

TRAIN WRECKS

In 1952, the biggest and most spectacular fire in the history of the department took place. This incident occurred on the railroad tracks between Main Street and Cemetery Road West of Norwich Street. Johnny Jones, Columbus Dispatch feature writer, described it in this way:

"Hilliard burst into the national news spotlight. It became a veritable war zone after 7:45 o'clock Wednesday evening, January 2, when two Pennsylvania freight trains, including gasoline tank cars and a car of 20 millimeter shells, sideswiped each other. The freak train wreck occurred when a reel of cable in one of the 23 cars broke thru the floor and became entangled in the wheels. The wreck exploded a gasoline tank nearly opposite the Farm Bureau Grain Elevator. The car containing the ammunition, caught fire and shells exploded for hours. Four men were injured. The steel car prevented the ammunition from causing any damage in the village. The sound was like that of a gigantic corn popper as the explosions occurred in the car. Volunteer fire departments, numbering 20, as far away as Delaware brought the fire under control while wind and snow hampered firemen. A little Korea was the way some of the old-timers referred to the scene. Good discipline and leadership were maintained throughout and Hilliard citizens remained calm. Many provided coffee and sandwiches. It proves defense organization is needed in all communities. Hilliard is a lucky city and will long remember the bursts of shells and flashes of fire."

This story was also told by Lowell Thomas' evening news report on national CBS -- so large a wreck it was. Traffic over the Gill Street (now Cemetery Road) crossing was not possible for almost thirty-six hours. By the time the fire was out, 3 fire fighters from aiding departments had been critically injured, 284 men had put in 3,316 man hours over 2 days using, 16 pumpers, 6 tankers, 5 rescue squads and 5 foam trucks. Eleven separate fire departments were involved including a foam crash truck from the U.S. Navy. Over 17,000 feet of firehose were laid during the battle and damages set at \$683,000.