

To the private citizen, a battle against the government or one of its agencies is almost always a losing one. Surrender comes early. Who wants to shoulder weapons against an army of officials barricaded inside the fortress of bureaucracy?

This is the story of just such a battle between a private citizen and the United States Postal Service. Both sides fought valiantly and now that the smoke of the battle has cleared since that first shot was fired, the government holds the white flag of surrender!

On February 23, 1976, in Washington, D. C. as part of the observance of the Bicentennial, the Postal Service issued a sheet of 50 stamps.....a special sheet. Each stamp was a miniature replica of one of the fifty state flags and that meant that EACH stamp was different. This made the issue VERY unique. Never before in postal history had each stamp on a sheet of stamps been different.

Wilmar Tognazzini, Morro Bay, California, retired school teacher, father of eight and proof of the old adage "once a school teacher, always a school teacher" recognized in the sheet of stamps the opportunity to develop an individual Bicentennial Project that would serve not only as a memento of the Bicentennial for his children, would be of lasting value, but would be educational as well. The government had spent \$467 million dollars promoting the Bicentennial, and the public notice to the inhabitants of California by the Bicentennial Commission, proposed a challenge. The challenge suggested that every "American, acting individually or with others, undertake at least one principal project which manifested the pride, the priorities and the hopes of his community." It went on to dare that "one person can make a difference.....what is needed most is the gift of one's time and resources in a worthwhile project of lasting value."

The Commission's challenge and the special flag stamp issue triggered Tognazzini to action. On June 15 in the small Morro Bay postoffice, he mailed 50 large envelopes to the Capital City Postmaster of each state. The large envelopes

each contained eight smaller envelopes bearing the respective flag stamps of each state, each one addressed to Tognazzini. Enclosed with the smaller envelopes was this simple note:

"Dear Postmaster: I would greatly appreciate it if you would see that the enclosed stamped envelopes are cancelled as of July 4, 1976. I am trying to get a complete set of 50 envelopes bearing the Bicentennial Era State Flags, cancelled in the CAPITAL CITY of each state on the 200th anniversary of our independence. I would like to have one set to give to each of my eight children in memory of this, our 200th year. Thank you very much."

If Tognazzini could get the postmasters of the CAPITAL CITIES to comply with his request, he would have a valuable memento for his children. The envelopes would have three things going for them: They would bear the STATE FLAG STAMP; they would be cancelled in the CAPITAL CITY of the state for which they bore the stamp, and they would be cancelled on the 200TH ANNIVERSARY OF OUR INDEPENDENCE! Tognazzini knew that he was gambling.....gambling in the sense that he was investing capital, fully recognizing that even one postmaster could refuse to cancel and he would end up the loser. He gambled on people he did not know. An ambitious undertaking? You bet.....but battles have never been won by soldiers who do not have the will to win.

Tognazzini's faith in people paid off.....partially, at least. On June 22, only one week after the envelopes were mailed and 12 days BEFORE the 4th of July, the first cancelled set was returned to Tognazzini's mailbox. Cancellation date? July 4, 1976. Cancellation CAPITAL CITY? Jefferson City, Missouri!

Then there was a lull. On June 29th and again on July 5, Tognazzini received refusals to cancel from Tallahassee, Florida and Lansing, Michigan. There followed an avalanche of cancelled envelopes. The gamble began to pay off. It was soon evident that CAPITAL CITY POSTMASTERS were anxious to help. Then another refusal from Topeka, Kansas. Each refusal was ^{followed} by a response from

Tognazzini to the refusing postmaster. In time, Tallahassee and Topeka rescinded their original refusal and these envelopes arrived. The project gained momentum and by July 15, Tognazzini had heard from every capital city postoffice in the country except Dover, Delaware. Dover's envelopes arrived July 31st.

The score now stood 49 to 1. Lansing, Michigan, President Ford's home CAPITAL CITY postoffice was the only holdout!

Tognazzini was impressed. He was impressed by the "good kind of people" ^{who} ~~which~~ man the postoffices. Baton Rouge's postmaster went far and beyond the "call to duty". The cancelling machine in that CAPITAL CITY malfunctioned and damaged four of the eight envelopes Tognazzini had sent. Tognazzini received four of his original eight, undamaged, the four damaged ones AND to make up for the damaged ones, four more supplied by the Baton Rouge postmaster. This meant special effort on the part of that postmaster. The Louisiana State Flag Stamp is about in the middle of the sheet of stamps. The four extra stamps had to be torn from the middle of four sheets, applied to four envelopes furnished by the postmaster, cancelled and posted to Tognazzini! He received 12 for his eight!

Salt Lake City's postmaster over-inked the stamp pad and smudged the first of the eight envelopes cancelled. The cancellation was readable, but pretty badly smudged. The postmaster there sent along an extra envelope which he stamped and cancelled, to make up for the smudged one!

When the envelopes from Boston arrived on July 9, another example of "good kind of people" became evident. One of the eight envelopes had gone through the cancelling machine with "nary a mark". Seven were perfectly cancelled. Tognazzini quickly wrote to the Boston postmaster. His explanation and 11 days wait paid off. On July 20th, the lone envelope arrived, cancelled JULY 4, 1976! This envelope along with others cancelled after July 4, became ammunition in the "Battle of Lansing" which was to follow.

What about Lansing? Lansing's refusal arrived, Tognazzini immediately replied with a progress report on the project and a request for reconsideration. Lansing refused again and submitted a NEWS RELEASE as justification for the refusal.....NEWS RELEASE known as PHILATELIC RELEASE No. 33. This was the first tactical error on the part of the bureaucracy. It was later admitted by the office of the Consumer Advocate for the Postal Service that the release was simply a bulletin of information NOT an official directive from the Postal Service.

Tenacity is Tognazzini's middle name. His ammunition, carefully thought out strategy based on poor or incorrect information supplied by members of the bureaucracy, words (and many of these), and his typewriter. There ensued the "BATTLE OF LETTERS". Benjamin Bailar, Postmaster General was the first target. As it turned out, several letters were written to Mr. Bailar. His defense, a wall of personnel mainly found in the office of the Consumer Advocate. Tognazzini never got through to him. Even a special fee of 65¢ for RESTRICTED DELIVERY to Mr. Bailar, could not pierce the wall of defense. Although postal regulations permit someone to sign for Mr. Bailar's mail if given WRITTEN AUTHORIZATION, Tognazzini could not get a photostatic copy of the WRITTEN AUTHORIZATION. Bailar remained completely protected, as it later turned out, by an office RECEPTIONIST. When Tognazzini's strategy provided him with an edge in the battle, the Consumer Advocate's Office refused to correspond with him any further. It mattered little that the 1977 Government Manual clearly stated that "the Consumer Advocate, a postal ombudsman, represents the interests of the individual mail customer in matters involving the Postal Service by bringing complaints and suggestions to the attention of top postal management and solving the problems of individual customers." In this battle, the Consumer Advocate personnel simply became defenders of the Commander-in-Chief. Bailar won that battle. But the war was not over. The BATTLE OF LETTERS continued.

In the time that followed, Tognazzini corresponded with the Consumer Advocate (2 letters), the Consumer Advocate's Associate (4 letters) The Chairman of the Board of Governors for the Postal Service (4 letters), the Secretary of the Board of Governors for the Postal Service (1 letter), the Senior Representative, Government Relations Department (2 letters) the receptionist in Mr. Bailar's office (2 letters), the Manager of the Office Administration Branch (1 letter), President Ford (5 letters), the General Manager, Administration, Government Relations Department (3 letters) President-elect, Jimmy Carter (2 letters) Administrator, American Bicentennial Commission (2 letters), Senior Assistant Postmaster General (2 letters), Congressman (4 letters), Senators (6 letters), State Senator (1 letter).

Letters received from the Postal Service in Washington, D. C. were indications that the bureaucracy is removed from the grass roots level. Evasions, gross errors, misinformation, all became a part of the responses which Tognazzini received. When approached with questions unanswerable, or answerable but yielding to Tognazzini, the Postal Service placed a "letter boycott" on Tognazzini. But in the interim, Tognazzini had received letters from four of the top men in the Service.....but never THE TOP MAN, Mr. Bailar, Postmaster General. He was just not to be reached!

It became evident now that the attitude "let's get him off our backs" prevailed. The question was HOW? Certainly, not with the information they supplied in their letters. In fact, Tognazzini's strategy was to wait for a letter, search out discrepancies based on facts at his disposal, call attention to these discrepancies, pose further questions and fire back a letter requesting clarification or answers to the new questions. This strategy brought on the boycott. It was safe to refuse to answer. Every letter written by an official in D. C. jeopardized the position taken that Lansing should be supported.

6

Oddly enough, facts which Tognazzini used as ammunition in his continued battle came from Mr. Bailar's defenders, themselves: William Corporan, Manager, Office Administration Branch quoted a section of the postal regulations to prove a point. Tognazzini found him in error and responded:....."you quoted just that section which would serve your purpose well. Why did you not quote the section which proved my point?" Where was the point proving Tognazzini correct? Two paragraphs above and on the same page of the postal regulations. Corporan's boycott against Tognazzini began!

Jack Powell, Senior Representative, Government Relations Department, responding to an inquiry from Tognazzini's Congressman concerning the project said: "The U. S. Postal Service.....is restricted from back-dating any mail matter, whether it be for a collection or actual mailing." Tognazzini had 9 cancelled sets from STATE CAPITAL CITIES and one additional full set of 50 from PHILADELPHIA, all BACK-DATED! Back-dating, although frowned upon by the Postal Service and certainly discouraged by regulations, IS DONE FREQUENTLY. It's simply a matter of knowing how to circumvent the regulations, which Tognazzini did not, at this time, choose to do.

Stephen M. Gordon, Consumer Affairs Associate (spelling Tognazzini's name incorrectly in his first response), in responding to Tognazzini's question as to why Lansing kept his envelopes for almost three weeks, said, "I suspect your letter was answered in turn, and that it took that much time to respond to the many similar inquiries to other customers....."

Leo B. Gleasten, Jr., writing for Berniece Salerno, Lansing's postmaster, did not agree with that. He said, "The reason there was a delay in returning your letters was because we were seeking clarification on how to handle such requests."

Tognazzini was quick to point out that J. T. Ellington, Jr., Senior Assistant Postmaster General, Administration Group said, ".....detailed instructions were issued by the Central Region on June 23. The Lansing postmaster

7

followed these directives explicitly as you can see from the copy we have attached." BUT THERE WAS NO COPY ATTACHED OR INCLUDED WITH THE LETTER. When Tognazzini wrote and pointed this out to Mr. Ellington he found that Ellington, too had boycotted him!

Playing with dates became quite a game. Ellington had given the date of the directive as June 23. Gordon, Associate Consumer Advocate set the date of the directive to postmasters concerning problems of this nature at MAY 23.....almost a month before Tognazzini's envelopes were received in Lansing for cancellation. The question remained: "Why the delay of three weeks in returning them to Tognazzini, uncanceled?"

The battle continued in this fashion.....questions to the Postal Service with confusing answers which seemed to conflict, one answer with the other.

And then a streak of luck. One of Tognazzini's former students ~~is~~ was the editor of a special section of the San Luis Obispo Telegram Tribune, a San Luis Obispo County paper. The section, known as FOCUS, is issued every Saturday, and along with the T. V. programs for the week, special events in the county, and a full center-fold special feature, includes other features of a human-interest nature. Tognazzini dropped her a line and explained his project. She assigned a reporter and a photographer to work with Tognazzini and on November 20th an interesting article appeared in FOCUS captioned: "PERSISTENT PATRIOT". Fred Vulin, the reporter did an admirable job in presenting the project to the paper's readers in an article which was humorous, tastefully done and to the point, and well written. This is what Tognazzini had hoped for.....PUBLICITY! He purchased a stack of papers, extracted the articles and mailed a copy of each article to just about everyone with whom he had a contact. More importantly, he mailed one to the editor of the State Journal in Lansing with a "Letter to the Editor." A few days later, Mark Sauer, reporter for the State Journal called Tognazzini for a phone interview and asked that the dossier relating to Lansing, now numbering

145 pages, be submitted. The dossier was placed in the mail on November 30th. Two weeks later, Sauer was yet to receive the dossier. He made another phone call to Tognazzini, and a second dossier was forwarded. The first one had gone by U. S. Postal Service. The second one went United Parcel!

While Mr. Sauer was awaiting the dossier, Tognazzini received a letter from Mr. Bob Carr, Member of Congress from Michigan. Mr. Carr enclosed a copy of a letter he had received from the Lansing postmaster which, for the first time set down the reasons why she had refused to cancel as requested.

Ms. Salerno's letter was filled with discrepancies as had been all of the letters from Washington. She claimed offers from "someone" to give her a complete set if she would cancel 150! Would not the other 49 postmasters have received the same offer? What good would it do for a collector to invest over \$1,000 in 150 sets without the assurance that the 49 other postmasters would assist in the project? Either the story was fabricated or this was a subtle accusation that the other postmasters were supplying cancellations for "profit."

Ms. Salerno implied that NO MAIL went out from Lansing on July 4. This seems highly unusual and unlikely.

Ms. Salerno said that the delay in returning Tognazzini's envelopes was due in part to the "several hundred letters and packages of envelopes" she had received for cancellation on that date implying that the work load was too great to allow for immediate return. No mention was made of the other 49 postmasters, some of whom had a greater output than Lansing and yet complied with the request.

Ms. Salerno referred to a "community celebration" on the river front which required actual participation to "provide other than routine cancellations." What cancellations, other than routine ones? Does this not sound like a contradiction to the implication that NO MAIL went out of Lansing on July 4th?

Ms. Salerno said "The reason we gave Mr. Tognazzini for not returning his

returned,

request until July 16th and the response he received from the Consumer Advocate's office were both correct...." Tognazzini had his Lansing envelopes, uncancelled on July 5th. He is puzzled as to where she got the July 16th date.

Ms. Salerno said: "On November 23rd I was investigated because of an allegation that I was a stamp collector and/or collect postmarks." She did not say whether she was a collector or not! Tognazzini had suggested in two letters to authority figures in Washington that: "Is it possible that the postmaster there is also a philatelist and did not want me to have cancellations for envelopes in a unique and desirable project for the Bicentennial Year?" and "I said from the beginning that I would be willing to bet that Ms. Salerno, postmaster in Lansing, Michigan is a collector and so recognized the project as a philatelic rarity, therefore her reluctant attitude towards "someone else doing something she had not thought of." At any rate, according to Ms. Salerno, "I was investigated because of an allegation that I was a stamp collector and/or collect postmarks." Who made the investigation? Who made the allegation?

Ms. Salerno concluded her letter to Congressman Carr by saying: "Mr. Tognazzini would be the only person in the United States with the 50 state capitol cancellations on July 4th, if his request is permitted." At last, the truth was ferreted out.

One other thing in Ms. Salerno's letter added confusion to the issue. She had implied that NO MAIL had been sent out of Lansing on July 4th. Mr. Ellington in his last correspondence to Mr. Tognazzini before the "boycott" suggested that: Mr. Tognazzini "(1) consult a local stamp dealer; (2) contact a Lansing stamp dealer who may have obtained machine cancellations for July 4; (3) consult the various philatelic publications for advertisements offering the Lansing July 4 cover for sale; or (4) place your own advertisement

offering to buy such covers."

Besides contradicting Ms. Salerno's implication that NO MAIL was sent from Lansing on July 4, the idea proposed by Mr. Ellington was offensive to Tognazzini. Tognazzini responded: "Your suggestion that I involve myself commercially in attempting to secure other cancellations offends me. This project was a project in HONOR OF THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION BICENTENNIAL. I undertook it because in the American Revolution Bicentennial's call to support the year-long celebration, we were asked to act individually.....or with others to start our own project...."

In Ms. Salerno's letter to Mr. Carr, Tognazzini's 35 years of school teaching brought out this one humorous note: Throughout the letter, the word "capitol" was used four times, each time incorrectly spelled. Tognazzini thought back to the hundreds of students he had reminded that "when you use an "O" in the word "capitol", you're referring ONLY to the building! Think of the round dome of the "capitol" building.....all other times use "capital" with the "A"!

So, now, over two years after the first shot of the battle, where does Tognazzini stand?

Safely tucked away in an over-sized bank deposit box in his local bank, Tognazzini has 8 sets of 50 envelopes all bearing state flag stamps, all cancelled in the state capitals and ALL CANCELLED ON JULY 4, 1976. ALL? Yes, ALL! Even Lansing, Michigan? YES, even Lansing, Michigan!

He'll proudly draw a set out of the bank deposit box to show anyone who may doubt or anyone who may be interested but he speaks only in mysterious tones of the Lansing cancellations!

With all of the resistance from the top of the federal ladder to the bottom, how did he accomplish this? It was not easy but it was done! And, it cost Tognazzini nothing, for those who might wish to accuse him of buying the cancellations. A few letters, a few phone calls, YES! Nothing more.

So the battle is won. It's all over. What now?

Tognazzini thinks that the sets are so unusual that the Smithsonian might wish to display a set and is making an offer.....not to give the Smithsonian a set,

only to put it on display.

Somewhere in the cumbersome binders of correspondence for this project, Tognazzini can recall these words of the postmaster in Lansing: "Do you realize what it would mean if I cancelled those stamps for him? He would have the only collection of its kind."

Bill Fleming, District Director for Customer Service said: "If a special deal was made to cancel these stamps it would just serve to enhance their philatelic value."

No matter. Tognazzini said from the beginning and continues to say it loudly and strongly: "Each of my children will get a set. From the standpoint of a monetary value, my children will not be interested. They are only interested in the fact that their dad took on the federal bureaucracy and won! And, some day, grandchildren, great grandchildren.....all the way through the Tognazzini line.....will proudly be able to say: 'He was a fighter.' "

From The Collection of Noel Tognazzini