

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
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REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD NEAR AVISTON, ILL ,
ON OCTOBER 3, 1924

October 17, 1924.

To the Commission:

On October 3, 1924, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad near Aviston, Ill., which resulted in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 15 passengers and 1 employee. The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with a representative of the Commerce Commission of Illinois.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Illinois subdivision of the St. Louis Division, extending between Shops, Ind., and St. Louis, Mo., a distance of 168 6 miles, this being a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders, and a manual block-signal system. The point of accident was at a facing-point switch located about 5,900 feet west of Aviston, approaching this point from the west the track is tangent for more than 2 miles, while the grade is descending for some distance, level, and then ascending, being 0.504 per cent ascending at the point of accident.

The switch leads to the right to a passing track, the turnout being a No. 10, and there was a Hayes detail on this passing track at a point about 224 feet from the switch, the switch is equipped with an Economy medium stand, the light being about 7 feet above the head block tie. The general condition of the main and passing tracks was good. The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred at 10.47 p.m.

Description

Westbound passenger train No. 12 consisted of two mail cars, one baggage car, one smoking car, one coach, five Pullman sleeping cars, and one observation car, hauled by engine 5101, and was in charge of Conductor Childers and Engineman Van Allman. The first five cars were of all-steel construction, while the others were of steel-under-frame

construction Train No. 12 passed Trenton, Ill., 4.2 miles west of Aviston, at 10.43 p.m., one minute late, headed in on the passing track at Aviston, the switch being open, and was derailed while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 50 miles an hour.

The engine came to rest on its right side across the main track nearly 600 feet beyond the point of the switch. The first eight cars and the forward truck of the ninth car were derailed, all of the cars remaining upright except the coach, which turned over on its right side. The employee killed was the engineman, while the fireman was seriously injured.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Childers said the speed of his train was about 50 miles an hour and that he did not feel any application of the air brakes prior to the derailment. After the accident occurred he examined the switch and found that it was latched open, while the switch lamp had been extinguished, he could not find the switch lock, Conductor Childers also noticed some brass filings on the head block tie. The first marks of derailment appeared to be about where the derail had been located and he thought the engine had entered the switch without being derailed. His statements were practically corroborated by those of Flagman Aufderheide, who added that when the switch lamp was lighted it burned properly. Baggage man Maham, who was riding in the third car, corroborated the conductor's statement about not feeling any application of the air brakes prior to the accident. The statements of these employees as to the condition of the switch were verified by Section Foreman Altgilbers, who also said that he found a sufficient amount of oil in the lamp, and that the wick was in good condition, he also found the lid over the top of the lamp partly open.

Road Foreman of Engines Creager said that when he reached the scene of the accident, Lt. Bond, of the Baltimore & Ohio Police Department, was in possession of a link from the switch lock chain on which there were marks such as might have been made by a hack saw; he also saw brass filings, several cigarette stubs, and 100 or more match stubs in the immediate vicinity of the switch stand. In company with Lt. Bond he began to search for the missing lock and he said Lt. Bond finally found it in the grass about 25 feet from the switch stand and examination of the lock showed that the hasp had been sawed apart.

This switch was last used by the crew of west-bound freight train extra 2555, which departed at about

9.35 p.m., the flagman closing the switch, and both he and the conductor, who was on the rear platform of the caboose, noticed that the lamp was burning properly, they did not see any one in the vicinity. Investigation developed, however, that when Head Brakeman Ruby of this train went forward to open the switch preparatory to the departure of the train he heard a noise and on looking to one side he saw a man standing near the telephone booth. He flashed his light on the man, saw that he was a negro, and thought he had some kind of an iron bar in his hand raised as if in readiness to defend himself. Brakeman Ruby said he asked the negro where he was going but obtained no information.

A negro by the name of George Williams was afterwards arrested and he confessed to having opened the switch. He said he was standing near the switch when the westbound freight train departed and that he then sawed off the lock, using matches for the purpose of seeing what he was doing, opened the switch and threw away the lock. He then walked westward about half a mile, saw the train pass and after hearing the noise indicating that it had been wrecked he continued walking westward to Trenton; he offered no explanation for his actions. It further appeared from his statements that at various times he had ridden freight trains in this section of the country and that on at least two occasions he had tampered with track or switches. This negro was subsequently identified by Brakeman Ruby as the one he had seen near the switch when extra 2555 departed from Aviston.

Conclusions

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

Examination of the switch immediately after the occurrence of the accident showed that the switch had been latched open and the switch lamp extinguished, while the lock was missing, having been filed off. The negro who was arrested confessed to having filed off the lock, then opening the switch, and was afterwards identified as the one who was seen near the switch slightly more than an hour prior to the occurrence of the accident.

Had an automatic block-signal/ been in use on this line this accident probably would not have occurred, an adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented it.

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.