

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE CHIEF OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE MICHIGAN CENTRAL RAILROAD NEAR GARY, IND., ON AUGUST 20, 1922.

September 6, 1922.

To the Commission:

On August 20, 1922, there was a derailment of an express train on the Michigan Central Railroad near Gary, Ind., which resulted in the death of 2 employees, and the injury of 2 persons carried under contract.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on that part of the West Division extending between Niles, Mich., and Chicago, Ill., a distance of 92.92 miles, this being a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The accident occurred at a point about $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles east of Gary, approaching this point from the east, the track is tangent for about 2 miles, while the grade is 0.4 per cent ascending for a distance of about 1 mile. The track is laid with 105-pound rails, 33 feet in length, with an average of 21 treated oak and hardwood ties to the rail-length, ballasted with about 12 inches of crushed stone. The general maintenance of the track was good. The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 2.18 a. m.

Description.

Westbound express train No. 39 consisted of 22 express cars and 1 coach, hauled by engine 8317, and was in charge of Conductor Foote and Engineman Coy. It passed East Gary, about 4 miles east of the point of accident and the last open office, at 2.10 a. m., 5 hours and 43 minutes late, and was derailed near Gary while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 45 miles an hour.

Engine 8317 turned over on its right side and came to rest on the right side of the track about 330 feet beyond the point of derailment. The first 11 cars in the train were derailed, three of them being demolished and the others more or less badly damaged. The employees killed were the engineman and the fireman.

Summary of evidence.

Conductor Foote, Brakeman Elwell and Flagman Becker were riding in the rear car at the time the accident occurred. Their first knowledge of anything wrong was an emergency application of the air brakes, which might have been made by the engineman or due to the breaking of the train line as a result of the accident. The flagman went back to protect his train, while the conductor and brakeman went forward to ascertain what was the trouble. Conductor Foote did not find out what caused the accident, while Brakeman Elwell did not make any examination of the track for this purpose.

Division Engineer Elder found that from 27 to 30 spikes had been pulled from the ties on the outside of the left rail, the spikes being left on the ballast at the ends of the ties. The spike holes were in no way distorted, nor were the spikes bent, indicating that the spikes had been withdrawn by means of a claw bar. There also were marks on the under sides of the spike heads such as a claw bar would make, and there were also fresh marks on the ties made by the base of a claw bar. Just east of where the spikes were drawn, the spikes in three other ties showed evidence of having been tampered with, but apparently the person or persons handling the claw bar could not engage the heads of the spikes. The statements of Division Engineer Elder were substantially corroborated by those of Superintendent Pfeifer, Master Mechanic Corbett, Roadmaster Graffner, and Acting Captain of Police Connelly, of Gary. The superintendent and the roadmaster also examined the track for evidence of dragging equipment, but failed to find any such evidence, while the master mechanic made a careful examination of the engine and found it to be in good condition.

Section Foreman Draves, in charge of the section on which the accident occurred, stated that on August 18 he had been working in the vicinity of the point of accident, renewing ties and lining the track. On August 19 his men had been engaged in similar work just west of the point of accident, and he said that after the day's work had been completed he examined the track and found it to be in good condition. He said the tools used were locked up for the night and that there was nothing to indicate that the tool house had been tampered with, nor were any of the tools missing.

The last westbound train previous to the accident passed East Gary at 12.28 a. m., while the last eastbound train running on the eastbound track, passed East Gary at 1.35 a. m. The engine crew of the eastbound train did not notice any one around the track in the vicinity of the point of accident.

After the accident occurred, careful examination of the track showed it to be in good condition, with no marks to indicate that there had been any dragging equipment. Examination was also made of the wheels and axles of the derailed equipment, but no defects were found. There were, however, marks on the counterbalances of the driving wheels which showed that they had struck the rails and indicated that at some time following the derailment they had been inside of the south rail, running on the ties.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by malicious tampering with the track.

The evidence clearly indicates that approximately 30 spikes had been withdrawn from the ties on the outside of the left rail, leaving it without support and permitting it to spread outward under the engine hauling train No. 39, resulting in the derailment of the engine and following cars. At the time of this investigation it had not been definitely determined when or by whom the spikes were removed.

All the employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident the engine crew had been on duty about 3 hours, and the train crew about 10 hours, previous to which all of these employees had been off duty 30 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Chief, Bureau of Safety.