

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
ATLANTIC COAST LINE RAILROAD NEAR TENNILLE, ALA.,
ON SEPTEMBER 17, 1925.

November 6, 1925.

To the Commission:

On September 17, 1925, there was a derailment of a freight train on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad near Tennille, Ala., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Montgomery District of the Second Division, extending between Dothan and Montgomery, Ala., a distance of 118.5 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 about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of Tennille; approaching this point from the west there are 1,800 feet of tangent and then a 1° curve to the left 975 feet in length, followed by about 580 feet of tangent to the point of accident, this tangent extending for a considerable distance beyond. The grade at the point of derailment is 0.62 per cent ascending for eastbound trains. There is a pile bent trestle, about 1,380 feet in length and 18 feet in height, spanning Pea River, the west end of which is located 143 feet 9 inches east of the initial point of derailment; the 0.62 per cent ascending grade continues to a point just beyond the center of this bridge, and is 0.75 per cent ascending for eastbound trains to a point about 300 feet east of the bridge, from which point it is 1.60 per cent ascending for about 350 feet, then 1 per cent ascending for about 600 feet.

In the vicinity of the point of derailment the track is laid with 85-pound rails, 33 feet in length, with an average of 18 ties to the rail-length, tie-plated, single-spiked, and ballasted with gravel to a depth of about 10 inches; the track is well maintained. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 4 p.m.

Description

Eastbound freight train extra 1603-1621, consisting of 43 cars and a caboose, hauled by engines 1603 and 1621, was in charge of Conductor Parks and Enginemen Doggett and McGinnis. At Troy, 23.7 miles west of Tennille, the drawbar pulled out at the rear end of the first car in the train, a refrigerator car; this car, containing perishable freight, was then placed behind the caboose, and the train proceeded. It departed from Tennille at 3.49 p.m., and just before reaching the trestle the caboose and refrigerator car were derailed and broke away from the rest of the train, while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 25 and 30 miles an hour.

The forward truck of the caboose was the first to be derailed and after running along on the ties for a distance of about 130 feet it struck the second guard rail on the north side of the trestle; the caboose then broke away from the forward portion of the train, climbed the third guard rail, and dropped off the north side of the trestle, followed by the refrigerator car. The caboose came to rest bottom up while the refrigerator car was behind the caboose, on its left side. The employee killed was the flagman.

Summary of evidence

Careful inspection was made of the track subsequent to the accident, for a distance of about one half mile west of the trestle; the track was found to be well maintained and in good condition, and there was no evidence of any repair work having been performed on it, west of the trestle, as a result of the accident. The first mark of derailment was a well-defined flange mark, starting at the gauge side of the head of the north rail, at a point 143 feet 9 inches west of the west end of the trestle. This mark extended diagonally across the top of the rail toward the north for a distance of 39 feet 6 inches to the point where it dropped off on the outside of the rail, a distinct flange mark appearing on the top of the base of the rail at this point, 4 inches east of this mark there was a flange mark on the top of a spike head. From this point eastward flange marks appeared on the ties, gradually leading to the north, being about 10 inches from the rail on reaching the trestle, and they continued to diverge until they encountered the guard rail on the north side of the north rail. From this point eastward the bridge ties were broken and bunched to the point where the wheels mounted the third guard rail. No mark of any kind was found that would indicate dragging equipment, and all the brake beams were intact and remained supported by the hangers on the trucks of the derailed cars.

Conductor Parks stated that he felt an air-brake application made while rounding the curve and on reaching the tangent the brakes were released. The first he knew of anything wrong was on feeling the caboose derailed; he immediately opened the emergency valve and on looking through the cupola window he noted that the refrigerator car was still on the rails. As far as he knew, the forward truck of the caboose was the first to be derailed, but he could not tell which pair of wheels of this truck became derailed first. When the wheels struck the guard rail the caboose gave a jerk and broke away from the train. He was of the opinion that possibly the brake beam at the front end of the caboose might have dropped down and caused the accident.

Engineman Doggrell, of engine 1603, the lead engine, stated that the first he knew of anything wrong was when the accident occurred, at which time he estimated the speed to have been between 25 and 28 miles an hour; he felt nothing wrong with the track when the engine passed over it. After cutting the engine off and proceeding to Arlton, 4.1 miles east of Tennille, and returning with assistance, he examined the track west of the trestle, in company with Section Foreman Hays, and there appeared to have been something dragging on both rails, he could not determine what this was, but it looked as though the marks were made by a brake beam, being slight scratches, the full width of the running surface of each rail. He did not see the flange mark that extended diagonally across the top of the north rail from the gauge to the outside edge, nor the mark on the spike head, but he did see where the wheel became derailed about at this point. He was of the opinion that a brake beam probably got caught under the wheels of the caboose, causing the derailment, and not that the refrigerator car behind the caboose derailed first and pulled the caboose off the track.

Section Foreman Hays stated that he arrived at the scene of the accident about an hour after its occurrence and on examining the track, in company with Engineman Doggrell, found it to be in good condition, he did not examine the derailed cars closely. There were marks on the running surface of each rail for a distance of about 40 feet; on the south rail the mark appeared to have been caused by something dragging, while the corresponding mark on the north rail was deeper and apparently caused by a wheel flange; there was also a mark on the base on the outside of north rail, and 2 or 3 inches east of this point a spike head was marked. He said that no repair work had been performed on the track west of the trestle as a result of the accident, and was of the opinion that the accident was caused by both engines reducing speed while crossing the trestle, then suddenly beginning to work steam to increase speed for the ascending grade east of the trestle, and that the refrigerator car, being heavily loaded, pulled back on the caboose enough to raise the

front truck of the caboose and cause it to be derailed.

Engineman McGinnis, of engine 1621, estimated the speed to have been between 25 and 30 miles an hour at the time of the accident, he noticed nothing wrong with the track at the point of derailment when his engine passed over it. He examined the caboose and refrigerator car but could not ascertain what caused the derailment; he did not examine the track.

Road Foreman of Engines Baker stated that he made an examination of the track at about 10.45 p.m., but found no indication of anything dragging. All brake rigging was intact on the tracks of the caboose, also on the refrigerator car, except the rear truck of this car, which had a brake shoe missing on each side. The brake heads were not broken.

Conclusions

The cause of this accident was not definitely ascertained.

There was testimony to the effect that something apparently had dragged along the running surface of each rail, but at the time the Commission's inspectors examined the track, early in the morning of September 19, no mark of this nature was found, the only mark being a well-defined flange mark extending diagonally across the top of the north rail for a distance of 39 feet 6 inches, from the gauge side to the outside of the rail, while their examination of the equipment and running gear failed to develop anything to support the idea that the accident was caused by dragging equipment. There was nothing to indicate that excessive speed might have been a factor, nor was there anything about the condition of the track which it was thought could have caused or contributed to the occurrence of the accident.

The employees involved were experienced men. 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 laws.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Director.