

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD NEAR CRIDERSVILLE, OHIO, ON AUGUST 13, 1927.

September 27, 1927.

To the Commission:

On August 13, 1927, there was a collision between a passenger train and an automobile tank truck at a grade crossing on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad near Cridersville, Ohio, resulting in the death of two employees, one express messenger and the driver of the truck.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Second Sub-division of the Toledo Division, extending between North Lima and Dayton, Ohio, a distance of 73.1 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders and an automatic block-signal system. The point of accident was about three-fourths of a mile north of the station at Cridersville, in a slight cut, where a public highway known as Hume Road crosses the main track and siding at an angle of about 50°, the railroad track extends practically north and south while the highway extends east and west. The railroad track is tangent for a considerable distance in each direction from the crossing, which is also the case with the highway. The grade for southbound trains is 0.35 per cent ascending. Approaching from the east the highway is practically level to within about 250 feet of the railroad tracks, at which point it gradually descends about 9 feet to the level of the tracks, it then ascends to its former level within a similar distance.

From the driver's seat of a truck of the type involved, traveling westward on the highway, a clear view of an approaching southbound train can be had for a distance of about 2,500 feet until a point about 73 feet east of the center line of the main track is reached. From this point for a distance of 49 feet the truck driver's view of an approaching southbound train is partially obstructed, and then for 9 feet it is totally obstructed by the north embankment of the cut, weeds and shrubbery; when the truck had reached a point 15 feet 3 inches east of the center line of the main track a clear view could again be had of the

railroad tracks in each direction from the crossing. While sitting on the seat of a truck of the type involved, the driver's eyes are approximately 7 feet above the level of the highway, giving him a better view of an approaching train than in the case of the driver of an ordinary passenger automobile. The only protection afforded at the crossing is the usual cross-bar sign, reading "RAILROAD CROSSING", located 21 feet east of the center line of the main track and 15 feet south of the center line of the highway; the cross bars are 11 feet above the ground. The white paint on the pole and cross bars and the black lettering of the sign are in fair condition. The normal travel over Hume Road is light, but owing to the fact that at the time of the accident the main streets of Cridersville were closed for improvements and repairs, vehicular traffic was being detoured over Hume Road, which was an improved highway with a crushed stone surface.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 10.52 a. m.

Description

The Gramm Bernstein tank truck involved, owned by the Radiant Oil Company, Lima, Ohio, weighed 8,100 pounds and had a capacity of 8,000 pounds. It was loaded to its full capacity with 710 gallons of gasoline and 110 gallons of kerosene, and was being operated by Leonard B. Sneary, en route from Lima to Hume, Ohio. Approaching the railroad tracks, traveling westward, a stop apparently was made for the crossing and then the truck was started across the tracks, being struck immediately afterwards by train No. 51.

Southbound passenger train No. 51 consisted of one mail and baggage car, one express car, one baggage and express car, one combination car, and one coach, in the order named, hauled by engine 5105, and was in charge of Conductor Byers and Engineer Lindner. The first car was of steel construction while the others were of wooden construction. This train left Lima, 6.7 miles north of Cridersville, at 10.35 a. m., on time, passed Erie Junction, 1.5 miles beyond and the last open office, at 10 45 a. m., five minutes late, and struck the tank truck on the crossing near Cridersville while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 50 miles per hour.

The tank truck came to rest between the main track and the siding, at a point about 100 feet south of the crossing, it was practically demolished. The gasoline and kerosene were thrown over the engine and cars and immediately caught fire, the train proceeding until it was brought to a stop at a point about one half mile south of the crossing by an emergency air-brake application made by the baggage man. No part of the train was derailed but the four cars which were of wooden construction were destroyed by fire. The track was badly damaged where the

burning train stood, and it was slightly damaged by fire from that point back to the crossing. The driver of the truck jumped to the ground before the collision occurred but was sprayed with blazing gasoline and kerosene and died from his burns, the engineer and fireman were also sprayed with the gasoline and died from their burns, while the express messenger was burned in the express car.

Summary of evidence

In a statement made about 30 minutes before his death, Mr. Sneary, the driver of the truck, said that he drove up to within a short distance of the track, stopped, did not hear anything approaching, and then proceeded. As he reached the track he saw that the train was going to strike the truck and at once jumped off. Mr. Sneary stated that the engine whistle for the crossing was not sounded.

Conductor Byers stated that he was riding in the fourth car, that the door of the baggage compartment was open, and that he could hear the engine whistle very plainly when it was sounded. He said that the regular crossing whistle signal was sounded when the train was about one-fourth mile from the crossing. He did not recall hearing the station whistle signal sounded for the station at Cridersville and did not think that the train was quite close enough to the station for the engineer to sound this signal. Conductor Byers further stated that the air brakes were in proper working order and that the engine was equipped with a whistle which had a good loud tone, but he did not know whether the bell on the engine was ringing. The Dixie Highway crosses the railroad track at a point approximately one-half mile north of the Hume Road crossing and the conductor said that the engineer twice sounded the crossing signal for that crossing and also sounded a succession of short blasts. As the train passed over that crossing the conductor looked out of the baggage-compartment door and saw two automobiles standing just clear of the tracks, apparently locked together, and he remarked to the baggageman that the train had nearly struck an automobile. Judging from the way the whistle was sounded for the Dixie Highway crossing he thought it should have been heard not only at the Hume Road crossing but also down at Cridersville station.

Baggageman Hannum's testimony was similar to that of Conductor Byers' as to what transpired until the Dixie Highway crossing was passed. The baggageman said that he then heard the station whistle signal sounded for Cridersville and reached for the mail box to get the mail that he had for that station. On account of being so

engaged he could not say positively whether the crossing whistle signal was sounded for Hume Road. Shortly afterwards the accident occurred and he then pulled the emergency cord and brought the train to a stop.

Train Auditor Daibel said that considerable whistling was done just before the accident occurred although he could not definitely state whether the usual whistle signal was sounded for the particular crossing involved.

Brakeman Sponenberger, however, stated that as the train was going over the Dixie Highway crossing the whistle signal was sounded for Hume Road, followed by the station whistle signal for Cridersville station. He got up at once for the purpose of announcing the station to the passengers and immediately afterwards he heard a short blast of the whistle and then the train was all ablaze, he thought that the engineman started to sound the danger whistle signal, a series of short blasts, but that he was not able to complete it. He said that Engineman Lindner had been very particular about sounding the whistle for road crossings and also the danger whistle signal, which was sounded for the Dixie Highway, and that on this occasion the whistle was sounded almost continuously from the time the train approached the Dixie Highway until the Hume Road crossing was reached.

Road Foreman of Engines Stevens stated that after the accident he checked the tape of the speed recorder with which engine 5105 was equipped, and it showed that at a point 2,600 feet north of Hume Road crossing, in the vicinity of the Dixie Highway crossing, the speed of the train was 53 miles per hour. The brake had been applied lightly enough to reduce the speed to 50 miles per hour and this was the speed for about one-half mile. When the truck was hit the belt of the speed recorder was knocked off, putting the recorder out of order, there was nothing to show that a heavy air-brake application was made prior to the accident.

J. F. Schilling, in company with four other persons, was in an automobile which crossed the Dixie Highway shortly before train No. 51 arrived. He said the engine whistle was sounded for the Dixie Highway crossing, followed by a succession of short blasts; afterwards the whistle was sounded for Hume Road crossing and other whistling was also done, in fact, he said that one of the persons in the automobile remarked about it, saying that "any one could hear that whistling." Mr. Schilling said that the whistle was blowing when he saw a big flash of fire, after which

the whistle was silenced and there was nothing but black smoke

William B. Stevenson stated that he and another man were driving a team westward on Hume Road and were some distance from the railroad tracks when the tank truck passed them, traveling at an ordinary rate of speed. Apparently the truck was brought to a stop at the crossing, although Mr. Stevenson was not positive that it came to a full stop nor as to its exact location at that time. He further said that he saw the train after it passed the Dixie Highway crossing but paid no more attention to it until after the accident occurred, he did not hear the engine whistle sounded or the bell rung. A Mr. Ryan, who was with Mr. Stevenson, said that the truck stopped for the crossing and that the whistle was not sounded.

W. M. Moyer stated that at the time of the accident he was working in a field at a point about one-half mile east of the crossing. He heard the train whistle for the Dixie Highway crossing and said that he had made it a point to count on this train as a reminder that it was nearly time for dinner and he pulled out his watch to see what time it was; Mr. Moyer said that the whistle was still being sounded after the entire train had passed over the Dixie Highway crossing.

Mr. F. E. Bessire, vice president of the Radiant Oil Co., stated that the driver of the truck was 35 years of age, single, of good habits, temperate, and that he was supporting his aged parents. He had been in the employ of this company for four years, prior to which he had driven a truck for five years for the Radiant Oil Company's predecessor, this was his first accident. Mr. Bessire further stated that Mr. Sheary's sight and hearing were good, and that on the day of the accident he was driving the truck over the same route that he had traveled since their firm took over the business four years previously, while he was familiar also with the operation of this particular truck, having driven it for a period of about three years. Mr. Bessire further stated that their truck drivers are instructed to stop at all crossings and not drive at excessive speed, and that all of their trucks are equipped with governors which limit the speed to 18 miles per hour, under no circumstances are drivers permitted to carry any one else on the trucks. Mr. Bessire stated that evidently the truck was brought to a stop before it started over the crossing as after the accident it was found to be in second gear.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the driver of an automobile tank truck proceeding upon a railroad crossing at grade directly in front of a passenger train which was approaching at high speed.

The investigation disclosed that truck drivers of the oil company are instructed to stop before going upon a grade crossing, and it appears that in this case the driver either stopped or reduced speed to a very low rate. The purpose of such an instruction or rule is to enable the driver to ascertain positively whether or not a train is closely approaching the crossing, and unless he does so the effect of the rule is practically nullified. According to the evidence, this crossing was on the regular route of the truck driver involved and he had passed over it many times; he must therefore have been fully aware of the restricted view of the track as he approached the crossing, and had he exercised proper care this accident would not have occurred.

There is a conflict in the statements of the various witnesses as to whether the engineman sounded the whistle when approaching the crossing, the driver of the truck said that the whistle was not sounded and the statements of two men who were behind him driving a team of horses tended to support the truck driver's statement, but on the other hand there were many other statements to the contrary and the weight of evidence indicates that a great deal of whistling was being done by the engineman in the vicinity of the Dixie Highway and Hume Road crossings.

While the traffic ordinarily moving over this particular crossing is not heavy, and perhaps does not justify elaborate protective devices, nevertheless the removal of weeds and shrubs and a slight cutting away of the top of the embankment would have made a very great improvement in the situation.

In this instance there was an unusual volume of highway traffic over this crossing on account of detours necessitated by other roads being under repair. This is a condition which frequently exists particularly in the summer months when much road work is in progress and highway travel is heavy, and it is believed that in these circumstances additional protection should be provided at grade crossings which ordinarily are little traveled but which temporarily are subject to a heavy volume of detoured traffic. This is a matter in which the railroads and the local authorities in charge of highways and highway traffic should cooperate.

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

Respectfully submitted,

W P. BORLAND

Director