



The crew callers at Russell in 1961 (there were six of them then on three shifts, plus a chief) knew that I would take an emergency call and that I was qualified as both engineman and trainman. I had gone to work in 1956 on the engineer and fireman's roster on the Northern Subdivision of the Cincinnati Division, but in 1961 still was not "marked up." Eager to work and to experience real railroading, I had taken temporary assignments wherever the work was—like on the "Straight Line" at Richmond, at Hammond and Burnham, in Indiana, and at Rockwell St. Yard on South Kedzie Ave. in Chicago. So, when there was no head brakeman available on the Lexington Division roster to go out on the "tool cars," the callers knew they could depend on me even though they had to call me at 5:00 in the morning. Thus it was on June 7, 1961, that I accepted a call for 6:30AM on a work train that would be at Aden, Kentucky, all day (paying shifter rates) cleaning up a derailment.

Aden, in Carter County, was an interesting place to be called to for someone looking for a little bit of work and a little bit of adventure. Aden was not your typical small town or "flag stop," which in all likelihood could be reached with equal ease by rail or highway. For Aden was not a town; it was an operational point, where the Corey Hill pusher got behind westbounds.

Flash Flood at Aden

by Gary E. Huddleston

Being within the bounds of the Appalachian Plateau, Aden was naturally surrounded by hills. It was also in an area where a great bed of limestone surfaced to form caverns (Carter and Cascade Caves), sink holes, box canyons, cliffs, and streams with surface flow of more volume in their upper courses than their lower, because of water from the stream sinking beneath the surface. It was an area, in geographer's terms, of Karst topography. The fact that Aden was surrounded by cliffs and that Little Sinking Creek flowed through it verifies its unusual drainage situation. This background is necessary to understand what happened to me during the afternoon my train was working at Aden.

The work train that morning had C&O GP9 No. 6164, several camp cars, the 250-ton wrecking crane, an idler car and a fuel car, and a caboose. Heading east from Russell to Ashland, we entered the west leg of the wye track off the passenger main through Ashland. Once at Aden, the engine crew left the train on the main line, then backed around it to the depot at the east end of the siding. The derailment was on

the main, just west of the west end of the passing siding. The wrecker's job was to put six cars that had derailed back on the track again. (The wreck had occurred several days before and the main line had been opened shortly thereafter.) The crew, composed of engineer, head brakeman, fireman, conductor, and rear brakeman, put the train, except for the "big hook" and its idler car, into the house track behind the depot and then shoved the "big hook" into position to retrack the cars. Then the six rerailed cars would be coupled to the rear of the train since their air brakes were damaged and were not working.

While we were doing this, C&O trucks were driving up the bed of the creek to get to the scene of the wreck. Very little water was in Sinking Creek then. Later in the day, when all the cars were ready to be put on their trucks, anyone alert to sounds could hear the thunder of an approaching storm.

When it hit, it rained so hard that the cliffs behind and to the east of the depot looked like waterfalls. Because east of Aden to its confluence with the Little Sandy River there was little downward gradient to the

Creek, because of its “sinking” propensity, the area around Aden filled up like a bathtub. Water was rising so fast in the creek, it was apparent the house track (behind the depot) would soon be submerged, so it was decided to move the GP9 and camp cars out of the house track and onto the main line. (Because of its low-slung electric traction motors, a diesel’s running gear had to be kept above water level.)

It was still raining hard and water was rising fast—so fast that the murky down-pour was flooding the depot, and the operator had to sit on top of his desk. During the height of the flash flood there was all kinds of debris coming down the narrow valley—outhouses, chicken coops, logs, and uprooted trees. The highest ground not under water was just east of the little bridge across the creek.

Moving the engine and train to the highest point on the main line had left the camp cars resting on the bridge. (The bridge carried both the main line and passing siding over Little Sinking Creek at the west end

facing page: C&O GP9 No. 6200 worked at Aden, Kentucky, in September 1959, on a day much drier than the one described by Gary Huddleston. (E. L. Huddleston)

In these two March 1963 views, the 250-ton wrecking crane stationed at Russell—and employed on the author’s rain-soaked Aden adventure—works near Limeville. (Both, Don Riel)





C&O 250-ton wrecker No. WC-25 worked near Limeville, Ky., in March 1963. (Don Riel)

Looking east down the valley past the Aden, Ky., depot in 1958. Main line and siding are at right, with the house track passing behind depot at far left. (E. L. Huddleston)



of the siding near Aden Tunnel.) The cook, a nervous fellow anyway, got very excited because the debris being washed downstream was hitting the bridge and jarring the camp cars. And he was not about to leave his quarters, either, because not only was the water rising but also the high water was chasing quite a few snakes out of hiding. On any high ground left, you could see snakes slithering around.

About as suddenly as it started, the storm ended. After the water had gone down enough for us to walk around on the ground, we started to put our train together, with the bad-order cars on the rear behind the caboose. The conductor was hoping to leave for Russell ahead of No. 22, the eastbound *George Washington*, which was due to leave Olive Hill at 7:24 EST (actually 6:24 because the Lexington Division at that time operated on CST.) But the dispatcher told the operator he was going to hold No. 22 at Olive Hill and have a section man on a motor car come east from Olive Hill to inspect the track and we would wait for him at Aden.

When the section man showed up, he said No. 22 wasn't going anyplace because five rail lengths of ballast were washed out just west of Aden Tunnel. He said he would go on east and see if we could leave. We watched him depart on his motor car and when he got down to a curve that went around a big cliff, he stopped and came back, telling us we weren't going anyplace either. The track was washed out just east of the curve for seven rail lengths. When the dispatcher found out he could not run anything, he told us we would stay with the train at Aden.

The dispatcher thought the engine crew and train crew could be taken off duty and put back on duty in the morning and thus be used as relief crews for the jobs. But the engine crew's contract did not allow that. Because they outlawed and stayed on continuous time, they could not work again. But the train crew could. Yet that would not work because the train crew would be without an engineer. Roads were so bad that no one could get in right away. Finally, an official came from Grayson to Gregoryville on Route 60 and from there over unpaved roads nearly to Aden. He drove in as far as he could, but because of debris on the road near Aden, he walked in over a tram railroad leading to an old clay mine that was connected with a little tippie just east of the Aden depot. He took back with him as many of the tool car people as he could, and still left some behind.

When we learned who would have to

stay behind, we went to the depot, and the operator used the dispatcher's line to cut us in with the Bell System so that we could tell our families we would not be back that night. The operator just sort of disappeared. He must have either lived at Grah—about two country miles up the line—and walked home, or he lived in a company house near the depot, the only building besides the depot at Aden proper. I never learned what happened to him.

We left in the dark, and the official with us was carrying a light. We then settled down for the night. For some reason the engineer decided to stay on the engine. The conductor and rear brakeman cast their lot with the bunks in the caboose, and I was invited by some men that I knew from Russell to stay on the camp cars with them. There is no doubt I came out best doing this, because I had a clean, dry, and warm bed. After I removed the tarp from the bed, I found clean sheets and a woolen Army blanket. I slept well, listening to the whippoorwills.

Next morning I discovered the cook was still on the train and he fixed those who had spent the night at Aden one heck of a good breakfast. By that time, daylight, the Carter County road crews had the roads opened enough so that the officials could drive in and take those who were still stranded home. I had been released from duty at 10:20PM on the 5th and went back on duty next morning. We deadheaded to Russell, where we were relieved. Loads of ballast were diverted from other locations so that the Lexington Division could be put back in service in a prompt manner.

The official in charge of the wrecking train had been R. H. "Jack" Savage, Assistant Trainmaster and Road Foreman of Engines. Paul Rece operated the "Big Hook," with assistance from a fireman. The conductor on the wreck train that fateful day was C. M. Hutchinson, and the engineer was T. D. Huckill.

Still another flash flood on Little Sinking Creek prompted the Army Corps of Engineers to design a local flood-control project. A visit to the region in the mid-1960s disclosed that through the little com-

munity of Grah, about two miles up the creek from Aden, a sluice for the flow of the creek had been built of concrete. At Aden, one visible alteration was that a cliff that blocked the water's flow at a bend in the creek had been blasted away, presumably enabling water to flow more directly through the valley.

One unfortunate effect was to take away an aspect of the landscape that tended to remind anyone interested in natural scenery to think of Poe's "ghoul-haunted woodlands of Wier." S.



A 1958 view, facing east toward the area of the 1961 washout at Aden. The cliff at left was subsequently blasted away by the Army Corps of Engineers as part of flood-control efforts.

As a result of the flood experienced by author Gary Huddleston in June 1961, and a later cloudburst, the Corps of Engineers tried to improve runoff along Little Sinking Creek. A C&O local passes the concrete-lined flood control channel at Grah, Ky., in December 1964. (Both, E. L. Huddleston)

