

55 YEARS IN THE MAKING: VOGT RETIRES

In 1951, Willie Mays joined the *New York Giants* while another baseball giant, Joe DiMaggio, retired. America was introduced to Dennis—as in the Menace—and the Disney version of *Alice in Wonderland*. Seventeen million Americans owned TV sets and were watching *I Love Lucy* in black and white. Jobs were plentiful. So when Bill Vogt applied at a railroad on April 10, he got the job, marking the beginning of a 55 1/2-year railroading career that withstood three major railroad mergers and spanned 11 U.S. presidencies. On December 1, Vogt retired from the only full-time job he ever held.

Vogt was 18 when the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy (CB&Q) Railroad hired him to work on a construction gang, installing signals in the Midwest. Harry Truman was President, and America was involved in the Korean conflict. Vogt felt called to duty. On April 17, 1952, he enlisted in the army, serving a two-year stint. When he returned, the railroad based him in Hannibal, Mo., but a short time later, called him to Chicago, Ill. Once there, Vogt took the First Class Signalman exam, acing it. He would hold the job of signal maintainer for the remainder of his career.

Looking back, Vogt describes his early years as a romantic time. He was fresh off the farm and thought rail travel was very glamorous. When he transferred to Chicago, he settled in Hinsdale, Ill., because it was within 15 minutes of base operations, a requirement of the railroad at the time. That's all changed now, he says, along with so many other elements of the industry.

Back then, Vogt used a motor car to do maintenance. "It was different then," Vogt says. "We would call the dispatcher in the morning and get a track line-up. The dispatcher would tell us we had a suburban [passenger train], and we'd go behind them. That's the way we operated. It's very unusual by

today's standards." In those early years, signal maintainers bought second-hand pickups to carry their tools. Later, he says that the company began paying for their fuel, eventually providing their maintenance trucks.

Signaling systems have made dramatic changes, especially with the introduction of solid-state equipment in the 1990s. "We used to have shelf relays in a 9' x 6' house,"

Vogt says. "Now, they're in an 18" x 12" x 12" box."

During his final week at BNSF, Vogt worked with his replacement who, he laughs, will have his phone number "just in case." What advice did he pass on? "I told him that he has to be alert and watch what he's doing," Vogt says. "All the new guys coming behind me, they need to keep their mind on business. Sometimes that's hard to do if you have 175 trains a day." Vogt considers himself fortunate because he had a safe career, noting that signal maintenance is a critical job.

According to Wally Adams, signal manager, Chicago, Vogt did not miss a day of work in 55 1/2 years because of personal injury. In fact, during Vogt's entire career, he had only one reportable injury. "When I look at Bill Vogt, I'm amazed at two things: his length of service to our company and that he did not miss work," says Adams. "Bill worked hard, and he worked

well. I'm proud that I was able to work with someone who delivered excellent quality," Adams says.

Vogt will celebrate his retirement by taking a cruise with his wife, but he doesn't plan on a carefree lifestyle. He's unsure exactly how he'll spend his time but says he will probably look for a part-time job.

One thing about his retirement is certain, though. Vogt won't leave railroading behind. He says he'll always have an eye on the gates in Hinsdale. "If I see them down, I'll be wondering what went wrong." 



Bill Vogt, BNSF centralized traffic control (CTC) maintainer in Chicago, Ill., shortly before his retirement after 55 1/2 years of service.