

Mailing It In

**By Reg P. Wydeven
August 29, 2009**

When I was a kid, the Kenner toy company had a special offer to promote the release of 'Star Wars: The Empire Strikes Back.' If you mailed in enough proofs-of-purchase from the back of Star Wars action figures, you would get a special action figure of Boba Fett, the mysterious character from the new movie. He even had a firing missile launcher on his back.

Needless to say, I ran to the mailbox every day to see if my special package arrived. Finally, on a Saturday morning six to eight weeks later, the mailman delivered my Boba Fett. While he was extremely awesome, I was disappointed to learn that his missile didn't launch. After a few kids got shot in the eye, Kenner took out the launching feature.

Because it came on a Saturday, I got to play with him all day. But mail on Saturdays might soon become as rare as a missile-firing Boba Fett.

John E. Potter, the Postmaster General of the United States, has approached Congress and officially asked permission to stop delivering mail on Saturdays. Like many businesses in these difficult economic times, the Postal Service is struggling financially. Potter estimates the Postal Service will lose approximately \$7 billion this fiscal year and the Government Accountability Office has officially declared it to be a high-risk agency.

While many people are sentimental about written letters and love getting them, fewer and fewer people are writing them. Because of the popularity of email and text messaging, less mail is being sent. Twenty billion fewer items were mailed this year compared to last year.

To celebrate the 30th anniversary of the release of 'Star Wars,' in 2007, the Postal Service issued Star Wars stamps and also placed about 320 mail-collection boxes shaped like R2-D2 across the country. They stood out because of their cool decoration, but also because around 200,000 such boxes have been removed from U.S. streets over the last 20 years because not enough people were placing letters into them.

Accordingly, Potter has recommended not delivering mail on Saturdays, which he estimates will save more than \$3 billion each year. Potter cites the government's mandate to the Postal Service deliver the mail "as frequently as the public convenience ... shall require." Historically, mail carriers actually made several deliveries per day. One hundred years ago, mail carriers in New York made nine deliveries a day, seven in Baltimore, and six in Kansas City. Not until 1950 was residential delivery reduced to once a day "in the interest of economy."

This isn't the first time Saturday delivery has been on the chopping block. In 1957, Postmaster General Arthur E. Summerfield decided to stop mail delivery on Saturdays to save money. It lasted a whole week. In response to the nation's fury, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a bill providing more funding to the Postal Service and mail was delivered the following Saturday.

Even if the post office stops delivering on Saturdays, it's still pretty impressive that for just a few coins, you can have a letter delivered within a few days to anywhere in the U.S. It's even more impressive that mail carriers can drive so well with the steering wheel on the wrong side of the car.