INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD NEAR WHITE, ARKANSAS, ON MARCH 5, 1924.

April 16, 1924.

To the Commission:-

On March 5, 1924, there was a derailment of an Arkansas, Louisiana & Missouri Railway freight train on the Missouri Pacific Railroad near White, Arkansas, which resulted in the death of one employee.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on that part of the Felsenthal District of the Louisiana Division, extending between Felsenthal, Ark., and Vidalia, La., a distance of 127.08 miles, and is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block signal system being in use. This accident occurred about .88 mile north of White, approaching this point from the north the track is tangent for more than 4 miles and the grade is practically level for about 1 mile to the point of accident. The track at the point of accident is laid on a fill about 6 feet in height, with 56-pound rails, 30 feet in length, with 18 oak ties to the rail length, single-spiked and fastened with 4-bolt angle bars, ballasted with dirt ballast. The track at the point where the accident occurred was covered by a slow order reducing the speed of all trains to 10 miles an hour. The weather was clear at the time of the accident which occurred about 4.10 p.m.

Description.

Southbound freight train extra 100 of the Arkansas, Louisiana & Missouri Railway was being operated over the Missouri Pacific Railroad from Hutting, Ark., to Bastrop, La., and consisted of 17 cars, 2 cabooses and 1 coach, hauled by engine 100, and was in charge of Conductor Gulledge and Engineman Cullen. This train left Felsenthal according to the train sheet, at 3.20 p.m., with running orders and including an order restricting the speed of the train at various points on the division, and was derailed at 4.10 p.m., while running at a speed estimated to have been between 7 and 10 miles an hour.

The third car from the engine derailed to the right and overturned with its forward end 12, feet south of the point of derailment. The fourth car had both trucks derailed while the fifth car had only one wheel derailed. None of the other cars was derailed. The employee killed was a brakeman.

Summary of evidence.

No test of the air brakes was made leaving Felsenthel but Conductor Gulledge said he knew the air was through the entire train and that all the brakes were cut in and operative. Leaving the Ouachita River Drawbridge where a stop was made which consumed about five minutes, he said that the train was operated in compliance with the slow order. His first intimation of the accident was when the brakes were applied in emergency at which time the speed of the train was about 8 miles an hour. After the derailment he examined the track and noticed a mark on the west rail about five feet north of the joint which led diagonally across the ball of the rail to the joint, then dropped off on the west side and continued on the ties until the car turned over, stopping about 3 rail lengths south of the first flange mark.

Engineman Cullen said he was familiar with the track between Felsenthal and Bastrop and that he obeyed the speed restrictions as contained in the slow order, estimating the average speed from Felsenthal to the point of accident to have been about 10 miles an hour. He looked back frequently on account of the bad track and his first intimation of the accident was when he felt a jerk and the brakes were automatically applied in emergency, and looking back he saw that the third car on which Brakeman Dixon was riding was derailed. The statements of fireman Gulledge corroborated those of Engineman Cullen. Brakemen Holloway and McCoy estimated the speed to have been between 7 and 10 miles an hour at the time of the accident.

Exarination of the track after the accident disclosed the first mark of derailment was a flange mark on the ball of the west rail beginning 7 feet 1½ inches from the leaving end of the rail which continued diagonally to the right across the rail to the joint where it left the rail then led across and beyond eight succeeding ties. South of the joint at the leaving end of the rail on which the first mark of derailment appeared, the west rail pulled over towards the end of the ties and the east rail was drawn outward, bent and broken, as a result of the derailment. Level of the track at joints and centers for a distance of about 150 feet showed a variation of from ¼ to 1½ inches low on the east side.

A further examination of the track at the point of derailment and for a distance of approximately one-quarter mile north of it, disclosed that the track between the point where the first wheel mark left the rail and the overturned car, had been repaired, having been resurfaced on both sides for about one rail length and on the east side for four rail lengths. The gauge and level taken for a distance of approximately 600 feet north of the point of accident showed the gauge to be from 1/8 inch tight to 3/8 inch open, the level varied from level to one inch low, in one instance the measurment at center showed to be 7/16 inch low on the east side and at the following joint 1 inch low on the west side. This particular piece of track had been worked before the accident and prior to that had received some new ties but the gauge of the track immediately north of it was maintained in very poor condition, there being numerous low joints, decayed and broken ties, broken angle bars, joints connected with two hole angle/places where the ties were spread and other places where the base of the rail was 2 inches above the top of the ties.

An inspection of the wrecked equipment after it had been rerailed did not disclose any defect that would have contributed to the accident.

Roadmaster Short said he arrived at the scene of the accident about 10 p.m., and after making an examination of the track before repairs were made found that the track at the point of derailment was not in good level. He further said that this particular track was hard to maintain on account of a gumbo soil but did not think the track uneven enough to rock the cars if the speed restrictions were not exceeded.

Section Foreman Andrews said that he had lined about 2 rail lengths at the point of accident on March 3rd, and passed that point between 7 and 8 a.m., on the day of the accident when he noticed that the track was a little out of level, and upon examination after the derailment he found it to be 1½ inches low. The ties were good for about ½ mile north of the point of accident with the exception of a few broken ties, ties spread at rail joints, and half angle bars in that distance. He was working about 1 mile north of the point of accident when extra 100 passed at a speed of about 12 or 15 miles an hour. Arriving at the scene of the accident a short time after its occurrence, he found a flange mark on the west rail about 7 feet north of the joint which extended southward to within 8 inches of the joint; the ties showed wheel marks for about 20 feet farther before they left the ties. The two ties where the first wheel dropped off the head of the rail were rotten. He sur-

faced about 60 feet of track and renewed about 38 ties after the derailment. He also said that but 4 men had been employed on his section for 5 days before the derailment prior to which time one and two men were working

Conclusions.

This accident is believed to have been caused by bad track.

The employees involved were experienced men. None of them had been on duty at the time of the accident in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.