INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD AT HOAGLAND, IND , ON FEBRUARY 18, 1929

May 24, 1929.

To the Commission:

On February 18, 1929, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Pennsylvania Railroad at Hoagland, Ind., which resulted in the injury of three passengers.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Fort Wayne Branch of the Cincinnati Division, which extends between Richmond and Adams, Ind., a distance of 86.6 miles, and is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders and a manual block-signal system At Hoagland there is a passing track approximately 2,950 feet in length which parallels the main track on the north. About 1,700 feet east of the west passing-track switch there is a facing-point switch for eastbound trains which leads off the passing track to the north to what is known as the coal spur track, this track being 530 feet in length and paralleling the passing track. The derailment occurred at the switch leading to this spur track In the vicinity of the point of accident the track is tangent while at the point of accident the grade is 0.28 per cent descending for eastbound trains. The switch stand involved is of the Ramapo intermediate type and is located on the north side of the passing track.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 3.28 a. m.

Description

Eastbound passenger train No. 200 consisted of one baggage car, one coach, seven Pullman sleeping cars and one observation car, all of steel construction, hauled by engines 1965 and 8075, and was in charge of Conductor Lonergan and Enginemen Unthank and Krouse. This train departed from Fort Wayne, 12.3 miles west of Hoagland, at 2 56 a. m., 16 minutes late, and upon arrival at Hoagland it entered the passing track at the west switch, and while

proceeding through this track at an estimated speed of between 7 and 10 miles per hour the rear truck of the third car and the forward truck of the fourth car were derailed at the switch leading to the coal spur track, which in turn threw the switch fully open and permitted the rear end of the train to enter the spur track. The train continued eastward, causing the fourth and fifth cars and the forward truck of the sixth car to run off the end of the spur track.

The third car came to rest leaning against a barn, which was partly demolished. The fourth car was overturned, coming to rest on its left side, while the fifth car remained upright. None of these cars became uncoupled, and none of the other equipment was derailed or damaged.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Unthank, of the leading engine, stated that when his train was brought to a stop preparatory to entering the passing track for the purpose of meeting an opposing train he noticed a pronounced leakage of air and after the train entered the passing track he went back alongside the train and located a broken pipe which was connected to the auxiliary reservoir on the fourth car, he cut out the air on this car and returned to his engine. In the meantime the train to be met had passed and his own train then proceeded through the passing track at a speed of 8 or 10 miles per hour and as it neared the east switch he felt an unusual resistance to its movement, whereupon he shut off steam and permitted the train to stop without applying the brakes, he did not know at this time that a part of his train had been derailed. After examining the derailed equipment he went back to the spur track switch and found it lined for the spur track with the lever unlatched. He also examined the track and noticed that the first marks of derailment were near the heel of the switch point. Engineman Unthank further stated that when he inspected the train for air leaks prior to the accident he looked at the brake rigging and other appliances, which appeared to be intact, and it was his opinion that the air pipe on the fourth car had been broken as a result of having been struck by some foreign object

Engineman Krouse, of the second engine also returned to the spur track switch after the accident and noticed that it was set for the spur track, with the lever out of the hasp, and on testing the switch by moving it in

both the open and closed positions he found that the points fitted closely in each position, he also noticed that by raising the lever and then letting it go the points would open about 1 inch. He did not see any marks on the track that would indicate the derailment occurred west of the switch A brake shoe was found by him that had recently been in use, lying near the inside of the north rail of the passing track about two car-lengths east of the switch points, an examination of this brake shoe did not reveal the presence of any flange marks and there was no other loose material in the vicinity of the spur track switch.

Conductor Lonergan stated that while his train was moving through the passing track at a speed of 6 or 7 miles per hour he was standing on the right side of the rear platform of the second car, it being his intention to look over the train as it rounded the curve when leaving the passing track There was no unusual movement of the train until he heard a crash and upon looking out he noticed the car behind him settle down, while the car in which he was riding appeared to raise upward. He reached for the signal cord and sounded one blast of the air whistle, which was all he had time to sound before the train came to a stop. Subsequent to the accident he went back and observed wheel marks on the ties beginning near the east end of the switch points He operated the switch and found that the points fitted properly in both the open and closed positions, but it was somewhat difficult to move the lever entirely around and latch it in the closed position The statements of Fireman Johnson and Brown, as well as those of Flagman Fertig, added no facts of importance

Brakeman Nelson, of the westbound train RH-3, which was the last train to use the coal spur track, this being on February 14, stated that upon arrival of his train at Hoagland on that date his train was left standing on the main track while the engine entered the passing track at the east switch in order to pick up a car on the spur track He opened and closed the spur track switch for this movement and on both occasions he examined the points and noticed that they fitted firmly against the rails. After this had been done the engine and car returned to the train and in doing so a back-up movement was made over the spur track switch. He said he was certain that this switch was properly set when his train departed from

Hoagland, although it was not equipped with a lock. Conductor Cook, of the same train, stated that he did not accompany the engine when the car was picked up on the spur track and did not examine the switch after this movement had been made but felt confident that the switch was in the closed position since the engine and car passed over it in returning to the train.

Section Foreman Gibson, on whose section the accident occurred, stated that after his arrival at the scene of accident he inspected the spur track switch and found it in perfect condition, the switch points were not sprung and fitted closely to rails in either position, but he noticed marks on the ties just east of the switch points where some wheels had run along the base of the rail and damaged some of the spikes He said that the condition of the turnout as to line and surface was not bad, the ties were good and the ballast was about 1 foot in depth The switch stand was installed on February 6, 1929, and no trouble had been experienced with it prior to the accident He last inspected this stand on February 15, and his track walker inspected it on February 17 and did not report any defects.

Track Supervisor Hale stated that he thoroughly inspected the coal track switch and stand subsequent to the accident and did not find any defects, the switch was not damaged by the derailment, and he also gauged the track near the points and found it to be standard. This stand had been removed from a main track switch about 2 miles east of Hoagland before it was installed at its present location He is familiar with this type of switch stand and during his experience he has had no trouble with them, and it was his opinion that the lever was not down in the latch and possibly the vibration of the train as it passed over the switch caused the points to open, allowing the cars to derail. He also said that it is not the practice to lock switches leading from other than the main track

Wreck Master Brown stated that after the cars that were not derailed were reassembled an inspection of them was made, which disclosed that the brake rigging and other appurtenances were intact, while there was no brake shoes missing on any of the derailed equipment. The derailed trucks were picked up and placed on the track and the wheels gauged, but nothing was found to warrant condemning any of them nor was anything noted about the trucks that would have contributed to the accident. He examined the

track from the spur track switch to the west passing-track switch and did not see any marks indicating that anything had been dragging, neither did he find any parts of equipment In his opinion the rear truck of the third car from the engine split the switch and the forward truck of the following car dropped down into the switch, lining it for the spur track

The switch stand involved is operated by a lever secured to the side of the stand. This lever has a slot in it so that when it is pushed down in a vertical position this slot passes over a lug on the side of the stand and the lever must be snug against the stand before the switch points fit securely against the rails. The locking mechanism in the stand is so arranged that when the lever is raised a sufficient distance towards the horizontal position the lock is released and theswitch points will spring open about 1 inch.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by a cocked or partly opened switch.

The spur track switch was last used on February 14 and apparently was left in proper position as a movement was made over it, eastbound, after the switch was closed It was inspected by Section Foreman Gibson on February 15 and was last inspected prior to the accident on February 17 by the trackwalker. This switch was also inspected and tested by various employees subsequent to the accident and found to be in good condition, no repairs being required since that time. It is believed that this switch was handled by some person who failed to push the lever down a sufficient distance to engage the locking mechanism securely and that the vibration of the train as it was passing over the switch caused the lever to work up and the lock or plunger to work out of the base block of the stand, permitting the points to open under the train and resulting in the derailment.

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

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.