

Hi, Fred Nelson for Community Comment,
I recently read an article in the local Times-Standard newspaper dated September 7th of this year. Entitled "Throwback Thursday" the story was written about postal workers packing pistols in 1961 due to the rising number of mail robberies and violent holdups throughout the nation. During that period, the Postal Service was still the Post Office Department and governed by Congress. The measure was quite drastic at the time and even though many local people were trained to use sidearms, guns were kept under lock and key and not distributed but were signed out for on occasion. The most common event locally was to ride 'shotgun' on high value shipments which amounted to a very few. The only local postal employees who carried a gun full time were the Railway Postal Clerks (including the RPO clerks on the Northwestern Pacific Railroad mail car) and the members of the Postal Inspection Service (Post Office Cops). There were no robbery attempts made in our area. The real problem took place in the large metropolitan areas and on certain days of the month when government checks were scheduled for delivery. It got so bad in some cities that the letter carrier had to have an armed escort accompany him on his rounds. During this period of gun training, I was the Assistant Station Superintendent at Henderson Station and in direct charge of about fifteen carrier delivery routes. None of my personnel were armed nor did we think it necessary. None of us at the Station were included in the training. I did sit in on some of the classes that Henry Grossi conducted for my own information. A former Marine and an excellent shot, Henry was qualified to conduct such a class. One of the pictures with the article show Grossi (on the left) 'frisking' a mail bandit in the classroom. The man on the left is not Grossi but then Assistant Postmaster Al Stedman of Fortuna. Little did we know, at the time, that nineteen years later, after he retired, Henry Grossi would go off the deep end and hunt down and kill four of his neighbors, then take his own life. I had seen Henry a short time before the tragic event when he had dropped by the Post Office. He was upset at the time over the recent loss of both his wife and his loyal dog and his neighbors were concerned about his collection of live water fowl that was becoming a nuisance and a health hazard to the neighborhood but I had no idea that he would commit murder, the worst tragedy that ever befell a local postal worker to my knowledge. To work closely with a person over a period of twenty years, then lose him in such a violent manner leaves an indelible mark in one's collection of memories that remains with me to this day. Fred Nelson for Community Comment