

Inv-2248

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR
BUREAU OF SAFETY

ACCIDENT ON THE
CHICAGO & NORTH WESTERN RAILWAY

LAKE BLUFF, ILL.

FEBRUARY 3, 1938.

INVESTIGATION NO. 2248

SUMMARY

Inv-2248

Railroad: Chicago & North Western
Date: February 3, 1938.
Location: Lake Bluff, Ill.
Kind of accident: Derailment
Train involved: Freight
Train number: Extra 1604
Engine number: 1604
Consist: 34 cars
Speed: 4-5 m.p.h.
Track: Stub end house track; 0°30' curve.
Weather: Cloudy and misty
Time: Between 4:20 and 4:25 a.m.
Casualty: 1 killed
Cause: Train backed in on house track
by mistake instead of on siding.

Inv-2248

February 26, 1938.

To the Commission:

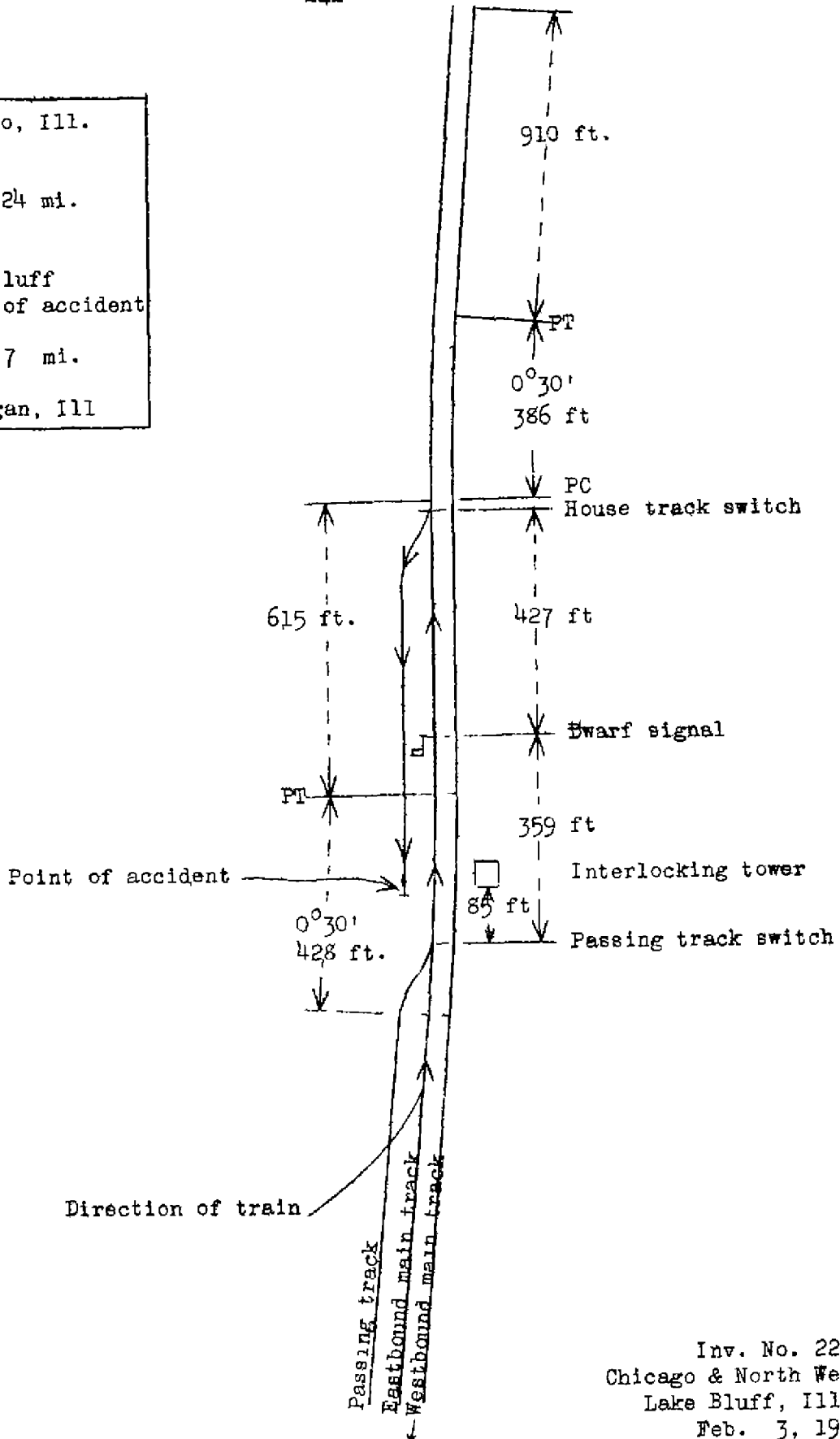
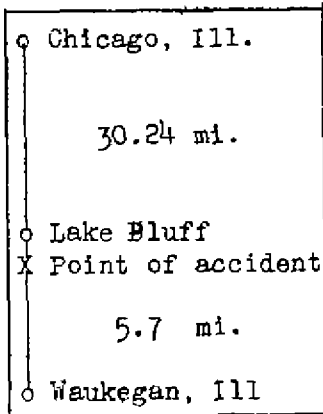
On February 3, 1938, there was a derailment of a freight train on the Chicago & North Western Railway at Lake Bluff, Ill., which resulted in the death of one employee. The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with a representative of the Illinois Commerce Commission.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on Subdivision 1 of the Wisconsin Division which extends between Chicago and Waukegan, Ill., a distance of 35.94 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. Trains moving with the current of traffic keep to the left. At Lake Bluff a stub-end house track, 707 feet in length, parallels the eastward main track on the north. This track extends westward from the switch through which it connects with the eastward main track, and has its stub terminal opposite the tower of the interlocking plant at Lake Bluff. The accident occurred at the stub end of this house track. Approaching the point of accident from the west on the eastward main track, the track is tangent for more than 1 mile, followed by a $0^{\circ}30'$ curve to the left 428 feet in length, a tangent 615 feet long, a $0^{\circ}30'$ curve to the right 386 feet long and tangent track for 910 feet. The accident occurred on the first-mentioned $0^{\circ}30'$ curve approximately 180 feet from its eastern end. The grade for east-bound trains is slightly ascending, being 0.22 percent at the point of accident.

The house-track switch is of the hand-throw type, equipped with a single target without a lamp. West of the west end of the house track, a stub end siding, 2,450 feet in length, parallels the eastward main track on the north and has its entry switch at the east end. This switch is located approximately 85 feet west of the interlocking tower and is operated from the interlocking tower. A dwarf signal governing movements through this switch is located 359 feet east of the switch and 427 feet west of the house-track switch.

The weather was cloudy and somewhat misty at the time of the accident, which occurred between 4:20 and 4:25 a.m.



Inv. No. 2248
 Chicago & North Western Ry.
 Lake Bluff, Illinois
 Feb. 3, 1938

Description

Extra 1604, an east-bound freight train, consisted of 32 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1604, and was in charge of Conductor Grogan and Engineman Olsen. This train arrived at Waukegan, 5.7 miles from Lake Bluff, at 3:15 a.m., according to the train sheet, where it was backed in on track 1. Before the train had been properly prepared to leave Waukegan, the front portion, consisting of 34 cars, departed without the conductor or flagman, and arrived at Lake Bluff at 4:12 a.m., where the engineman received the following message:

You left the rear portion of your train at Waukegan. Set out the part of the train you now have on the east passing track at Lake Bluff and return to Waukegan on the westward track for the balance of your train.

The train moved eastward to clear the interlocking plant, but instead of backing into the siding it backed into the house track; it was moving at a speed of about 4 or 5 miles per hour and the two rear cars were derailed at the stub end of that track.

The rear car was shoved beyond the end of the track a distance of about 78 feet, and stopped on its side fouling the eastward main track. The rear truck of the adjoining car was derailed, but this car remained in upright position. The employee killed was the head brakeman, who was on top of the rear car.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Olsen stated that after the necessary work had been performed at Waukegan he received a proceed signal from Head Brakeman Probert who was standing near the engine. The brakeman then boarded the engine and they started to leave, but had proceeded only a short distance when the air brakes became applied from the rear and the train stopped. Engineman Olsen looked back, but as he could see nothing he asked the fireman and brakeman to look back on their side. Not being able to see anything the brakeman started back on the fireman's side. About 2 or 3 minutes later the fireman stated that the brakeman had given him a proceed signal. The brakeman then boarded the engine and said that he had received a "highball" from Flagman Foley. The engineman took the slack and the train proceeded to Lake Bluff where the operator delivered a message to the brakeman containing instructions to set out the cars on the east

siding and to return to Waukegan for the remainder of their train. Engineman Olsen said that after listening to Brakeman Probert read the contents of the message to the operator, he read the message to the fireman and then informed Brakeman Probert that he would pull down to clear the dwarf signal. He also instructed Brakeman Probert to take a couple of fuses, and when the train had cleared the signal and the route had been properly lined to signal him with a fuse to back into the siding. It was his intention to have the brakeman give the signals on the fireman's side on account of the curvature of track. Brakeman Probert dropped off the engine at the dwarf signal, and after the train had moved a considerable distance the fireman relayed a stop signal. After the train had stopped the fireman transmitted a back-up signal and he had backed the train about eight car lengths at a speed of 4 or 5 miles per hour when he received a slow signal, followed by a violent stop signal. Engineman Olsen immediately applied the air brakes in emergency. After the train stopped he went back and found that the train had backed in on the house track instead of the passing track. Head Brakeman Probert had been working on this same run with him for the past two or three weeks and practically the same work is performed by his train each night. It was misty, but visibility was good as far as signals were concerned. Engineman Olsen stated that he did not see any signals of any kind on leaving Waukegan but thought that the bright rays from the headlight of No. 284 which was standing on the siding might have obscured any signals given. Inasmuch as Brakeman Probert had told him everything was all right, he assumed that it was all right to depart, and for that reason did not look back after his train was out on the main track.

Fireman Christensen stated that after the train was stopped at Waukegan by the air brakes being applied from the rear; the head brakeman got down from the engine on the left side and walked back a car length or two; the brakeman gave the rear end a "highball" and then turned around and gave him a "highball". On boarding the engine the brakeman said "highball - all right", and the train proceeded. There was further conversation to the effect that Flagman Foley had been left behind when they had first started out. Fireman Christensen stated that the train seemed to be light and he asked the brakeman if they had all of their train, to which the brakeman replied that they had. The statements of Fireman Christensen corroborated those of the engineman as to the message received at Lake Bluff, the instructions given Brakeman Probert, and the signals received during the back-up movement. In addition, he heard the engineman ask the operator if the siding was clear, to which the operator replied affirmatively. Fireman Christensen did not notice where the brakeman dropped off the engine, but he thought it was at the dwarf signal. The brakeman was standing on the

ground when he gave the stop signal but later signals were given from the top of a car.

Conductor Grogan stated that an air-brake test was made before leaving their initial terminal at Milwaukee and the brakes functioned properly. However, while work was being performed at Waukegan a bad leak was found in the train line of G.T.W. 160519, the eighth car from the rear. About the time the train started to move Conductor Grogan decided that the car would have to be set out, he went back to the caboose and when the defective car was close to the lead track he applied the air brakes. When he tried to uncouple the defective car he was not able to do so without the slack, and he then went over to the westward track to signal to the engineman and Flagman Foley, holding a lighted fusee, followed him. In response to their back-up signals, the slack was given and Car Foreman Orcutt who was on the left side at the rear of the defective car called out that he had made the cut. Conductor Grogan stated that they then gave the engineman easy signals to pull ahead, but when the train continued to move ahead and the engineman sounded two short blasts of the whistle he and Flagman Foley immediately gave stop signals, and Flagman Foley ran down the westward main track giving stop signals until the train had passed around the curve about 1 mile beyond Waukegan. Conductor Grogan stated that he did not see Head Brakeman Probert at any time while this movement was being made. He stated that there was no reason why men at the head end could not have seen their signals if any of the members of the crew on the engine were looking back. In performing work in this immediate vicinity signals are always given on the engineman's side.

The statements of Flagman Foley corroborated those of the conductor. Flagman Foley did not see Brakeman Probert at any time when the signals were given for slack so that the pin could be pulled at the rear end of the defective car. He used a red fusee to give signals as an extra precaution on account of the importance of the move and as an indication to the head end that the move was unusual.

Car Foreman Orcutt stated that he pulled the pin at the rear end of the defective car from the left side of the train, and at no time did he see any one on that side give a proceed signal. Both the conductor and flagman were on the right side of the train.

Loverman Arquilla stated that about 4 a.m. he received from the dispatcher by telephone the message previously mentioned. On delivering the message it was read aloud by himself, the head brakeman and the engineman, and the engineman explained

to the others that he would pull down beyond the dwarf signal so the route could be lined for the siding. When the train started to move the head brakeman was on the side steps of the gangway. Leverman Arquilla returned to the tower and did not again see the head brakeman until he observed him on top of the rear car backing in on the house track; at that time he was about opposite the tower and was giving stop signals with a fusee. Leverman Arquilla stated that if the house-track switch had been open prior to the arrival of Extra 1604 he could not have cleared the eastward interlocking signal for that train.

Discussion

The evidence indicates that when the train was stopped from the rear end in order to set out a bad order car just as the train started to leave Waukegan, the engineman could not see any signals from the rear and he instructed the head brakeman to go back on the left side to learn what the trouble was. About 2 or 3 minutes later the head brakeman boarded the engine and said that it was all right to proceed. The fireman, however, stated that the brakeman did not go back more than one or two car lengths, that he gave the rear end a proceed signal and then turned around and gave a proceed signal toward the engine. The statements of the members of the crew who were at the rear end of the train indicate, however, that at no time was a proceed signal given from the left side of the train, that they had signaled for slack, and after this signal had been complied with they gave signals to move ahead slowly and followed these with stop signals, all of which were given on the right side of the train. After Brakeman Probert boarded the engine there was some conversation to the effect that the flagman had been left behind. Whether the brakeman assumed this to be the case, and was mistaken about a signal, can not be stated as he was killed in the accident, but apparently he failed to ascertain definitely what the trouble was.

The evidence indicates that upon arrival at Lake Bluff Brakeman Probert read the message received and that he was further instructed by the engineman as to just what move was to be made - that they were to back in on the siding. The switch was to be lined by the leverman from the interlocking tower, and after his train had cleared the dwarf signal and the route had been lined, Brakeman Probert was to give the signal to back up. Brakeman Probert, however, opened the house-track switch, which was of the hand-throw type, signaled his train to back up and did not discover his mistake until too late to avert the accident. No reason can be given for his mistake. Brakeman Probert was an experienced employee and had been working on this particular run for the past two or three weeks.

Conclusion

This accident was caused by cars being backed into a short stub-end house track by mistake, instead of into the siding as instructed.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON

Director.

