

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 UHRICHSVILLE, OHIO, ON OCTOBER 29, 1935.

January 20, 1936.

To the Commission:

On October 29, 1935, there was a collision between a passenger train and freight cars standing on an industrial siding near Uhrichsville, Ohio, resulting in the death of 1 employee of the industrial plant, and the injury of 10 passengers, 2 mail clerks, and 2 employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the C. L. & W. Subdivision of the Akron Division, extending between Holloway and Warwick, Ohio, a distance of 72.7 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 a manual block-signal system. The accident occurred 1.06 miles west of the station at Uhrichsville, at a switch which leads off the main track through a No. 10 turnout to the south or right to what is known as the Belden Brick Company's siding; approaching this point from the west the track is tangent for about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles, followed by a compound curve to the right about 1,500 feet in length, the curvature varying from $10^{\circ} 15'$ to 30° , the accident occurring on this curve at a point about 475 feet from its eastern end, where the curvature is at its maximum. The grade for eastbound trains is 0.25 per cent ascending. The low switch-stand is located on the engineman's side of an eastbound train and the switch is a facing-point switch for eastbound trains. A view of the switch lamp can be had for a distance of 627 feet.

The weather was cloudy and it was approaching dusk at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 5.03 p.m.

Description

Eastbound passenger train No. 58 consisted of one mail car, one baggage car, two coaches, and one chair car, of wooden construction, hauled by engine 881, and was in charge of Conductor Marren and Engineman Schnerlie. This train passed GI Tower, the last open office, 4.4 miles west of Uhrichsville, at 4.58 p.m., 24 minutes late, and on

reaching a point approximately 3.34 miles beyond that point it entered the Belden Brick Company's siding and, while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 25 and 35 miles an hour, collided with a cut of four freight cars which were standing on that track.

The force of the collision demolished the first freight car and pushed the next two cars ahead for a distance of about 50 feet; the fourth car in the cut was driven ahead a distance of about 125 feet and collided with another cut of four standing freight cars, in turn driving them ahead a short distance and pushing the east car of this latter cut off the end of the siding. Engine 881 was turned a little more than half way around, but remained practically upright, the tender and the first two cars in train No. 58 were also derailed, but remained upright.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Schnerlie stated that he had an order to run 15 minutes late between GI Tower and Holloway, within which territory the accident occurred. Before reaching the curve on which the accident occurred two torpedoes were exploded by his engine; he answered them and shut off steam, at which time the speed was about 38 or 40 miles an hour. When about four car-lengths from the switch leading to the Belden Brick Company's siding he saw that the switch points were open and immediately applied the air brakes in emergency. Shortly after the accident, on returning to the switch, he found it open and latched, while the switch lock, which was fastened to a chain, was on the tie and was in the locked position. The switch lock showed no indication of having been damaged and he tried it with his switch key and found that it worked properly; he also operated the switch but found nothing wrong with it. Engineman Schnerlie further stated that it was just beginning to get dark, and when approaching the point of accident he could not tell that the switch lamp was burning, although after the accident he found this to be the case. He was, however, able to see that the switch points were open, without having turned on the headlight.

Fireman Myers said that shortly after the torpedoes were exploded he was looking ahead, saw the red indication of the switch lamp and called to the engineman, who at about the same time applied the air brakes in emergency; his other statements practically corroborated those of the engineman.

None of the other members of the crew was aware of anything wrong until the air brakes were applied in emergency, just prior to the accident; their statements corroborated in substance those of Engineman Schnierlie as to the condition and position of the switch and its appurtenances as they were found after the accident.

Engineman Ballard, of extra 2330, stated that his engine had performed work at the Belden Brick Company's siding shortly before the accident, and had passed over the switch in going east to Uhrichsville to get into clear for train No. 58, less than 10 minutes prior to the accident. At the time the work was being performed at the Belden Brick Company's siding he noticed a boy, about 15 years of age, standing in the vicinity of the switch.

This boy, 15 years of age, upon being questioned admitted having had a switch key in his possession, and that he opened the switch for fun, put the key in his pocket, then started home, and shortly afterwards heard the noise made when the accident occurred. He went into the house, changed his hat and coat, and then returned to the scene of the accident; later he dropped the switch key in a nearby pond, about 30 to 50 feet in depth, from the side of a row boat. This boy was taken into custody by the local authorities.

Conclusions

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

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

All of the employees involved were experienced men; at the time of the accident they had been on duty from 4 to 4 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours, previous to which they had been off duty from 21 to 22 $\frac{1}{2}$ hours.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.