

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE ATLANTIC COAST LINE RAILWAY NEAR LULATON, GA ,
ON OCTOBER 25, 1920.

December 18, 1920.

On October 25, 1920, there was a derailment of a passenger train near Lulaton, Ga., which resulted in the death of 2 employees, and the injury of 36 passengers and 1 employee. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

The Brunswick Division, on which this accident occurred, extends between Brunswick, Ga., and Albany, Ga., a distance of 169 miles. 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 track is tangent for several miles in each direction. Approaching the point of accident from the south the track is level for about 2,000 feet, followed by a grade of .88 per cent ascending to the point of accident, a distance of about 1,000 feet. In the vicinity of the point of accident the track is laid with 75-pound rails, 33 feet in length, with 17 untreated pine and cypress ties to the rail. The track and roadbed were well maintained.

The accident occurred on trestle 30.2, about 300 feet from its northern end. Trestle 30.2 is a pile-bent structure 1,075 feet in length; its average height above the ground is 21 feet. The bents have 10-foot centers, and 3 ply 7" x 14" x 20' chords are used. All the timber is of cypress, with the bark stripped from the piling. At the time of the accident a dense fog prevailed.

Northbound passenger train No. 96, in charge of Conductor Cox and Engineman Potter, consisted of 1 baggage car and 2 coaches hauled by engine 6, and was en route from Brunswick to Waycross, Ga. It left Brunswick at 6:30 a. m., on time, departed from Atkinson, the last station south of and about 2-1/8 miles from the point of accident, at 7:30 a.m., 2 minutes late, and at about 7:35 a.m., while crossing trestle 30.2 at a speed of about 35 miles an hour, the right side of the trestle, weakened by a fire which was burning at the time, gave way under the engine, causing the train to be derailed.

The engine turned over on its right side and came to rest parallel with the trestle and partly buried in the ground under the right side of the trestle; the tender was also on its right side, immediately behind the engine, while the baggage car was on its right side on top of the engine and tender. The front end of the first coach fell through the trestle to the ground and rested against the rear end of the tender and baggage car; the rear coach remained on the

track and was undamaged. The baggage car and first coach caught fire from the burning trestle and were destroyed. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman.

The statements of Conductor Cox and Baggage Master Scott indicated that their first knowledge of anything wrong was when they felt an emergency application of the air brakes, followed almost immediately by the derailment of the train. Train Porter Murray thought the brakes were applied in emergency at about the time the train started across the trestle, following which they were released and again applied a second time at about the time the derailment occurred. The statements of all of these employees, as well as those of Switchman Congers, who was a passenger on the train, indicated that the trestle was on fire at the time of the derailment, the porter and switchman estimating that from 20 to 30 feet of the trestle had been burned at this time, while according to Conductor Scott and Switchman Congers, Engineman Potter made a statement to the effect that the fog was so thick that he did not see the fire in time to bring the train to a stop. There was no evidence to indicate that the train was derailed prior to the time it reached the burned-out portion of the trestle.

According to the train sheet, the last train to pass this trestle was train No. 97, of October 24, which departed from Lulaton at about 8:30 p.m. Conductor Cox, who was also conductor of train No. 97, said that at that time he did not notice anything wrong with the trestle, while Engineman Manoney and Fireman Nixon said that they had not noticed any fire dropping from the engine. Engineman Manoney said that he last looked at the ash pan at Millwood, 47 miles from Lulaton, while Fireman Nixon said that he had cleaned the fire at Millwood and put the pan back in the proper position and then restored the operating lever to the closed position, which could not have been done unless the pan had been properly closed. It also appeared from the fireman's statements that he looked at the ash pan at Weycross, 28 miles from Lulaton, and again at Weynesville, 7 miles beyond Lulaton, and that the pan was properly closed on each occasion.

Engine 308, which was hauling train No. 97 on October 24, is equipped with an ash pan operated by a swing door at the bottom, so arranged that it can not be left partly open, and is controlled by a lever on the outside. The pan can be operated only from the ground, and when the engine is standing. The over-flow from the injectors goes into the ash pan, wetting the fire as it drops from the grates. Inspection of engine 308 showed that the ash pan and netting were in good condition, and that the door fitted tightly when closed.

Traffic on this line is light, there being only three trains daily in each direction. No watchman is on duty at the trestle, and while there are four water barrels located on the trestle, about 200 feet apart, the section foreman said he had found it impossible to keep fire buckets on them inasmuch as they were continually being removed by trespassers and other persons. Section Foreman Stokes verified the statements said to have been made by Engineman Potter about the fog, saying it was so thick that when going to the point of accident he did not see the fire until within 125 yards of the trestle.

This accident was caused by fire burning out a section of trestle 30.2 and so weakening it that it collapsed under the weight of the engine of train No. 96.

Investigation developed that the trestle caught fire about 300 feet from its northern end, and at the time of the accident two of the chords and several of the pilings on the right side had almost burned through. It was very foggy at the time of the accident and the evidence indicated that the engineman was unable to see the fire in time to bring his train to a stop before reaching the burned part of the trestle.

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