

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE TEXAS & PACIFIC RAILWAY AT CECILE, LA., ON
DECEMBER 14, 1931.

February 8, 1932.

To the Commission:

On December 14, 1931, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Texas & Pacific Railway at Cecile, La., which resulted in the death of 1 employee and 1 trespasser, and the injury of 18 passengers, 1 employee, and 3 trespassers.

Location and method of operation

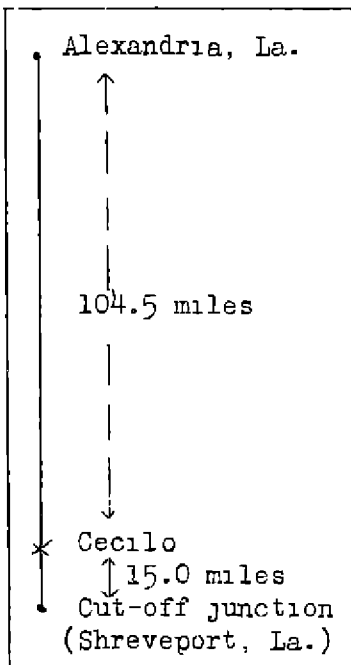
This accident occurred on that part of the Shreveport Sub-Division of the Louisiana Division, extending between Cut Off Junction, near Shreveport, and Alexandria, La., a distance of 119.5 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred at the switch leading to what is known as Hutchinson Gin spur, located about 590 feet west of the station board at Cecile, approaching this point from the west, the track is tangent for a distance of 5.9 miles, and for a considerable distance beyond that point. The grade is slightly descending approaching the point of accident, but is level at the point of derailment.

The track is laid with 85-pound rails, 33 feet in length, with an average of 20 ties to the rail-length, single-spiked, about 95 per cent tie-plated, and ballasted with gravel to a depth of about 9 inches; the track is well maintained. The maximum speed for passenger trains in the vicinity of the point of accident is 55 miles per hour.

The switch involved leads off the main track to the north or left through a No. 9 turnout, and the spur track is 669 feet in length, with a curvature of 7° 30' throughout its entire length. The switch stand is located on the south side of the track and is of the high Star, single-target type, no indication being displayed when the switch is closed. There is a switch lamp mounted on the stand above the target, normal night indications are green when the switch is closed and red when the switch is open.



7°30'
669 ft.



Tangent Track
5.9 miles



Station
board

590 ft.

Point of accident

Inv. No 1744
Texas & Pacific Ry.,
Cecile, La.
Dec. 14, 1931

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 11:30 p.m.

Description

Eastbound passenger train No. 22 consisted of 1 baggage car, 1 combination mail and baggage car, 2 coaches, and 3 Pullman sleeping cars, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 414, and was in charge of Conductor Singleton and Engineman Gorman. This train passed Cut Off Junction, about 15 miles west of Cecile, at 11.07 p.m., 11 minutes late, and was derailed upon reaching Hutchison Gin spur switch while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 50 and 55 miles per hour.

The engine and tender, the first five cars, and the forward wheels of the leading truck of the sixth car were derailed. The engine came to rest 359 feet east of the switch, between the main track and spur track, practically at right angles to the tracks and showed evidence of having slid part of the distance bottom up; it was quite badly damaged. The baggage car and mail car were immediately behind the engine and also practically at right angles to the track, the baggage car being almost overturned and the mail car leaning slightly towards the east. The third car rested diagonally across the main track just back of the mail car and the fourth and fifth cars were derailed to the north but remained almost in line with the main track. All of the derailed cars were more or less damaged except the sixth car. The employee killed was the engineman and the employee injured was the fireman.

Summary of evidence.

Fireman Green stated that when the train reached a point between 300 and 400 yards from Hutchison spur he noticed that the switch light was burning and was displaying a green indication. He did not see the target, as the switch appeared to be lined for a main-track movement and the target was not displayed, neither did he notice the position of the switch points while the train was approaching the switch; he estimated the speed of the train at the time of the accident at 50 or 55 miles per hour. No difficulty had been experienced with the handling of the train en route, and the headlight was burning at the time of the accident. The engineman, who appeared to be in full possession of his faculties, was riding on his seatbox and looking ahead while approaching the point of accident, but Fireman Green did not know whether the throttle was closed or the brakes applied prior to the

accident, neither did he know if the engineman received any advance warning of an impending accident. He also said there were no steam leaks or other obstructions around the engine that could have obscured the view ahead.

Conductor Singleton stated that he was riding in the colored coach when he felt what appeared to be an emergency application of the brakes, followed by the crash of the derailment a second or two later, in his opinion the brakes were applied just before the engine entered the spur track. Immediately after the equipment came to a stop he got off and after assisting the injured persons he went back to the switch and found the switch light burning green and the target displayed for a main-line movement, but the bolt which fastens the connecting rod to the head rod was missing, the rods being disconnected and the switch points set for the spur track. About 30 minutes later, upon its being called to his attention, he again examined the switch and discovered a piece of wood, 2 by 4 inches and about 24 inches in length, wedged between the stock rail and the switch point, on the north side of the track.

Brakeman Maggard stated that he was riding in the rear seat of the white coach when the accident occurred and the first intimation he had of anything ^{wrong} was when the brakes were applied, which was followed almost immediately by the derailment of the car in which he was riding. Shortly after the accident he went back to flag, and on his way he examined the spur-track switch. He noticed the disconnected switch rods, with the switch lever locked for a main-track movement and the switch lamp burning brightly and showing green, indicating that the switch was in proper position for the main track, he did not see the block of wood between the north switch point and stock rail, due to its being on the opposite side of the track from where he was standing at the time.

The statements of General Foreman Friend, Car Inspector Mitchell, Train Rules Examiner Woodford, and Claim Agent Daugherty, all of whom were riding on the train at the time of the accident, practically corroborated the statements of the train crew as to the condition of the switch and the position of the switch lamp as they were found subsequent to the accident. Foreman Friend said that he removed the speed recorder from the engine after the accident and when he opened it he found the tape had registered 52 miles per hour at the time the brakes were applied. Subsequently a test was made of the recording machine which showed that it was registering 2 miles slower

than the record it was making on the chart. He also examined the equipment where it came to rest after the accident, and again inspected it when it was removed to Hollywood, on December 17, but found nothing that could have contributed to the cause of the accident.

Section Foreman Holtzclaw stated that he was in charge of the section on which the accident occurred and arrived at the scene about 12.30 a.m. He inspected the spur-track switch and found the conditions as described by previous witnesses. He had made a thorough examination of this switch between 1 and 2 p.m. on the day of the accident, and at that time it was in good condition, although he did not unlock and throw the switch, he particularly observed that all bolts and nuts were in place and secured with either cotter keys or heavy wire. He also inspected the main track in the vicinity of the switch involved and found it to be in good condition;

Roadmaster Levee stated that he arrived at the scene of accident about 1 a.m., and as he approached the switch he noticed the lamp was burning and displaying a green indication. He immediately inspected the switch and found the switch stand intact but the bolt which had coupled the connecting rod and head rod together was missing, the rods were disconnected and the switch was set for the spur track, the bolt was later found on the north side of the track about 5 feet from the head block, and bore evidence of having been driven out of the bolt holes with a piece of metal. He said that it would have been impossible for this bolt to have dropped out of its own accord when the nut was removed, as the bolt was $3\frac{1}{2}$ inches in length and the original surface of the ballast underneath the bolt was about 1 inch below it, while the pressure of the switch point, with the switch in closed position, would have a tendency to hold the bolt in place. His examination disclosed that the ballast had been removed from beneath the connecting rods so that the bolt could be forced out, and there also was a block of wood between the north switch point and the stock rail. He passed over this switch at 4 p.m., on the day of the accident, and noticed that the switch points were fitting properly and the switch lock was in locked position. He considered the track in the vicinity of the point of accident to be in perfect condition for the maximum time-table speed.

Engineman Smith, of westbound passenger train No. 23, the last train to pass over the switch prior to the accident, stated that his train passed that point about 10.08 p.m. He noticed that the switch lamp was displaying a green indication as the train approached it, and upon

reaching a point about 200 feet from the switch he observed that the switch points were lined for the main track. He did not feel or hear anything when the engine passed over the switch to indicate that anything was wrong, neither did he see any person in that locality.

Fireman Woods, of train No. 23, saw the switch lamps showing green when his train was about one-half mile from it; he could not remember if he looked at the switch points, although he did recall that there was no noise nor disturbance under the engine as it moved over the switch. Conductor Mallory and Brakeman Taylor, also of train No. 23, both stated they did not see the switch lamp and did not hear any unusual noise while the train was passing over the switch.

Examination of the switch by one of the inspectors of the Commission disclosed no evidence to indicate that the switch had been run through by a westbound train. At the time of this inspection the switch was lined for the main track, both switch points were spiked to the head block tie, the switch lever was in the socket, and the switch lock was in the hasp, although it was unlocked. All of the bolts in the switch-point clips were intact, with the nuts properly applied and secured by cotter keys, except one bolt which had a heavy piece of wire through the cotter-key hole, none of these bolts had the appearance of having been disturbed for a long time. There was a temporary bolt holding the connecting rod and head rod together. The first mark of derailment was a flange mark on the eighteenth tie east of the head block tie, between the north main-track rail and the point where the north rail of the spur track had been located. From this point eastward, flange marks appeared on the ties, increasing in density to the fifty-fifth tie, and from this point eastward both tracks were torn up. Marks were also found between the rails of the main track beginning at the twenty-seventh tie from the switch points, but these marks did not appear to be flange marks, instead they looked like marks caused by a rail being turned over. A close inspection of the track for a distance of about one-fourth mile west of the switch revealed that it was in good condition and no marks were found to indicate that anything had been dragging.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by an open switch, due to malicious tampering.

Subsequent to the accident the switch points were found to be lined for the spur track, with the connecting rod disconnected from the head rod, and there was a block of wood wedged between the north switch point and the stock rail, causing the south switch point to be held tightly against the main-track rail. A bolt, of standard dimensions used for fastening the rods together, was later found on the north side of the track about 14 feet from where the rods were disconnected, and this bolt showed evidence of having recently been in use. The switch lamp was displaying a green indication after the accident and the switch stand was intact. In view of these conditions it is apparent that the engineman received no warning of danger until his engine had almost reached the switch, or when it was entering the switch. At the time of the investigation it was not known when or by whom the switch had been tampered with.

The employees involved were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.