Working on the T&OC in the 1960s

The "List Man"

by James M. Cavanaugh

The most challenging assignment you could pull working the Toledo & Ohio Central Western Branch extra board from West Columbus -- but the one that involved the most real "railroading" -- was the "List Man" job.

A train crew normally was three men - the "head brakeman" riding the locomotive along with the two-man engine crew, and the more senior flagman and conductor riding the caboose. All this has long since changed, with the disappearance of the caboose on over-the-road freights and repeal of the Ohio full-crew law. But in the early diesel era, that crew arrangement was a given, like the laws of physics.

However, on two of our hard-working road trains, NT-7 northbound from Columbus to Stanley Yard in Toledo, and TC-2 southbound back to West Columbus Yard, the head brakeman was called the "List Man." This was an honorific title bestowed by the crew dispatcher when he called you to report for work around 6 PM for one of these much-dreaded all-night runs. It was a privilege that could not be refused.

These trains, in addition to hauling 60-80 cars of through "overhead" freight from Columbus to Toledo, or *vice versa*, usually had 15-25 "short cars" to be dropped at points along the way, multiple pick-ups of other cars, and occasional major industrial switching assignments. Our other through freight trains, including the morning "hotshot" northbounds NT-1 and NT-5, and the SC, TN and CN symbol trains southbound, occasionally would have a single block of cars to set off at Ridgeway (T&OC Western Branch Milepost 81). That was a piece of cake, with the tower operator throwing most of the switches for you, and everything moving quickly through the ultra-modern plant at that major interchange point with NYC's sister Big Four line. You could expect an eight-hour day on those premium rides, during daylight hours, mostly drinking coffee in the cab, chatting about how the company ought to run the railroad or the latest safety rule change or whatever, watching the beautiful rural Ohio scenery fly by. Conversely, on NT-7 or TC-2, you could count on working all night, guaranteed to reach your lawful working limit of 16 hours, mostly out on the ground using all your muscle power throwing switches, pulling coupling pins and connecting air hoses, climbing up to set hand brakes, riding on the side ladders of covered hopper cars snaking in and out of side tracks, straining to see distant flickering lantern signals from your fellow crew members, in dark cold fog, rain and snow, or steamy mosquito-enhanced summer nights.

In the steam era, in addition to the head brakeman on these worker trains, the NYC would often assign an additional brakeman or conductor to ride the front end to help with the switching, bringing the train crew up to four men. That person was actually called off the extra board with the formal title "List Man". He would get the

list of short cars, pick-ups and switching assignments from the yard office, confer with the conductor over any details, and then carry all the switching work out over the course of the run. Having two people out on the ground when switching, especially with longer cuts of cars on curving track, is easily more than twice as efficient, and many times safer.

In the diesel era, in which there was a lot more crew productivity and better visibility from the cab, the railroad did away with this extra trainman. But when they called you for NT-7, or when you walked into the yard office to report for work, the crew dispatcher would say "I see we have our List Man for tonight." You were once again the "List Man," but now you had to do it by yourself.

Covering the Road and Feeding Our Locals.

On our T&OC Western Branch between Columbus and Toledo, there were four stretches covered by regular local switching trains. The 25 miles from Grandview Tower (the north end of West Columbus Yard) to Marysville was switched by the daily (except Sundays) Marysville Turn. Some 80 percent of this job's work was switching the sprawling O.M. Scott & Sons new plant at Scottslawn (MP 107-8). The "Turn" also covered the big Nestle Plant and small older Scott's facilities in downtown Marysville, which we reached via a short stub of the former Big Four Delaware-Springfield line that connected with the Western main line at MP 106 in the south end of Marysville. The Kenton Local, which I recall worked Monday through Friday, covered industries between the Eastern Branch Junction in downtown Kenton and the double-track Erie Lackawanna Crossing (MP 71-73), plus the extensive active shippers on the stub of the Eastern Branch (former Big Four Bellefontaine to Clyde Branch) between the Scioto River Bridge and the Erie interchange at Sands. The Findlay Local patrolled five or six days of the week between the Nickel Plate interchange at Mortimer (MP 38) down to Hancock Siding (MP 43), mainly switching the big Whirlpool complex and Dow Chemical plant just south of Whirlpool at MP-39. Finally, the nightly "WIP-4" switching run from Stanley Yard to the Willis Day Industrial Park, and three daily switching shifts inside the Park, WIP-1, 2 and 3, covered this huge warehouse and distribution complex via its south switch onto the Western Branch at MP 7.

That left more than 30 active switching points on the 92 miles of the Western Branch main track between MPs 7-38, 42-72 and 74-105. These ranged from a scattering of country grain and fertilizer elevators and isolated oil and chemical distributors to the expansive team track complex that served the Heinz and Hunts canneries in downtown Bowling Green. These places were seasonally very active during the corn, tomato and cucumber harvests, but otherwise dormant. Also in these stretches were interchange points with several other railroads, including the B&O at Galatea (MP 32), Nickel Plate (N&W) at Mortimer, Akron, Canton & Youngstown (ACY) at Arlington (MP-51), and the Big Four at Ridgeway.

This southbound freight is on the T&OC Western Branch just south of the B&O junction at North Baltimore (Galatea), near MP-32. No. 1865 is an F7A, built in 1952, former NYC 1865, wearing Penn Central livery from 1968-70. Photo by Paul Maykuth, May 10, 1975.

The T&OC covered these stretches of the line beyond the reach of our locals by having NT-7 and TC-2 roll up their sleeves, pick up and drop cars, and do all the heavy-duty switching. If traffic really got backed up, the railroad might also call a few "Turn" trains such as a Ridgeway Turn from Columbus, out and back the same working shift, or have one of its Columbus-based crews overnighting at Stanley Yard take a single shift Findlay Turn or Williamstown ("Billtown") Turn down to cover Bowling Green, Findlay, Arlington and back. We also sometimes got a "Grain Run" that would have to deliver empties to multiple little country elevators, and return with loaded covered hoppers.

Interestingly, the letters of our symbol trains harkened back to historical times when the NYC, C&O and Virginian Railroad coordinated trains and blocks of through freight running from tidewater ports in Virginia all the way to Chicago. "NT" originally signified Norfolk-Toledo, with through (or overhead) freight coming onto the T&OC from the C&O via the end-to-end Nicholas, Fayette & Greenbrier Railroad (NF&G) at Swiss, West Virginia, which was jointly owned by the NYC and C&O. Other blocks of through freight came to us from the Virginian (an N&W predecessor) at Deepwater, far down the T&OC line on the Kanawha River in West Virginia. Among our other road train symbols, "CN" stood for Chicago-Norfolk. "TN" was Toledo-Norfolk. The less exotic "TC" apparently was Toledo-Columbus. "SC"

must have been Stanley Yard to Columbus, and occasionally our southbound symbols had a "D" which was Dickenson Yard, south of Charleston, West Virginia.

Your Work Day as the "List Man"

The "List" itself was a stiff paper card, sort of like a small restaurant menu, usually created by rubber stamping or mimeographing a template on the back of a recycled car waybill with blue ink. A copy of a TC-2 "List" is attached to this article. It would have blanks to be filled in by hand by the train dispatcher, noting the train symbol, date, train origin and destination, and then there would be a list of loads and empties for each intermediate destination and the final terminus of the run.

The list would tell you how many cars were to be set off at each location, with the unique identifier number of the first car in that cut, or sometimes with numbers of both the first and last car of each cut. That gave the List Man two data points, first the number of cars to be handled at each point (i.e., the first four cars on your train were for Horton, next three were for West Mansfield, next nine were for Ridgeway, plus the first and last car number in each of those cuts to be sure. The cars were arranged in the right sequence by the yard crews who made up our freight trains.

The basic working train car "set off" was a four-step move that might take 15-20 minutes, if all went well, maybe a half hour if there were complications. Half a mile out as our train approached the main-track switch for the set-off track, the engineer would start applying the train brake and engine brake to slow down to about four or five miles per hour, which was about a brisk walking speed. On the side of the train where the switch was, I would go out the side door of our F7 covered wagon locomotive and step down the ladder to the bottom stirrup, keeping a careful grip in the grab irons on both sides of the ladder, carrying my six-volt battery lantern on my left arm at the elbow, like a lady's purse.

About 150 feet back from the switch, at a point where the two tracks did not yet start to converge, I would drop off to the ground, back foot first, taking a couple steps to keep my balance as I dismounted. I would have to start counting the cars as the rear locomotive unit in our consist passed, anticipating when to signal the engine crew to "steady up" and then "swing down" the engine to stop at the right place, so I could uncouple the train at the rear end of the last car in the cut to be dropped off. About three or four car lengths before that rear car approached I would give the steady-up signal, raising my arm, and at night, my lantern, as high as I could reach. The engineer would apply the engine brake, and I would hear the boom-boom-boom sound as the slack ran in behind the locomotives. One or two car lengths before the uncoupling point, I would give the "stop" swing-down, waiving my hand, or lantern, right-left-right, and the engineer would stop the train gently, using the air brake to draw down pressure in the brake line, causing pistons beneath the cars to shove the brake linkage into creaking action, applying the brake shoes to the wheels. The train would groan to a top, leaving only the hissing sound of brake

line air escaping somewhere, and the faint remaining booms of the slack running in on rear cars of the train off in the distance.

I would wait for the train to make a full stop -- never, NEVER under any circumstances, even to rescue a stunning young heiress or a beagle puppy, step in between moving train cars. Then, I would reach in and turn the air line angle cock on the rear of the drop cut, and if we were "saving the air" (because the train was on level ground with the air line pressure drawn down), I would also reach across the drawbar and close the angle cock on the next car behind. Then I would give the coupler handle a good yank to pull the pin up. If the pin would not rise because there was tension on the drawbar, I would give the engine the "slack" signal, bumping my fists together over my head. You could not quite do that "slack" thing with the lantern at night, but the engineer (or fireman if the switch was on the left side of the train) would be expecting either a highball or a slack signal, so he would get it. For slack, the engineer would back up a few feet easing tension on the couplers and drawbar, so I could get the pin up, releasing the coupler knuckle.

Once the train was uncoupled, I would step up in the stirrup on the rear of the cut, and holding on with one hand, I would give a "highball" (move forward) up-and-down signal with my hand or lantern. The engineer would pull ahead. No need for a horn signal here -- you could hear the engine rev up a couple seconds before the train started to move. We would pull ahead until the rear of the cut approached the switch, at which point I would give a "steady up" signal, quickly followed by a "swing-down" (stop) side-to-side arc with hand or lantern as the rear of the cut passed the switch points. The engine and cut would stop, and I would have already dismounted (rear foot first) and walked over to the switch.

Here I would need my bronze NYCS (New York Central System) switch key to open the big standard company padlock. That allowed me to pull the switch handle up from a locked position in a notch, and swing it 180 degrees to the far end of its arc to open the switch. Most of our main track switches were upright stanchions, with a vertical axle rotated by the switch handle. At the top was a red and green target that would allow an approaching engineer to see from some distance what position the switch was in (green aligned for the main track, red for the siding). At the bottom was a crank connected by a rod to the switch points.

Once the switch was open, I would give the "back 'em up" (circular) signal, and the engineer would reverse the cut down through the now open switch points into the side track. I could hop on the stirrup of the rear end and ride the 150 feet or so down to the uncoupling point, but if I could see the track was clear and the ground was level, I would usually walk that distance rather than doing the more dangerous mount and dismount to and from the moving cars. I would swing down the engine when the rear coupler of the locomotives reached the point where the cut would be "in the clear" of the main track, where the curving switch lead rails straightened up to full parallel with the main track rails. This was a point easily determined visually, but as I learned after getting yelled at pretty good once by the trainmaster, in TCS

(Train Control System) territory there was usually (not always) a yellow-painted joint bar on each rail marking the point where cars on the side track would be "clear", and you had to be sure both front wheels of the first car were behind those yellow bars. The yellow bars were where the main track electronic circuit ended. If you left the lead set of wheels ahead of those bars, it would close the circuit and tell the train dispatcher there was something fouling the circuit there, and it would also cause the train signals on the main track in that block to lock on red.

Here, once stopped, I would step in and close the rear angle cock on the engine, leaving the one on the set off cut lead car open, as we would always dump the air on the cut to set the brakes securely. Once the engine pulled away a few feet I would usually swing him down to a stop and climb up the side latters on the first couple cars of the cut and set the hand brakes. In some places where it was dead level and the cars were going to be moved during the following day or so, there would be no need for the hand brake, but usually by custom we set at least one. In other steeply sloping sidings like Arlington, you better set a brake on every single car. That done, I would get on the rear stirrup of the engine and signal them forward toward the switch ahead.

F2 No. 1605 taken at the West Columbus Yard. Photo by Galen Gonser, April 1958. Note the small stirrup and grab iron just forward of the front truck wheels. The model F "covered wagons" were built for over-the-road haulage and viewer esthetics, but not for the brakeman's comfort and safety while switching.

On an F7 "covered wagon," there is no footboard at either end on which the brakeman can ride during switching moves. On the rear end, there was a usable ladder and vertical grab irons, but on the front there was only a small box-like stirrup facing somewhat forward where the locomotive body curved around toward the front drawbar, with a chest-high curving horizontal grab iron. But riding here had you hanging awkwardly partly around on the front of the engine, out of sight of the engineer, with at least a remote possibility of falling or being thrown off onto the track ahead of the wheels of the engine if moving forward, or under the car behind if you were backing up while coupled to a cut. I never heard of that happening, but my paranoid preference was to ride around on the side of the locomotive hanging on the ladder up to the cab.

Once out of the side track and past the switch, I would swing down the engine, jump off and throw the switch, replace the lock, and signal "back 'e up" to bring the engine back down the main to the waiting train, couple on, reconnect the air hoses, open the angle cock to let the air pressure flow to the train. I would then walk forward to the lead locomotive unit, and climb back aboard, job completed. It would take a few minutes to pump the brakes back up, and then we were ready to go on up the line.

That whole process would take perhaps 15 minutes if you moved smartly. You wanted to step lively, but never rush, which is what leads to accidents and mistakes.

However, there were many things that could turn the usual 15 minutes into a half hour or more. Dark, fog, rain, snow, ice, extreme cold or wind or anything that impaired visibility or hearing meant the crew would probably have to move more slowly. And on NT-7 or TC-2, the longer you were out there, the more likely something would happen to cause a major delay.

If the set off point was several tracks back in a small local yard or plant where you were setting off, there could be additional switches or "derail" devices to throw to get there, and to realign on the way back out to the main track. Also at some locations, such as covered hoppers going into an elevator, tank cars going onto an oil terminal or boxcars going along side an industrial building with a loading dock or doors, you might be required to spot a car at a specific building door or discharge point, or more challenging, to spot multiple cars at multiple doors or loading and discharge points. If this was on curving track, the degree of difficulty was greater as you might have trouble finding a point where you could stand to see both the cars and the engine at the same time to give your signals.

The degree of difficulty would be several multiples greater if you had to move and replace other cars already in the track on spot points that were in your way. Pulling out three or four standing cars, getting your three or four cars in there and spotted, and re-spotting the cars that were already there might take 30 or 45 minutes or more. If the spots for the cars were back inside an industry track or inside a building, especially on a curve, it just took forever to do it safely.

In the 1960s, some engineers were starting to carry walkie-talkie radio sets for these complex switching jobs, and to talk to the conductor in the caboose on the rear. However, these were not always reliable and I did not really trust them. Sometimes the engineer could hear you talking but could not make out what you were saying, meaning he could not move if there was the slightest uncertainty in communication.

If the set off point was on a hill, and you had trouble getting the slack, or had to set lots of hand brakes, that all took time.

Fortunately, the drops and pick ups we were assigned on the T&OC always had correctly facing switch points, and we never had to "drop" cars off the main track into facing switch points. Virtually all the time, the cars to be set off would be in the right order from the yard, so we did not have much sorting to do. Also when we picked up cars, they would almost always be destined for the terminal yard at the end of the run, rather than some other intermediate point, which simplified matters.

Of course if you were both setting off and picking up cars at the same place, that added another layer of effort and planning. If it was a simple pick up and set off at a single track, with no cars to be spotted or switched, you could do it in six moves. Usually we would cut off the cars to be set off, leaving the train far enough back from the switch to accommodate the pick up cut, pull forward, back in the side track, set off the arriving cars, and couple onto the pick up cut, pull back out onto the main track, back down and couple the pick up cut onto the train, then go forward with the set off cut, back it into the side track and leave it there with hand brakes set, pull the engine out of the side track and back down onto the train, pump off the air and depart. But at best this was going to take a lot longer. Also if you were picking up eight of ten cars and dropping a similar number, you would end up working quite a distance from the engine, hard to signal in limited visibility or on curving track.

Each of our potential drop off and pick up points in the 130 miles from Stanley Tower to Grandview had some unique features. The little country industries with a single sidetrack alongside our main track that could hold a few cars at an elevator, warehouse or mill, were pretty simple. There included places like Lime City, Dunbridge, the alfalfa mill at Trombley, elevators at Arlington, Horton, and West Mansfield.

There were also interchange points with other railroads including the Nickel Plate at Mortimer, N&W at North Findlay, AC&Y at Arlington, Pennsylvania at Dunkirk, Erie at Kenton, and with our sister Big Four at Ridgeway. Usually an interchange move entailed backing the cut through a curving 90-degree connection onto a dedicated interchange track, and then coming back out the way you got in. However, at Ridgeway, moving northbound on NT-5 or NT-7, we would pull the drop cut into the transfer track and then take our engine all the way through the three-quarter mile long Big Four siding to the east, get permission to come back out onto their double-track main, and back all the way to the tower and through the

plant back to our waiting train. Fortunately the tower operator would throw most of the switches using the tower equipment, so it went quickly.

Southbound at Ridgeway was far more complicated, and the crews of TC-2 would often have to spend several hours there. The car storage track for interchange cars was along the T&OC siding north of the tower. To switch cars in and out of there, we would have to pull around on the northwest quadrant track connecting onto the Big Four toward Bellefontaine. Complicating matters, there was a busy highway grade crossing part way up this track that we were not permitted to block with standing cars. We would have to leave the train way back up in the siding, and switch out the storage track cars to get the ones for our train, and then back them north around that curve back to the train. This was not much fun at all in the dark or rain, or on a windy January day.

Fortunately, for southbound working trains like TC-2, there were no more switching points south of Ridgeway. However, we commonly got held out at Highway Siding (MP-124) at Scioto-Darby Road for an hour or more, waiting for a track to open up at West Columbus. If we did not "violate" (exceed our maximum 16-hour legally-allowed working shift) at Highway, in which case the management sent out another crew in a van to pick us up, we would then go down to the yard and have to double our lengthy train into several tracks before uncoupling the locomotives, taking them back to the roundhouse and calling it a day.

A Surge of Deep Satisfaction

I can't really explain it, but when you manned a working train like NT-7 or TC-2, you came off dead tired but felt like you had done some serious railroading. Then, you got to go home, get a few hours sleep, a cup of hot coffee, an aspirin or two for those aching fingers and sore back, throw some dry socks, a can of baked beans and a baloney sandwich into your grip, and you were ready to go do it again.

Breakdown of Road Train Dispatched

Train Symbol TO 2

From Stanley Yd. Put check on this line ____

From Outer Yd. Put check on this line ____

Date Dispatched 2-7-70

Time Train was called for 2°5

Conductor's Name ____

Engineer's Name ____

Engine Numbers ____

Cabin Number ____

Radio Yes ____ NO ____

Radio Working Yes ____ NO ____

Loads	Mtys	Block	Tons ____
0	1	Long City	TLDX-2555
5	1	So Bklyn	RBNX-80591
4	4	Franklin	NYC-47659
0	8	Kearny	EL-29970
22	52	Columbus	
31	65	3120 tons	

Time This Train Departed ____

Date This Train Departed ____