

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE SOUTHERN RAILWAY AT LINDALE, GA., ON JANUARY  
14, 1927.

February 25, 1927.

To the Commission:

On January 14, 1927, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Southern Railway at Lindale, Ga., resulting in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 23 passengers, 4 rail clerks and 1 employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Atlanta Division extending between Atlanta, Ga., and Chattanooga, Tenn., a distance of 152.7 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 at the switch leading to a spur track, at a point about 200 feet south of the station at Lindale; approaching this point from the south there is a 4° 21' curve to the left 1,478 feet in length, followed by 1,985 feet of tangent, the accident occurring on this tangent at a point about 1,700 feet from its southern end. The grade at the point of accident was 0.70 per cent ascending for northbound trains.

The switch involved is a facing-point switch for northbound trains and is constructed on a No. 10 turnout. The switch stand, located on the east or engineman's side of a northbound engine, is a Wier rigid type, and is equipped with a switch target located 15 feet above the head-block tie, in addition to a switch lamp, the night indications of which are green when the switch is closed and red when it is open, at the time of the accident, however, the switch lamp had been removed. This spur track is also equipped with a derailing device located on the right rail at a point just into clear of the main track. The switch can be seen by an engineman of a northbound engine for a considerable distance.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident which occurred at about 7.43 p.m.

### Description

Northbound passenger train No. 2 consisted of one mail car, one combination car, one coach, one dining car and six Pullman sleeping cars, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 1466, and was in charge of Conductor Alcutt and Engineman Waitt. This train left Atlanta, 50.7 miles south of Lindale, at 5 p. m., on time, passed Silver Creek, the last open office, 1.4 miles south of Lindale, at 7.40 p. m., 45 minutes late, entered the switch leading to the spur track and was derailed upon encountering the derailling device while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 25 and 40 miles an hour.

The engine, its tender, the mail car and the combination car were entirely derailed, this equipment coming to rest in an upright position diagonally across the main and spur tracks, the front truck of the coach was also derailed. At the time of the accident there were two box cars standing on the spur track which were struck by the derailed equipment and practically demolished. The employee killed was the engineman.

### Summary of evidence

Fireman Ellis stated that after passing Silver Creek he began to shovel coal into the fire box and that he was still so engaged when he felt the engine leave the rails. He was not certain whether or not the brakes were applied, and it was his opinion that the engineman did not see the open switch until just about the time the engine reached it. Fireman Ellis said that the headlight was burning brightly when leaving Silver Creek, but from his position on the deck of the engine as it approached Lindale he could not see the switch and he expressed the opinion that it would have been impossible to have seen the switch target by the aid of the headlight until the engine was close to it. In conversation with the engineman immediately after the accident the engineman informed him that the switch was open. Fireman Ellis estimated the speed of the train at the time of the derailment to have been from 35 to 40 miles an hour.

Baggageman Drummond stated that he felt an application of the air brakes just before the accident occurred but that the baggage car was not derailed until after it had entered the switch. After the accident he did not examine the switch, but proceeded to transfer the baggage to the station at Lindale, and while per-

forming this work some one brought the switch lamp into the station, stating that it had been found wrapped in a newspaper in a culvert near the switch stand.

Conductor Alcutt stated that just before the accident occurred he felt an emergency application of the air brakes. After the train came to a stop he went forward to the engine and while assisting the injured engineman the latter informed him that the switch was open. Conductor Alcutt then proceeded to the switch and upon examining it found it set for the spur track with the switch lever securely latched, while the switch lock, which was open, was lying on the head-block tie a few inches from the latch; he did not examine the lock as to its condition. He also observed that the switch lamp was missing. Conductor Alcutt examined the switch points and found that the left point was standing partly open, and he was of the opinion that a southbound train had run through the switch while it was set for the spur track. He said his reason for reaching such a conclusion was the fact that the speed of his train, which he estimated to have been from 25 to 30 miles an hour, would not have caused it to be derailed upon entering the spur-track switch.

Flagman Sorrels stated that he felt a severe application of the air brakes a few seconds before the accident occurred. After having been relieved of his flagging duty he returned to the scene of the accident, picked up the switch lock which he found lying on the head block tie and later gave it to the agent. He said he did not examine the switch points closely and could not say as to whether or not the switch had been run through by some other train.

Agent Baker said the switch lamp had been lighted by his clerk at 2 p. m., and when going off duty at 4 p. m. he noticed that it was burning properly, showing a green indication, while the switch target also indicated that the switch was lined for the main track. He further stated that the switch had not been used on the day of the accident, and it was his opinion that some one had opened it with malicious intent. He did not examine the switch and could not say what condition it was in at the time of the accident, but he heard the switch lamp had been found in the culvert near the switch stand, wrapped in newspapers.

Roadmaster Bradley stated that he arrived at the scene of the accident at 12.55 a. m., January 15, and immediately made an inspection of the track and found the switch set and latched for the spur track; the lock showed evidence of having been pried open and also of having been struck by something in an apparent effort to open it. There were no flange marks on the running surface of the left or turnout switch point, but there were indications that the outside of a flange had rubbed against this switch point, in addition to the fact that the first tie bar was bent and one of its lugs broken, which indicated that the switch had been run through by some other train, although he said this could have been caused by the derailed train when it entered the switch. Roadmaster Bradley further stated that he understood some work had been done at this switch by the signal department on the day of the accident, but that these employees are not permitted the use of switch keys. It was his belief that the switch had been opened with malicious intent.

W. L. Eagle, captain of the railway police, said an examination of the switch and its appurtenances immediately after the accident disclosed that the lock had been broken, apparently having been forced open by the use of some instrument. The switch had been opened, while the switch lamp apparently had been removed and placed in an upright position in a culvert located about 3 feet from the switch stand, the light was said to have been still burning, while the lamp had been wrapped in newspapers with the idea of concealing it from view.

Further investigation showed that the first marks of derailment appeared at a point near where the derail was located, the track was not damaged between this point and the switch points where there was evidence of slight damage, as referred to by Roadmaster Bradley.

The statements of Engineman Barclay, of northbound train No. 6, whose train passed Lindale at about 5.45 p. m., and of Flagman Hutchison, of southbound train No. 101, who was riding on the rear platform of the observation car when his train passed Lindale at about 6.45 p. m., were to the effect that nothing unusual was noticed when their trains passed the switch in question and that if the switch lamp had not been burning they undoubtedly would have noticed it.

### Conclusions

This accident was apparently caused by tampering with a switch.

The switch and its appurtenances showed every indication of having been tampered with; the lock apparently had been forced apart, in addition to its having been struck by some object, while the lever was turned and securely latched for the spur track. The switch lamp had also been removed from the stand and placed in a nearby culvert.

The evidence indicated that the switch might possibly have been run through by some other train prior to the derailment of train No. 2, as the left or turnout switch point stood open about one-half inch when the switch was set for the spur track, while the outside surface of this point showed some evidence of a flange having rubbed against it, together with a bent tie rod and a broken switch lug. While it could not be definitely determined how the switch points came to be damaged, the fact remains that the derailment did not occur until the derailing device had been reached, some distance north of the switch points.

An automatic block-signal system, supplemented by an automatic train-control device, was to have been placed in service at 4 p. m., on the following day; had they been in use at the time of the accident it probably would not have occurred.

At the time of the accident the engine crew had been on duty 3 hours and 13 minutes, after having been off duty 14 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,

Director.