

ROLLAT *Nov-18/19*

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE RAILROAD AT OKEMA, KY.,
ON OCTOBER 22, 1919.

November 15, 1919.

On October 22, 1919, there was a derailment on the Louisville & Nashville Railroad at Okema, Ky., which resulted in the death of two employees and the injury of one employee. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety submits the following report.

The derailment occurred on the Atkinson Cut-off, which is a single-track freight line, six miles in length, extending between Morton, Ky., and Atkinson, Ky. Trains are operated by time table and train orders, no block signal system being in use. Approaching the point of derailment from the south the track is tangent for some distance, and for about 3,500 feet is on a descending grade varying from .10% to .50%. The weather was foggy.

The train involved is a turn-around run operated as train No. 32 from Guthrie to Morton, at which latter point it is diverted over the cut-off. At the time of the accident it was being operated over the cut-off as extra 971. It consisted of 42 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 971, and was in charge of Conductor Blackburn and Engineman Partington. It left Guthrie at about 11.30 p.m., and at about 5.00 a.m. was derailed at Okema by striking a horse at a point about 265 feet south of a cattle guard. The body of the horse was dragged by the engine to a point about 100 feet north of the cattle guard, where the wheels of the pony truck were derailed. These

derailed wheels followed the rails until they encountered a facing point switch leading to a mine track on the right side of the main line, where they were diverted to the right, while the driving wheels, which were still on the rails, followed the main line, resulting in the engine turning over to the left. The speed at the time of derailment was estimated to have been about 20 miles an hour.

The engine came to rest at a point about 110 feet beyond the switch. The first nine cars were derailed, three of them being demolished while four were more or less damaged. The employees killed were the fireman and head brakeman.

Engineman Partington stated that the speed of his train was about 20 or 25 miles an hour when he saw the horse on the track, apparently about 15 feet distant. In a few seconds he noticed the odor of burning hair and immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, the engine turning over just after the brakes were applied. Although his engine was equipped with an electric headlight, he could not see the horse earlier on account of the dense fog.

Conductor Blackburn stated that he was in the caboose working on his reports when the train came to a sudden stop. On examining the track he saw where the wheels had left the rail near the cattle guard, south of the switch. The derailed wheels then marked the ties and spikes on the east side of the rails until they reached the switch leading to the mine track. They were there diverted to the right, while the driving wheels

apparently continued to a point close to the frog before leaving the rails. He also found a portion of the body of the horse near the switch in the center of the track, while the other portion was alongside the track. He estimated the speed at the time of the derailment to have been about 20 miles an hour.

This accident was caused by engine 971 striking a horse, the body of which became wedged under the engine in such a manner as to derail the pony truck wheels, resulting in the derailment and overturning of the engine when the switch was encountered. As the right of way is fenced in, and had no breaks in it, it is thought that the horse had crossed over the cattle guard at a nearby road crossing.

The crew in charge of this train had been on duty about six and one-half hours, after a period off duty of about 20 hours.

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