INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE YAZOO & MISSISSIPPI VALLEY RAILROAD, ILLINOIS CENTRAL SYSTEM, NEAR GOWDEY, MISS., ON SEPTEMBER 22, 1928

March 6, 1929

To the Commission:

On September 22, 1928, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad, Illinois Central System, near Gowdey, Miss., resulting in the death of two employees and the injury of three employees

Location and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on the Natchez District of the New Orleans Division, extending between Jackson and Natchez, Miss., a distance of 98 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred about 1-2/3 miles south of Jackson; approaching this point from the south the track is tangent for a distance of more than 2 miles, while the grade in the vicinity of the point of accident is level.

The track is laid with 75-pound rails, rerolled, 31 feet in length, with an average of 18 treated and untreated ties to the rail-length, fully tie-plated, single-spiked and ballasted with cinders to a depth of 6 inches.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 4:10 p. m.

Description

The train involved in this accident was Vicksburg Route Division train No. 202; on account of a bridge having been burned out between Vicksburg and Jackson it was being detoured over the New Orleans Division as northbound passenger train extra 585 At Harriston, 79.2 miles south of Jackson, the engine was turned but not the cars, and the train on departing from that point, at 1:00 a. m., consisted of one dining car, two

Pullman sleeping cars, one combination coach, one combination coach and baggage car, and one combination mail and express car, in the order named, hauled by engine 585, of the 2-6-0 type, and was in charge of Conductor Martin and Pilot Engineman Williams The cars were of steel construction with the exception of the last car, which was of steel-underframe construction Extra 585 passed Utica, the last open office, 31.6 miles south of Jackson, at 3:04 a. m., and on approaching Gowdey it was derailed by a broken rail while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 20 and 25 miles per hour

Engine 585, its tender and the first three cars in the train were derailed toward the east and came to rest in general alignment with the track. The engine and tender turned over on their right sides, the coupler being broken between the tender and dining car, while the three cars remained coupled to the rest of the train The first car came to rest leaning to the right while the other two remained practically upright. The employees killed were the pilot engineman and the fireman

Summary of Evidence

Engineman Jones, of Vicksburg Route Division, said that while he did not operate the engine at all between Vicksburg and the point of accident yet to the best of his knowledge everything about the engine was in good condition. Engineman Jones rode on the engine as far as Learned, 23.7 miles south of Jackson, and then went back into the coach where he was riding at the time of the accident, which occurred while the train was traveling at a speed of from 20 to 25 miles per hour. Engineman Jones then got out of the coach and went to the engine; the air pumps were then working and it seemed to him that the engine was running but he was not positive about this although he thought he heard the exhaust from the engine, In his opinion the air brakes were not applied prior to the accident and he did not think that the engine was the first to be derailed, basing his opinion on the way the equipment came to rest and saying that if the engine had derailed first it probably would have gone to the west, instead of the east. Statements of Conductor Martin, Flagman Walker, Baggageman Lanier and Train Porter Meadows, all of the Vicksburg Route Division, were similar to those of Engineman Jones as to what transpired prior to the accident, except that Flagman Walker, who was riding in the next to the last car with the conductor, thought that the air brakes were applied before the

shock cars. Conductor Martin did not feel any air-brake application made just prior to the accident; in his opinion the accident was caused by a broken rail and he further stated that the position of the engine and cars after the accident indicated that the engine was pulled off the track by the cars

Examination was made of the track and equipment subsequent to the accident by Supervisors Goddard and Lewis, Division Engineer Brevard, Train Master Williams, General Yardmaster Hardin, Acting Yardmaster Stapleton, Master Mechanic Chapman, and Section Foreman Beasley. The track was gauged and cross levels were taken at every rail joint, the joints being staggered, for a distance of about 1,000 feet south of the point of accident. At its maximum the gauge was 3/8 inch open, and at one point about 60 feet south of the broken rail the gauge was 1/8 inch tight. It was also found that at three points the difference in elevation was 3/4 inch, these points being located about 210, 405, and 600 feet south of the point of derailment. Starting at a point approximately 15 feet from the leaving end of the rail preceding the broken rail a distinct mark appeared on the top of the ball of the east rail, this mark extending to the outside of the rail, marking the outside of the ball and then appearing on the base of the rail. This mark apparently was made by a wheel flange of one of the derailed cars; there was no corresponding mark on the opposite rail. It did not appear that there was any indication of equipment dragging through a trailing-point switch located 51 feet south of the point of accident, or at a private highway crossing 480 feet farther south, nor was any defect found about the engine or cars that would have caused the accident. The broken rail was on the east side of the track, and the break in it was a new break, angular in shape, with no indication of a fissure. The break occurred in a full-bolted, four-hole Weber rail joint, over a tie, beginning at a point about 4 inches from the receiving end of the rail. About 5 or 6 inches of the ball of the rail was missing and could not be found

Supervisor Goddard stated that the track in the vicinity of the point of accident was resurfaced about one year previously and is in reasonably good condition for light branch line traffic. Some of the ties have been in the track as long as 10 years, but they are changed every month where needed, while the track is patrolled every other day. The maximum speed permissible for a passenger train with a freight engine is 35 miles per hour.

Section Foreman Beasley stated that his section is 7 miles long and that six men are employed in his gang. He was last over this track, making his regular inspection on his motor car, on September 20th and at that time noticed nothing wrong.

Southbound freight train extra 558 was the last train to pass prior to the accident. It consisted of 20 cars and passed about 2 hours and 25 minutes before the accident occurred. Members of the crew noticed nothing unusual as to track conditions at that time.

Examination of the track by the Commission's inspectors for a distance of several hundred feet south of the point of accident disclosed rather poor maintenance. Numerous rotten ties were found, together with loose spikes and spikes with broken heads. All joints seemed to be in good condition, however, and the gauge and cross levels were well maintained.

The rail involved in this accident was originally rolled in 1898 and was a 75-pound rail; it was re-rolled to about a 70-pound rail and laid in the track in 1908. The brand was not legible and no heat number, rail number or letter was discernible. It showed little wear. There was a fracture extending diagonally downward from a point approximately 4 inches from the receiving end on the ball of the rail through the web to a point approximately 8 inches from the receiving end on the base of the rail. A small piece of the base, about 2 inches in length, with web and ball missing, was found in the Weber joint, and this piece of the base fitted in the break at each end. The missing section was an irregular U-shaped section with a maximum length of 5 or 6 inches. Both angle bars and the Weber plate were badly bent, and an indentation appeared in the center on top of the ball of the rail at the receiving end. The surface of the fracture was clean and showed no evidence of a defective condition.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by a broken rail.

It did not definitely appear whether this rail was broken by the engine hauling the train, or whether it had been broken by some preceding train, but in either event it seemed apparent that the broken piece, partly secured by the Weber joint, leaned inward far enough

to be struck by a wheel flange, causing the indentation on the ball of the receiving end of the rail and resulting in the tender or forward truck of the first car being derailed; the indications were that the engine was pulled off the track from the rear

All of 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