Lankan railwaymen have migrated to. We still blend the articles to have a mix of aspects which entertain and educate. We welcome your experiences with our railways in the form of articles.

Vinodh L.J. Wickremeratne

Editor

April 2014

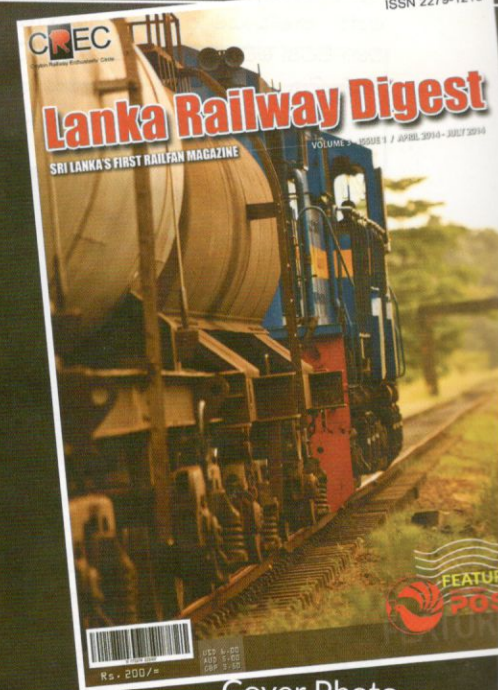
vinodhwix71@yahoo.com



ISSN 2279-1213

CONTENTS

මේ ශ්‍රී ලංකා දුම්රිය සේවයයි	4
From Remote Railway Stations to Roads	5
Colombo to Jaffna & KKS by Train	6
The Traveling Post Offices of Ceylon	10
The Dash to Batticaloa	11
මම ආසයි කෝච්චියට	14
Have you ever posted a letter from a Train?	16
Sri Lanka Posts Honours Two Colonial Railway Civil Engineering Masterpieces	20
Railway Detonators	23
කෝච්චි විකට් ගැන මේ දේවල් ඔබ දන්නවද?	29
History of the Ceylon Government Railway	32
දඩරට දුම්රිය මාර්ගයේ කාර්මික පුරාවිද්‍යාත්මක වටිනාකම	34
It is the end of the line for Locomotive hauled trains	36
The "Steyrtalbahn" of Austria	38



Cover Photo

A Class M10 locomotive hauls empty oil tank wagons towards Colombo on the Main Line

Photo : Gayantha Samaradiwakara - 2012

THIS ISSUE OF "LANKA RAILWAY DIGEST" HAS BEEN BROUGHT TO YOU BY

Production Team

Vinodh Wickremeratne
Ifthar Rizvi

Lahiru Weerasinghe
Suren Rajasooriyar

Design & Layout

Gayantha Samaradiwakara
Thurya Owitipana

Editor : Vinodh Wickremeratne

Readers/Contributors Please Note -

CREC accepts no liability for the views or linguistic styles of the writers (which are their own, and not necessarily those of CREC) or the accuracy of the information contained in the articles and advertisements published in LRD. Further, CREC publishes all contributions in good faith, assuming that such articles and images do not infringe copyrights. All material published herein is Copyright of Ceylon Railway Enthusiasts' Circle and/or the Authors. Copying or reproduction in any form is strictly prohibited.

පාඨකයින් සහ පළකිරීම් ලබාදෙන අය සැලකිය යුතුය -

රචකයින්ගේ භාෂා භෂිතවීම හෝ පළකිරීම වල නිරවද්‍යතාව පිලිබඳව ලංකා දුම්රිය ගවේෂකයින්ගේ සංගමය කිසිදු වගකීමක් නොදරයි. තවද ලංකා දුම්රිය ගවේෂකයින්ගේ සංගමය මෙම ලිපි සහ දැන්වීම් පළකිරීම සිදු කරන්නේ ඒවායින් බුද්ධිමය දේපල හිමිකම් කඩවීමක් සිදු නොවේ යන විශ්වාසය මතය. මෙහි ඇති සියළුම පළකිරීම් වල අයිතිය ලංකා දුම්රිය ගවේෂකයින්ගේ සංගමය හෝ අදාල කතෘවරයා සතුවේ. අනවසරයෙන් උපුටා ගැනීම හෝ කිසිදු මාධ්‍යයකින් නැවත පළකිරීම සපුරා තහනම් වේ.

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

සියළුම හිමිකම් ඇවිරිණි

Have you ever

posted a letter

from a Train?



Story Nishan Fernando
Photos Lalith Seneviratne

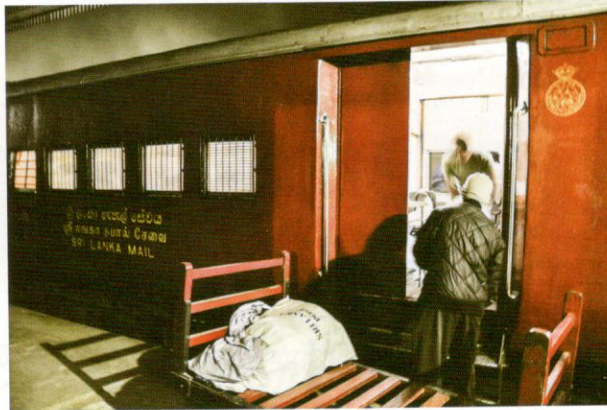
In this day and age seldom would a person post a letter for personal communication needs from a Post Office or Post Box both of which are static. With mobile phones, smart phones, personal computers and iPads in use by Sri Lankans of all walks of life, the preferred mode of personal communication is voice calls, text messages, email etc. So, who would post a letter from a Train?

Lalith Seneviratne, Lahiru Weerasinghe and I were fortunate enough to be invited by none other than the Secretary to the Ministry of Postal Services Mr. Hemasiri Fernando to the inaugural launch of the postal stamp series 'Civil Engineering Marvels of Sri Lanka Railway' on 28th February 2014. At the conclusion of this modest but elegant ceremony at the Demodera Railway Station we were invited to lunch at Cranford Villa, Diyatalawa. The discussion at pre lunch drinks with Postal and Railway high officials opened a door to a lifelong dream.

From my childhood I have been intrigued to know what really goes on in the Night Mail Rail Carriage with pigeon holes and people sorting letters. Our humble request to take a peek was readily accepted by Mr. Fernando who went on to say that in fact recently some postal officials who did not understand the very basis of the 'Night Mail Train' had commenced the transport of mail bags in 'Motor Vans' !! Therefore, he welcomed us to document this operation which was a unique collaboration between two major service providers of the Government of Sri Lanka i.e. the Postal Service and the Railways. Both organizations have a long history and colorful heritage which needs to be preserved for posterity.

We had booked 1st Class Sleeping Berths for our return that night to Colombo Fort from Bandarawela in the Badulla to Colombo Fort Night Mail Train. After a hearty lunch late in the evening, Mr. Fernando accompanied us to the Bandarawela Railway Station to introduce us to his staff on the 'Travelling Post Office' (TPO) of the Badulla to

Colombo Fort Night Mail Train. With the introductions over and the TPO staff adequately briefed, Mr. Fernando left us. The Night Mail pulled out from the Bandarawela Station into the dark, rainy night with us in the TPO.

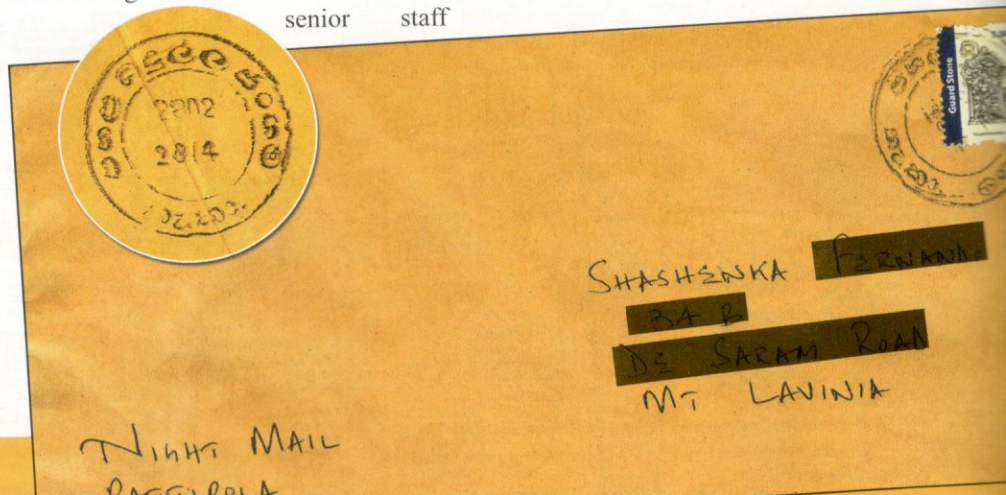


At first it was a bit awkward since we had boarded the TPO unannounced like pirates with the 'Big Boss' himself, so the staff, we noticed, were a bit uneasy. Then we got talking and they realized that we were no CIA operatives planted by their 'Boss' but three harmless rail fans. They were rather amused that we were highly taken up with their TPO operation which to them was rather a mundane affair.

We first explored the TPO which is a specially designed railway carriage. One complete length of the carriage has sorting racks used for sorting letters. These mail sorting racks start almost at the ceiling and end at the counters. In front of the counters are small stools fixed to the floor with rotating seats for use by the 6 'Mail Sorting Officers'. The 'Post Office Guide' which is a complete list of PO locations is referred when sorting letters. But most senior staff

know the names and locations by heart, so that the guide is rarely used!! The counters are used by the MSOs for franking the 'Letter Bill' which comes inside each mailbag, the 'Neck Label' tied on the outer side of the mailbag and the 'Way Bill' before sorting the letters. The 3 Peons assist in the culling of the mailbags and facing the letters for sorting. They also assist in placing sorted mail into to bags and closing them. The 2 Porters sort the mailbags into designated areas on the opposite length of the carriage which also has a row of windows. The windows are for ventilation but all of them have mesh to prevent any article flying out due to the blowing in a fast moving train.

Above the windows is a length of hooks for hanging mailbags. In the middle of the carriage on either side are large steel access doors for mail bags, parcels and of course staff. Adjacent to the access doors are two post boxes, one on each side of the TPO. Across the access doors are two drop down tables used by the 'Travelling Clerk' and 'Assistant Travelling Clerk' who check and record all 'Enterable Articles' in the 'Transit Register'. The designation TC and ATC is unique to the TPO in the Postal Service. In the middle along the length with the windows next to the access doors sits the 'Staff Officer', the person in charge of the TPO. There is also an Additional Assistant Traveling Clerk who travels up to Nawalapitiya in the Up Badulla TPO from Colombo Fort and moves over to the Down Badulla TPO at Nawalapitiya for the journey down to Colombo Fort. Therefore, the staff on the TPO is 15 to and from



Colombo Fort to Nawalapitiya and 14 to and from Nawalapitiya to Badulla.

On each end of the carriage is the emergency access door. There are also a set of steel cabinets fixed to one end of the length of the carriage before the windows commence. According to the staff these steel cabinets were used for the safe storage of 'Postal Cash Remittances' in the past. However, they are now used by the TPO staff to store their personal belongings. On the opposite end of the carriage are the Toilet and the Pantry/Dining area. Tea is prepared with a kettle of boiling water collected at Hatton Railway Station. There are fans and lights on the ceiling of the carriage with a separate emergency lighting system run on a dynamo which charges a set of batteries on the carriage.

We watched the operation inside the TPO from Bandarawela to Pattipola where we thanked the TPO staff for tolerating us and headed back to the 1st Class Sleeping Berth for the rest of the journey back to Colombo Fort.

To better understand the greater mail collection and delivery operation and the relevance of the TPOs in the rail network I later visited the Central Mail Exchange and met its Superintendent, Mr. R.A. David. Two of his most experienced staff Kamal Chandana Wickramaratne

and Sudath Wickramaratne both Post Master Class 1 on the Up Badulla and Down Badulla TPOs, explained this seemingly process to me. It is narrated here for the benefit of the reader. The process begins at individual Post Offices with the mail collection time for the day. This collection time is decided leaving room to organize the closing of the mailbag for onward transmission either by Motor Van or Bus. Letters can be handed over after the collection time but before closing by paying the 'late fee'



Mail sorting racks

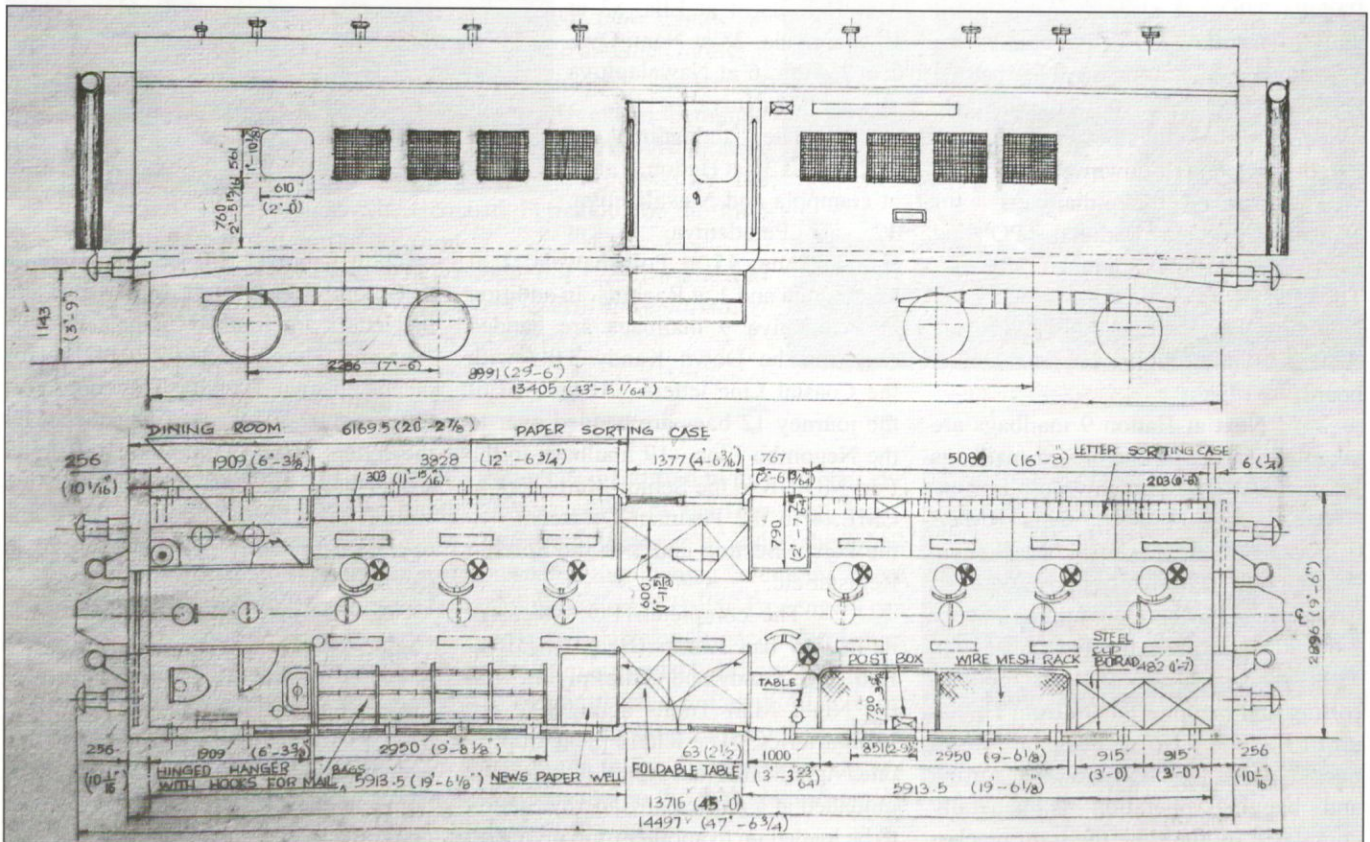
which at present is Rs. 10/- . It can also be handed over direct to the TPO with the same penalty.

The drill of the TPOs begin with the 6 MSOs reporting at 1630hrs to the CME's Inland Mail Section to sort mail until it's time to board the TPO but to clock in the required 7 hours to fulfill their duty turn on one way of the

journey. The SO reports at 1700hrs and checks for his other staff and required items. These include the filled drinking Water Barrel, Empty Bags, Cane Basket with implements such as PO Guide, Attendance Register, Summary Book, Log Book, Letter Bills, Date Stamp and Date Type Box, Stamp Pad, Knife, Tags etc to be loaded on to a Trolley and thereafter to a Motor Van to be taken to the Railway Platform accompanied by a Travelling Clerk and 2 Porters.

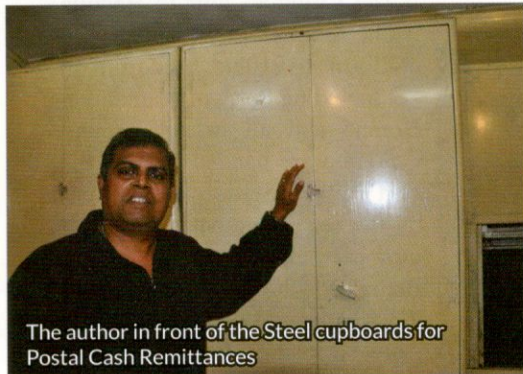
The Colombo Fort to Badulla Night Mail Train is due on the platform at 1910hrs. Mail from 89 PO including Puttlam, Ratnapura, Horana and all in and around Colombo are handed over to the Fort Railway Station Mail Officer by the respective MOs which in turn gets loaded on to the 'Up Badulla TPO'. Additionally 23+ mailbags, 20+ parcel bags/store bags and 10+ Up Badulla TPO mailbags from the CME are also taken over by the TPO staff. Three chairs too are loaded for use by the senior staff on the TPO. The Train leaves Colombo Fort at 2000hrs. and it must be noted that this train has two TPOs attached!! The Up Badulla TPO and the Up Kandy TPO.

Now the core operation of culling mailbags, facing letters, sorting letters, recording enterable items and closing mailbags begins. The first additional



mailbag after leaving Colombo Fort comes on board at Ragama. At Veyangoda there is 1 mailbag for the TPO and another mailbag for the Polgahawela MO.

At Polgahawela 8 mailbags from the area and others from as far as Jaffna, Anuradhapura, Maho and Polonaruwa are taken on board. Further, 'Up Kandy TPO' bags are also taken over. Closed mailbags for Kegalle, Mawanella etc are unloaded.



The author in front of the Steel cupboards for Postal Cash Remittances

Next, 10 mailbags come on board at Peradeniya. An exchange of Kandy area mailbags takes place between the Up Badulla TPO and the Up Kandy TPO. Further the Up Kandy TPO which is the last wagon in the train is detached at Peradeniya. It must be noted that the Up and Down Night Mail trains from Colombo Fort to Badulla and back cross each other in the night on this one route. Therefore, all mail bags for the Down Badulla TPO are also taken on board the Up Badulla TPO at Peradeniya for transmission to Nawalapitiya so that the Down Badulla TPO staff has adequate time to sort the letters before they reach Peradeniya on their downward journey. At Gampola the mailbags for Nawalapitiya, Up Badulla TPO and Down Badulla TPO are taken on board. Then at Nawalapitiya 10 mailbags including the Down Badulla TPO bags for delivery at Rambukkana are taken on board.

Next at Hatton 9 mailbags are taken onboard with the closed mailbags for the Hatton Regional Mail Sorting Center being unloaded. This RMSC handles Hatton, Dickoya, Maskeliya, Punduluoya, Talawakelle and Lindula to name a few. Furthermore approximately 28 mail bags from the Down Badulla TPO is taken onboard for culling, sorting and bagging letters from Hatton up to Badulla. No mailbags are taken over beyond Hatton and the sorting and bagging operation is generally completed by the time the train reaches

Bandarawela. From Hatton to Nanuoya 32 mailbags have to be culled, faced, sorted, closed and handed over. This is a tough call since in a limited time frame of one hour and fifteen minutes all work must be completed. Beyond Hatton it's only a matter of unloading sorted and closed bags; 52 at Nanu Oya, 53 at Bandarawela, 2 at Ella, 2 at Demodera, 4 at Hali-ela and finally 38 at Badulla. The entire journey for the TPO staff through out the night doing all the hard work is whilst the train rocks, rattles, jerks and swings to every possible side when it on the move. Finally the train reaches Badulla at 0710hrs and the mailbags are handed over to the MO at Badulla. The letters in these bags get distributed to towns such as Ampara and even Tissamaharama. The TPO staff can finally rest after working very hard overnight on the train and there is a special 'TPO bungalow' in Badulla with an excellent cook to take care of the needs of the tired group.

The Night Mail Train from Badulla Railway Station leaves at 1800hrs. However, the TPO staff after a well deserved rest at the TPO bungalow report for duty to the TPO at 1630hrs. They take over about 35 mailbags from the Badulla MO and commence the same operation but now in what is identified as the 'Down Badulla TPO'. Therefore, the collection of mailbags is 3 at Hali-ela, 4 at Ella, 53 at Bandarawela, 28 at Nanu Oya, 2 at Hatton, 6 at Nawalapitiya and 2 at Peradeniya.

The unloading of mailbags is 30 at Hatton, 3 each at Gampola and Nawalapitiya, 32 at Peradeniya, 6 at Rambukkana, 45 at Polgahawela, 1 at Veyangoda and 1 at Ragama. In addition at Peradeniya 9 mailbags are handed over for the Down Kandy TPO with the Coastal Line letters. At the end of the journey 12 bags are handed over to the Negombo Line, 19 mailbags to the Fort MO, 16 to the Senior Mail Clerk at CME, 4 to the Postman Delivery, 5 to the Parcel Section and 5 to the Foreign Register etc.

The complete TPO system in its heyday had 5 units (Badulla, Jaffna, Batticalo, Kandy and Galle) plying with the Night Mail Trains acting like the main arteries. The letters picked up by one Night Mail Train would therefore be unloaded at a particular Railway Station to be loaded on to another train plying on

a completely different direction to that of the first train. For instance a letter posted from Monaragala before the mail closing time would reach Colombo Fort early next morning on the Badulla to Colombo Fort Night Mail Train. Then the letter would be picked up by the Coastal Line Train and be delivered to the recipient in the south by that very morning. Therefore, the letter is delivered within 24hours. This way the majority of letters reached every nook and corner of the Island with the least delay and at very low cost.

For those to whom this is too complicated, it is similar to the 'Lunch Walla' on a bicycle who would deliver lunch to Colombo office staff some years back. This I know still happens very successfully in India even today!!

In conclusion, let me mention that before we boarded the train at the Bandarawela Railway Station I wanted to pick up a few Post Cards which I could not find. So the next best was Envelopes with Stamps which I managed with much difficulty at almost 7.30p.m. These I addressed to my two young sons and handed them over to the TPO staff at Nanu Oya Railway Station. So yes I posted not just 'a Letter' but two letters



Sorting letters

on 28th February 2014 on the Badulla to Colombo Fort Night Mail Train and the letters are franked "Pahala Badulla Jangama Tha. Ka. 28.02.2014"!! This means "Down Badulla Traveling Post Office 28.02.2014". Had I handed over the letters after 12 midnight the frank would have the date 01.03.2014 which would have been 122 years after this operation probably first commenced in Ceylon!!!

So the next time you are on a Night Mail Train don't forget to post a letter or postcard!! But remember to place the stamps for the 'Late Fee'!!!

Ironically even in this day and age, the first thing I enquire when I come home in the evening is for any letters delivered by the Postman.