

# Mr. Cecil and the Standard Gauge

*By Ken Riddle for the Blue Ridge Stemwinder*

Over the last several years we have talked about some colorful characters that ran the railroad down thru the years. We have had Belmont Watson twirling his magic rabbit foot on his watch chain, telepathically (with the help of a throttle valve in need of grinding) beckoning the old Engine 4 to move on her own, We discussed Uncle John Lewis sneezing his teeth out the window of the 12 in the Doe River Gorge and stopping the train and climbing down the bank to go get them. John Meridith and his bad temper tales have crossed the pages of this magazine, not to mention all the Cy Crumley, Sherman Pippin, numerous Allison's, and Tighteye Simerly tales that you have gotten to see here. John Waite and Chris Ford are winding down the Stemwinder soon, but before we sign off there is one more guy that I want you all to get to know. He was, at least to me, maybe the largest of many larger than life characters that ever stomped across the property at the ET&WNC railroad yards at 132 Legion Street in Johnson City. His name was **Cecil Dwight Bowden**, and he ran the railroad from the day the first Alco diesels smoked down the Southern lead and into the yard in 1967 until he left to become the General Manager of the Georgia Central in June 1989.

I reckon that I need to apologize to the meek among you right now, as it is going to be impossible to talk about Cecil Bowden without three things, a scalding hot cup of coffee, a lit cigarette, and (this is what I want to warn you about) a triple charge of railroad profanity. Cecil was of the old school, the Frank Coffey and Wallace Heywood "**University of Hardass**" professional railroading where use of profanity was not only accepted and expected, it was elevated to an art form. Mr. Cecil and Frank worked in cussin' like Rembrandt worked in oil paint.

Mr. Cecil (as we always addressed him) was born in Tarpon Springs, Florida in 1926. Tarpon Springs has a large population of Greeks, and as a boy Cecil made his spending money as a sponge diver offshore, selling his take for cash to some of the Greek merchants in town. I know that he had some brothers and sisters, but I don't know much about them or his early life. You have to understand that Mr. Cecil did not talk about himself very much, if at all. **He was all about work**, his work on the railroad. And he expected you to work just as hard as he did. His life was his work and his work was his life. Keep this in mind as you read my story. If you would work and give your hundred percent he would take you and give you a railroad education better than anything you could get anywhere, but if you were lazy you were quickly branded a

“lazy bastard”, a “damn slob”, or the famous “no-good futhermucker” and written off and as soon as possible went on to a new career.

Keith Holley, Darrell Edwards, and I had the sad duty of going down to Georgia last November to bury Mr. Cecil. Keith and Darrell were two of “**My Boys**”, as Mr. Cecil called them. He knew his time was getting short he told his wife that he wanted “his boys” to be his pallbearers. Keith and Darrell as well as some of his Georgia Central men did the job. **Earl Durden**, the owner of Rail Management (former parent company of the East Tennessee Railway) and Cecil’s boss (if there was such a thing) for the last twenty-some years, delivered his eulogy, and oh, what a fine job he did. He said that Mr. Cecil was a “**Man’s Man**” and I am here to tell you that no truer words were ever spoken. A *Man’s Man*, and a railroad man’s railroad man was Cecil Bowden if ever one walked the cinders.

Mr. Cecil was a little guy, about five feet six or seven or so and stout as a bull. I told you before that he had been a sponge diver when he was a boy in Tarpon Springs. Cecil served as a Navy “frogman” during World War II. He placed and detonated underwater demolition in the Pacific, and while he was there he earned not one, but two Purple Hearts. He told Keith that he stood up in the shallow water and there stood an enemy soldier “and the little Jap sonofabitch shot me.” Mr. Cecil took a special liking to Keith and told him some things that not many others heard. Keith replaced him as General Manager of the East Tennessee Railway when he went to the Georgia Central and at the yearly manager’s meeting in Panama City Beach, he would grab Keith around the shoulders and proudly tell the room that “Hell yeah—I raised this young-un!” (and he did and every time Keith moves the engine, checks a traction motor brush, signs a cab card, or tightens a track bolt there is a healthy dose of Cecil in the job). Keith went to work for Mr. Cecil when he was 18 (*“damn snot nosed young ‘un he was, but by God he’d work, not like some these other lazy bastards!”*).

According to **Russell Tedder**, a professional railroad man who was another “damn snot-nosed young ‘un” that worked with Mr. Cecil early on, Mr. Cecil started railroading on the Live Oak, Perry, and Gulf railroad (the “Lopin’ Gopher) down in Foley, Florida in 1946 as a mechanic in the shops there. This was before the Southern took over the LOP&G, and at the time the Foley shops maintained not only the LOP&G engines, but the large fleet of engines operated by the Brooks-Scanlon Lumber Company, and the shops were owned jointly by both companies. Refer to your copy of “*Mixed Train Daily*” (you do have one, don’t you?) as Beebe and Clegg made a couple of pilgrimages down there right at the time Cecil was there. They operated a fleet of wood-burning Baldwin engines, yes, wood burners. Mr. Cecil was probably the last living railroad man that had operated wood burners in regular service when he retired last

year. He had no love for the old Baldwins in particular or steam locomotives in general. I believe the term was *“damn nasty-ass hot wore-out pieces of shit—ever time you turn around the sonofabitches went to leaking and you’d have to crawl in the damn firebox an caulk ‘em up—while they was hot—burn your ass up—been better off to take a torch to the goddamn things!”* Mr. Cecil was most likely right.

Anyway, back to my story. The LOP&G was tied in with the South Georgia Railway from way back. The Gopher was forty-seven miles long and ran from Springdale to near Perry, Florida with a twelve-mile branch to Mayo. Throw in the South Georgia and its seventy-seven mile run from Adel, Georgia to Springdale, Florida and you have a fair size empire, not to mention all the Brooks-Scanlon logging stuff. Brooks-Scanlon built the largest Southern Pine sawmill in the world at Foley. Russell tells us that the Foley shops had a master mechanic by the name of George Reddick, and he was a Brooks-Scanlon employee. J. H. Kansinger was the president of the LOP&G, and wanted to get the shops out of Brooks-Scanlon control, as he was not happy with the deal of the dually owned shop. He bought a couple of 70-ton GE diesels in 1946 and set up a separate shop in Perry, Florida and kept his parts inventory there. The South Georgia bought their own 70-tonner at the same time, maintaining it out of the Foley shops. The old roundhouse burned in 1947, and Mr. Cecil got the South Georgia engine out by starting up a Cat bulldozer and dragging it out of the burning building. Russell Tedder went to work as the depot clerk in 1951 and he and Mr. Cecil became lifelong friends. Mr. Kansinger kept the storehouse for the diesels in one end of the depot and Russell also became the inventory clerk for the GE parts. The shop foreman would call him on the old battery phone system and tell him what he needed for a job and Russell would dispatch the order in a Ford stake truck over to the shop.

Buckeye Cellulose built a big mill at Foley in the early 1950’s and Russell says that it was common to see Cecil running the woodburners moving trains of construction materials for the new pulp mill, no doubt adding to his general disgust of external combustion railroad equipment. After the Southern bought the LOP&G in 1954, they took a torch to all of them.

It did not take Mr. Kansinger long to see that Mr. Cecil had superior mechanical ability and reward him for it. Not only mechanical ability I suspect, but that drive and work ethic that stayed with him his entire life. He built a pit at Perry and put Cecil in charge of inspecting, cab carding, and troubleshooting the diesels independent of the Foley shops and also put him in charge of the parts inventory. Not long after that, Kansinger hired a man named Slim Woods (Russell says he was a first-class diesel man) and put him over all the diesel maintenance and operations and totally broke away from the Foley shops and the Brooks-

Scanlon situation. About that time one of the 70 tonners broke a crankshaft (thou shalt remember to blow out those cylinders every morning lest the same fate befall thee) and Slim Woods and Cecil tore her down, renewed the crankshaft, and put her back together under a Florida shade tree. I bet even Mr. Hobbs would have been impressed.

Not long after the crankshaft adventure Slim Woods moved on to bigger and better things, and Kansinger promoted Mr. Cecil to master mechanic of the LOP&G and South Georgia. At the same time, Russell Tedder was made agent and chief dispatcher for the whole system, and he and Mr. Cecil shared an office in the Perry depot.

The Southern bought the whole outfit in 1954.

First thing they did was take a torch to the Baldwins. Second thing they did was notice what a crackerjack railroad man they got in the deal with Cecil Bowden. They sent Mr. Cecil two EMD SW-1's, two Alco S-1's, and a 44-ton siderod GE diesel locomotives. They also began upgrading the tracks to Southern's standards, which at the time was the finest in the world. They turned engines back at Adel every thirty days, and it was apparent that the power was coming back to the mainline in better shape than it came to Mr. Cecil. As soon as the trackwork was finished, Cecil ran his railroad with RS-2's and RS-3's. He always considered the Alco a superior locomotive to any other, and once again he was probably right.

The Buckeye pulp mill opened at Foley in 1954 and with it a high demand for wood chip, wood, and boxcars. Mr. Cecil was put in charge of all the rolling stock on the line, cars and engines together.

The man who the Southern sent to oversee the trackwork was French Akers, who had been assistant superintendent of the Knoxville division and was a favored son in the Brosnan administration of the Southern Railway.

I need to talk a little about **D. W. Brosnan**. For those of you who don't know the name you need to know about him. He was the head man of the Southern and brought it from a collection of short lines running pre-depression steam locomotives (sorry, I know they were green and pretty but they were low-tech power) over 70-pound steel and made it the Southern Railway System, the most modern, progressive, and profitable railroad the world had seen so far. He did it all Mr. Cecil's way, too, with long, hard work and none of it done halfway. I have done a lot of business with Norfolk Southern the last twenty years or so, and the Brosnan men were the backbone of the company as long as they were there. I bet he is doing flips in the ground over what that railroad has become. Here is one example of how "Ol' Broz" operated.

Bankhead Industries is a large metal fabrication outfit in Atlanta. They had tried and tried to get work with the rail welding portion of the railroad at Inman Yard but never could get a job. Finally the owner was at the “fab” plant one morning when Brosnan came by to check out things. The rail welding facility was and is the model of that type of plant in the railroad industry. Brosnan said he had some work that Bankhead might could do but they would have to perform. He then drew out part of a dismantling rack, where the used welded rail is taken apart for inspection and re-contouring. It would normally take a fab outfit most of the week to get it done. He told Bankhead that he needed it tomorrow, and he would be back at 11am the next day to see it. Bankhead worked all night and built it and at 11 the next day it was sitting at the fab plant, paint still wet but ready to go. Brosnan saw it, looked it over and then immediately told the railroad crew to cut it up and send it to the scrap pit. Brosnan then gave Bankhead a real order, and within a year they were running the fab plant and to this day operate it as well as all the rail trains and equipment system wide. Tens of millions have been made because Brosnan found somebody who would work his way. Cecil Bowden would work his way, too.

Mr. Kansinger died in 1956 and French Akers took over the LOP&G and South Georgia operations. He had seen what a fine railroad man Mr. Cecil was, and Mr. Cecil was taken into the Brosnan management fold. Brosnan had a mountain retreat at Almond, North Carolina called the “Forest”. He had management meetings here a couple of times a year and they were the railroad industry’s Parris Island. The days started at 5 a.m. and ended near midnight. Sometimes they even included building a fence, but mostly it was for Brosnan to see what his men were made of and hash out issues once and for all for the good of the company. As soon as Akers took over, Mr. Cecil started attending the meetings at the Forest. Russell says he thinks that Mr. Cecil’s management abilities came in a great degree from the time he spent at the Forest.

Russell Tedder tells us about how they worked together in Florida. They both hit the depot about 6 in the morning and found out where the South Georgia train was. Often as not they would be “on the law”, which meant the crew had been on duty 12 hours and had to, by law, come out of service for 8 hours rest. Lots of days Cecil would take a track foreman out and bring in the dog law train. Passenger service was discontinued by the Southern in 1956, but before it was the only consist operated down there was two doodlebug cars, one Kalamazoo, and one home-built contraption motorized by Mr. Cecil with an engine from an Army surplus half-track. (Once again, wherever he is, Mr. Hobbs smiles). The doodlebugs operated as trains 1 and 2, and met the Southern’s Ponce de Leon at Adel, GA.

**Clarence Hobbs** caught the westbound in the spring of 1967, as his son Jim went to the Legion Street shop to get the monthly cab cards for him to sign. He left among his survivors two 1904 consolidations, the ET&WNC 207 and 208. Graham Claytor, the former VP-Law of the Southern Railway and the man who had the nerve to ask Brosnan about a ferry move of the Kentucky and Tennessee 12, formerly the Southern 4501, from Stearns to Chattanooga, had made good and was at the time the president of the Southern. He had an excursion program going and cast a lustful eye towards the 207 and 208. He made repeated calls to **K. E. Wilhoit**, the CEO of the ET&WNC, courting him for to get the former Southern locomotives back. Mr. Hobbs would have none of it, but did agree to let the Southern rent one of them to take to a railfan convention in Roanoke. Wilhoit went to Hobbs and asked what he should charge for a week's rent. Mr. Hobbs said twelve thousand dollars should cover it, so Wilhoit calls Claytor and tells him they will rent the locomotive, and Mr. Hobbs to go along with her, for fifty thousand dollars, cash in advance. Like him or not, Wilhoit was a good money man.

Well, Donnie Palmer, Andy Kern, and Sirg Cole kept the steamers going a few months after Mr. Hobbs passed on. Andy retired late that spring and took to raising tomatoes. Late that summer the 208 fractured a throat sheet in Elizabethton. Andy, who was the boiler man, was not coming back out of retirement. Mr. Wilhoit says that when he came in from a civic club meeting and saw the old Baldwin being towed back into town he knew he had lost half his capacity and soon was back on the phone to Claytor. They worked out a trade for two diesels and the steam era in Tennessee was over. Frank Coffey came over from Tweetsie Railroad and pretty well cleaned out the shop, then Bill Purdie got most of the rest of it and loaded a boxcar with parts. Both steam locomotives were put on track two and the main rods and eccentric rods taken down and loaded in the tender. Earl Vest and Donnie Palmer retired as the ET&WNC went about its business with a loaned Alco switcher.

Mr. Cecil was General Foreman in Atlanta and was sent with the Central of Georgia 114 and 115 as a messenger to Johnson City. They were to become the 209 and 210. Mr. Cecil stayed on to help the nar' gauge men make the change from superheater headers to traction motors. A crew from the Birmingham steam shop came that fall to get the two steamers. Cy Crumley, Sherman Pippin, the Fords, my Uncle Sam and me, and a crowd of others came by the shop to see the old engines before they went south with the boxcar between them. Of everybody I am sure Brownie had the hardest time with it. Wilhoit recognized his value and, with the void left by Hobb's passing, made Mr. Cecil a deal he couldn't refuse and Cecil Bowden became the General Manger of the ET&WNC Railroad, Johnson City, Tennessee.

**Mr. Cecil did a great job from day one on the ET&WNC.** He was all business and the Clinchfield and Southern management and crews soon knew that there was a new sheriff in Johnson City. He made some changes that immediately grew the bottom line on the railroad, and Wilhoit was most pleased. Until about six months down the road when Mr. Cecil knocked on his office door one Friday.

Bowden told Wilhoit that it was time for a raise. He had been there six months and done a good job, and now it was time for some more payday. Wilhoit told him that it was not in the budget, and a raise would have to come later. Mr. Cecil told him that was too bad and left.

Monday morning comes and the crew shows up but no Cecil. It came dinnertime and still no Cecil. Word gets to Wilhoit and he calls Cecil's home. Cecil told him he didn't work there anymore, that he had taken a job in Florida "where they pay a man that makes the goddamn company money". **It didn't take long for Wilhoit to tell Clinton Edwards, the treasurer, to adjust Cecil Bowden's salary and reflect it back two pay periods.**

Cecil didn't have much use for railfans. He was always nice to me, but I knew when it wasn't a good day to be around, and there were plenty of those days. One of the funniest things I ever saw was a post on one of those foamhead boards on the internet about some dude from Atlanta who went down to the Georgia Central to make pictures. He posted that "everyone was so nice until some old man showed up and said he owned the railroad. He told me to take my goddamn camera and get the hell off his damn railroad". Pure Cecil.

I would take Brownie Allison by there to see him or to do a little work in the shop from time to time and I was always amazed to see how Mr. Cecil treated him. He would give him a big hug and ask him "*just where in the hell you been so long and ain't you about ready to come back over here and help me out*". Brownie had worked on until 1970, but his heart wasn't in it after the steam engines left. He was really nice to that old man.

Mr. Cecil bought a blue 1967 Chevy Bel Air (known as the satanmobile) when he came to Johnson City, brand new. He drove it his whole tenure here and it became a ritual for watching for him to come roaring up in it, just as it had been with Mr. Hobbs and the old big Buick Roadmaster years before. The train crew got a gondola car on the ground at Herb and Metal in Elizabethton one day and Cecil came oversee the proceedings. Clarence Smith was running the engine, and Mr. Cecil kept him scared to death all the time. (same for Claude "Pappy" English, who

would pace the shop chain smoking every morning waiting for the Chevy to roar into the yard). The crew drug the truck back up on the rail and off in the distance they heard someone yelling "You've run over my goddamn car!" Sure enough, Clarence had knocked the living crap out of the Chevy. Mr. Cecil was stomping and fuming and carrying on that he "cain't have a shittin'-eyed thang for the goddamn train crew!" Clarence was just plain scared to death, pale as a dead man. Cecil took a bar and pulled the fender off the tire and headed back to Johnson City. When the crew got back there was Mr. Cecil, puffing on a cigarette, beating the hell out of that fender with a hammer. Keith walked over there and Mr. Cecil had pounded it out with the blacksmith's hammer. "There you go--fixed that sumbitch back good as new". I don't think Clarence Smith ever recovered from the incident.

Not too long after that one rainy morning the crew was getting ready to take the engine out for the day. For those of you who have never paid attention, the old shop doors are a two-piece arrangement, and it takes a little doing to get them open as they don't open outward like a barn door, but slide on rollers, the original Cap Allison design from 1906. The track crew got sent home because of the weather, all but Keith Holley, back in the day when he still had his afro. Keith was sweeping up and heard a crash. He looked up to see half the door dangling in the breeze where the RS-3 had hit the half-open door and knocked it off. He knew what was coming so he heads back to the blacksmith shop and started looking like he was doing something. "Goddamn train crew!--I cain't have nothing for the GODDAMN TRAIN CREW!!!" Wasn't Clarence this time, but the show went on just the same. Mr. Cecil could sure get fired up when things got sideways.

Cecil really liked Keith Holley (as well as Keith's daddy, Clyde) and recognized his ability and work ethic early on, just as Mr. Kansinger had with Cecil years before in Foley. Keith was, like Mr. Cecil, handy with the troubleshooting and upkeep of the Alcos that kept the place going for so many years. Keith was working in the shop alone tightening up rod bolts on the 209 one day. This is a tedious process and requires the use of a long torque wrench and balancing yourself on the walkway. Keith had to get more leverage on the bolt to get the required torque so he puts his foot up on the side of the block and gives a mighty heave. Well, just as has happened to every young guy working in the shop, it didn't work out quite like he hoped. The wrench slipped off the bolt, and the handle flies back and hits him right between the eyes, opening a big cut. He is pulling so hard the force knocks him feet over head off the 209 and he lands on his feet between tracks one and two, next to the drop pit. He is bleeding like a stuck hog, and makes his way over to the yard office where Miss Elsie Fritts sees him and shrieks "Young 'un are ye killed?!?" He was covered with blood, but Miss Elsie cleaned him up

and taped him up and he heads back to the shop and finishes up on the 209, this time being more careful. The blue beast roars up to the yard office and directly Mr. Cecil comes walking thru the shop. He comes walking past the 209 with a cup of coffee and sees Keith. *“Elsie said ya knocked yer goddamn head off”* he said around his cigarette. *“Yes, sir, Mr. Cecil-just a little.”* *“Hell, you’ll be aright.”* And he kept going, never missing a step.

**Earl Durden bought the railroad in 1983.** He told me at Mr. Cecil’s funeral about their first encounter. He made the trip up to Johnson City from Florida to look things over and see what he wanted to change. He comes into the yard office and there sits Mr. Cecil at the desk in a cloud of cigarette smoke with a cup of “dat-dam” coffee, as he called it. You need to know that if Mr. Cecil didn’t know you he didn’t have a lot to say to you, and what he did was maybe a little brusque for your taste, especially if you were not used to real railroad men.

Earl said Cecil didn’t hardly look up. Earl told him that he was the new owner of the railroad and he wanted some things done differently. Cecil never took a note and just barely acknowledged Earl’s presence. When Earl left he said Cecil never even got up from the desk, just kept working away on whatever paperwork he was doing when they met.

Earl was not just miffed, but more like furious. He had given Cecil a month to do what he asked but came back in a week just to fire that obstinate old man who paid him no mind as the new owner.

Well, Earl gets back in a week and not only has Cecil got it all done, it is done exactly the way Earl wanted and in a week, not a month. **He immediately realized what a great manager he had and valued Cecil’s input on many issues not only at the ETRY,** but many of his Rail Management lines and later made him General Manager of the Georgia Central, the largest railroad in the RMI family. Earl built a large shop in Lyons, Georgia to maintain the big power on the Georgia Central and named it the “Cecil D. Bowden Maintenance Building”. He also built a new office building in Lyons and Cecil had a big fancy office with fancy furnishings. I never found him in it when I would stop by. He was always in the shop or on the road.

I have to tell this one on **Darrell Edwards**, as it left a lingering phrase that still gets used by many of the people who knew Mr. Cecil and several who didn’t, but it is a great tale and pure Cecil.

The train crew always had hopper cars loaded and empty for the tipple at North American Rayon. In typical Carter County style, they could let things get a little out of hand from time to time. (Mr. Cecil had no use at

all for Carter County). He said they should “build a damn fence around the whole fucking county to keep the goddamn convicts in there”). Well, that day the NAR crew had let a hopper car get away and needed a re-spot. Conductor Darrell “Cy” Edwards got flagged down and went back to re-spot the runaway hopper. Well, a little while later the NAR crew let another one get away on the tipple, just like before, but the ET train was already on the way back to Johnson City. They called the yard office and told Cecil what had happened.

Cecil gets on the radio and hollers for Darrell-  
“come in 211”

“211 go ahead”

“NAR let one get away on the tipple—go over there and respot”

“We already did”

“No, they need a re-spot on the tipple, go back over there”

Darrell didn’t know another car had gotten away. Mr. Cecil was getting fired up, and everybody in the yard office and on the radio frequency stopped what they were doing because they knew the show was going to start any time now. Darrell comes back on the radio-

“We already re-spotted the NAR tipple”

“Darrell, DONT MAKE ME CUSS **GODDAMMIT GET YER ASS OVER THERE AND SPOT THE GODDAMN TIPPLE!**”

Silence from the 211.....

“OK Mr. Cecil we’re on the way”

Nobody laughed out loud but there were a bunch of people that heard it and it they were all about to pop.

**Keith Holley** was across the desk from Cecil and finally broke the silence. “Mr. Cecil, you scared Darrell out of two years growth—he won’t be worth a shit all day after that.”

*“Well, I gotta teach you goddamn boys not to argue with me—I tell ya what I tell ya for a reason, goddamnit!”*

**Lesson learned. To this day, “don’t make me cuss” is often repeated by everyone who knew Mr. Cecil. Conductor Edwards eventually recovered never questions anyone on the radio anymore.**

Mr. Cecil worked as long as he could. He got sick about three years ago. For some reason, whether it was all those constant cigarettes or the asbestos stripping the jackets and lagging on the woodburner boilers, he got cancer. The same kind that also took my Grandpa Riddle, who worked in the CC&O roundhouse in Erwin and also smoked a constant chain of cigarettes. It is a nasty, terrible thing, but Cecil knew he was getting to the end of his run.

He kept working until Earl sold RMI to Rail Link and they made Cecil retire at 80. Cecil had forgotten more than the entire Rail Link management team ever knew about railroading, but they had no use for the old man, and retired him.

Keith and Darrell kept up with Cecil pretty close during that last year when he was sick. One day Mr. Cecil asked for Keith’s Dad’s phone number. Clyde Holley was working when Cecil came to the ET&WNC, and was a damn good railroad man in his own right and Cecil respected him a lot. Cecil called Clyde later that week and asked him if he remembered when RMI took over that Clyde had lost three weeks vacation time in the deal. Clyde said he had forgotten about it, but he reckoned that now he did remember it happening. Cecil told him that he was very sorry about that and that he might could have done something about that all those years ago. Clyde assured him that all was forgiven and forgotten and he sure hoped Cecil got to feeling better right away. Cecil ended the phone call by telling Clyde:

“God Bless you and your family.”

The next week Clyde got a letter from Lyons, Georgia, with a check from Cecil Bowden’s personal account for all the money Clyde Holley would have made in three weeks in 1983.

**Friends and neighbors, they ain’t no men like Cecil Bowden left in this world and we are a lot poorer because of it.**

I want to let Russell Tedder help me close this thing out, in his own words from an email he sent me shortly after we buried Mr. Cecil.

*“Lastly, from my many years as a co-worker with him, I always felt that Cecil had a spark of faith. As a Christian, I am very pleased to know that he publicly professed his faith and became a member of a church. My heartfelt sympathies go out to Rosemary and all of Cecil’s family as they*

*adjust to his absence in this life. Likewise, to those of you who worked for and with him for so many years, I know that his presence will also be truly missed. Like me, you have benefited immensely from the knowledge and railroading expertise he has imparted to you over the years. We will all treasure the memories of his life as a great railroader and friend.”*

I want to state here that Cecil Bowden, in my opinion, was the finest railroad man that ever sailed the rails between Johnson City and Boone. Probably the best railroad man I ever knew, except for maybe Keith but he wouldn't have known a damn thing if Cecil hadn't showed him, so Cecil wins. I reckon it makes me feel a little old and sad to know that we have outlived not only the Cy Crumleys and Sherman Pippins, but even Cecil Bowden. We sure don't have the timber coming up to replace men like him, and that is a sad thing.

Cecil did get religion along toward the end, and I am glad that he did, but I kind of have a problem imagining him as an angel. I guess he would do well at it, as he was a fast learner. I just hope that they allow cigarettes, have plenty of hot coffee, and don't mind if he slips up with a bad word once in a while.

Darrell, Keith, and I were visiting with some of his Georgia Central boys after the funeral in Georgia. I want to close with what one of his track foremen told us.

*“It was Christmas Eve and we had a locomotive with a dead wheel that had to be taken out of the consist about thirty miles from the shop. We got the wheelset changed, but left the engine on the mainline so the men could go home for the holiday. Mr. Cecil asked me if I would go out Christmas Day with him and bring her back to the shop. I told him I would be glad to, so he picked me up and away we went.*

*We got over to the engine and started her up. We got the air up and headed back to Lyons. It was a beautiful warm sunny day and not a cloud in sight. Cecil sat over on that engineer's seat, lit him up a cigarette, and poured him a cup of hot coffee from the thermos. He rared back in the seat and grinned at me and said-*

*“You know, this is my kind of Christmas—good engine, great weather, and we got the whole railroad to ourselves—yes, sir-my kind of Christmas!”*

And I know it was his kind of Christmas.

I hope that is what he has now. Just can't see him with a harp or wings, but if the Good Lord needed a damn good railroad man to take care of one of his railroads he has sure got one now!

**Just don't make me cuss, goddammit!**

The story line to this tribute to Cecil Bowden needs to say it was written by Russell Tedder, Keith Holley, Darrell Edwards, the Georgia Central crew, and me – Ken Riddle.