

Former Streetcar Operator Anders Looks Back on 40-Year MTA Career



By Bill Heard, Editor

(November 8) Lonnie Anders was 25 years old when he first took his place in the operator's seat of a Los Angeles Transit Lines streetcar in July, 1959.

Over the next 40 years, he drove thousands and thousands of miles - on both rails and asphalt - transporting an equal number of passengers for a succession of transit agencies. Last April, he retired from the MTA, but he was back in full uniform and looking sharp to lead the Pledge of Allegiance at Division 1's 100th birthday celebration, Nov. 7.

Anders began his career at the old Division 20 at 11th and Georgia. He was taught to drive an electric streetcar on-the-job by a line instructor. Among other things, he learned the importance of the "deadman's device," which he had to keep depressed with his left foot all times. If the operator lifted his foot off the device, or "if he passed out," Anders says, the car came to an emergency stop.

He drove streetcars for three years on what now are Lines 30 and 31, as well as on Pico, Broadway, 7th and 1st streets, Florence, Pacific, Santa Fe, Rowan and Dozier - all in the downtown area. In those days, passengers ventured to the middle of the street and waited for the streetcar on a small platform or just within the bounds of a painted box.

"It was dangerous, but motorists were more considerate at that time, I think," Anders recalls. "Today, I don't think that would be a very good idea."

Following his streetcar days, Anders was assigned to Division 2 where he was retrained to operate buses.

"It was quite an experience driving streetcars," he said. "I think the public was sad to see the streetcars go."

Forty years is a long time and Anders served as a line instructor for about 30 of those years. What wisdom did he pass along to young operators?

"You must have patience," he says, responding to this reporter's questions with a great deal of the same. "Drive safely, of course, and treat your passengers well."

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