

## THE PLAYERS

### Chief Dispatcher

The Chief Dispatcher was a management position with hiring and firing authority over the dispatchers, operators, agents and switchtenders. He was ultimately responsible for the movement of trains through his territory and for the employees that made that happen.

### Dispatcher

The dispatcher had overall responsibility for the operation of trains over a large section of the railroad. He would issue train orders to the operators who would then align the switches and signals and pass the orders to the train crews. The dispatcher had to maintain the big picture determining when trains moved and make sure that high priority trains like passenger trains, mail trains and high value merchandise trains were given preference.

### Train Director

The train director sat between the dispatcher and the operator in high traffic areas such as around Columbus Union Station. There was a train director located at US Tower, for example, that directed train movement into and out of Columbus Union Station. Neilston Tower had a train director that was a general yardmaster. He directed train movement for the Pennsylvania RR from Neilston to Mounds on the Bradford line and Neilston to Miami Crossing on the Little Miami line.

### Operator

The operator was responsible for aligning the switches, setting the signals, recording the train movement, transcribing train orders and passing the orders to the trainmen. Some operator jobs included teletype operation for passing train manifests and other messages. The operator also inspected the passing trains for defects, shoveled coal into the furnace for heat and swept the floor.

An operator's job once required telegraphy proficient. In the 1950s telegraphy proficiency became less important and new hires often didn't know telegraph.

### Agent

Agents are included here as they were often part of the same craft-seniority list as the operator. The passenger agent would be responsible for the operation of a passenger station including selling tickets, checking baggage and ensuring the passenger train stop was efficiently managed. The freight agent was concerned with representing the company to shippers arranging for freight cars to be left at the shippers siding when needed and picked up at the appropriate time with all the proper paper work prepared.

### Switchtender

Towers that didn't have an interlocking plant often had one or more switchtenders that work under the direction of the operator. The switchtender had a small shack where he stayed during the quiet times. The operator would communicate with the switch tender

by loud speaker. The switchtender would then align the switches and flag the train through their area of responsibility.

On the east side of Columbus Union Station there were switchtenders from three companies – Columbus Union Depot Co., The Baltimore & Ohio and the Pennsylvania Railroad – listening to the same speakers. Each would do their part to line up the route.

Even when there was a track side signal, controlled by the operator, the engineer would have to get a flag or lantern signal from the switchtender to proceed.

In some cases, like Fields Avenue and Dennison Avenue on the Pennsylvania RR where the switches were hand thrown the operator did not have a switchtender. He would line up the hand thrown switches then set the appropriate signal.

### **Signal Maintainer**

The signal maintainers were responsible for the wayside poles, the numerous road and track crossings, the wayside signals, and the track circuits. They had to keep the interlockings in working order, whether it be a mechanical, also known as an armstrong plant, or an electrical plant. There were constant checks that had to be done on a regular schedule.

On a mechanical interlock, oil was your best tool, as all working joints and connections had to be kept free of debris and oiled on a regular basis. The locking dog bed needed some lubrication, and had to be kept free of dust and debris. All switches and signals had to be lubricated and checked for wear. Switches had to be kept adjusted to meet specifications so as not to cause an accident.

With an electrical plant, power sources had to be checked, backup batteries cleaned and refilled. All relays and wiring needed to be kept clean and in good condition.

Two of the biggest problems for the signal maintainer were the weather and rodents. Rail and switches both react to heat and cold. Rarely does a tower, shanty, wayside case, and sometimes pole line, not have some sort of rodent problem. Rats were seen once in a while, but mice were everywhere. Outside cases and pole lines were known for ants and wasps.

With today`s electronics, many of the daily chores of the maintainer have been eliminated, but these new systems have yet to be designed to maintain themselves, so the maintainers are still out there, keeping things running.

### **Conclusion**

Each work location was unique and could include a combination of operator and/or agent duties or an agent might be both a passenger and freight agent. Some towers like the Norfolk and Western's JO tower did not issue train orders. Some places such as on the Hocking Valley outside of Columbus were a combination of operator/agent duties. The operator that worked in the T&OC's dispatcher's office spent most of his time as a teletype operator. Each office had its own set of duties that ranged from sleepy to super busy.