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 NEAR HARRISTON, MISS., ON MAY 11, 1930.

June 16, 1930.

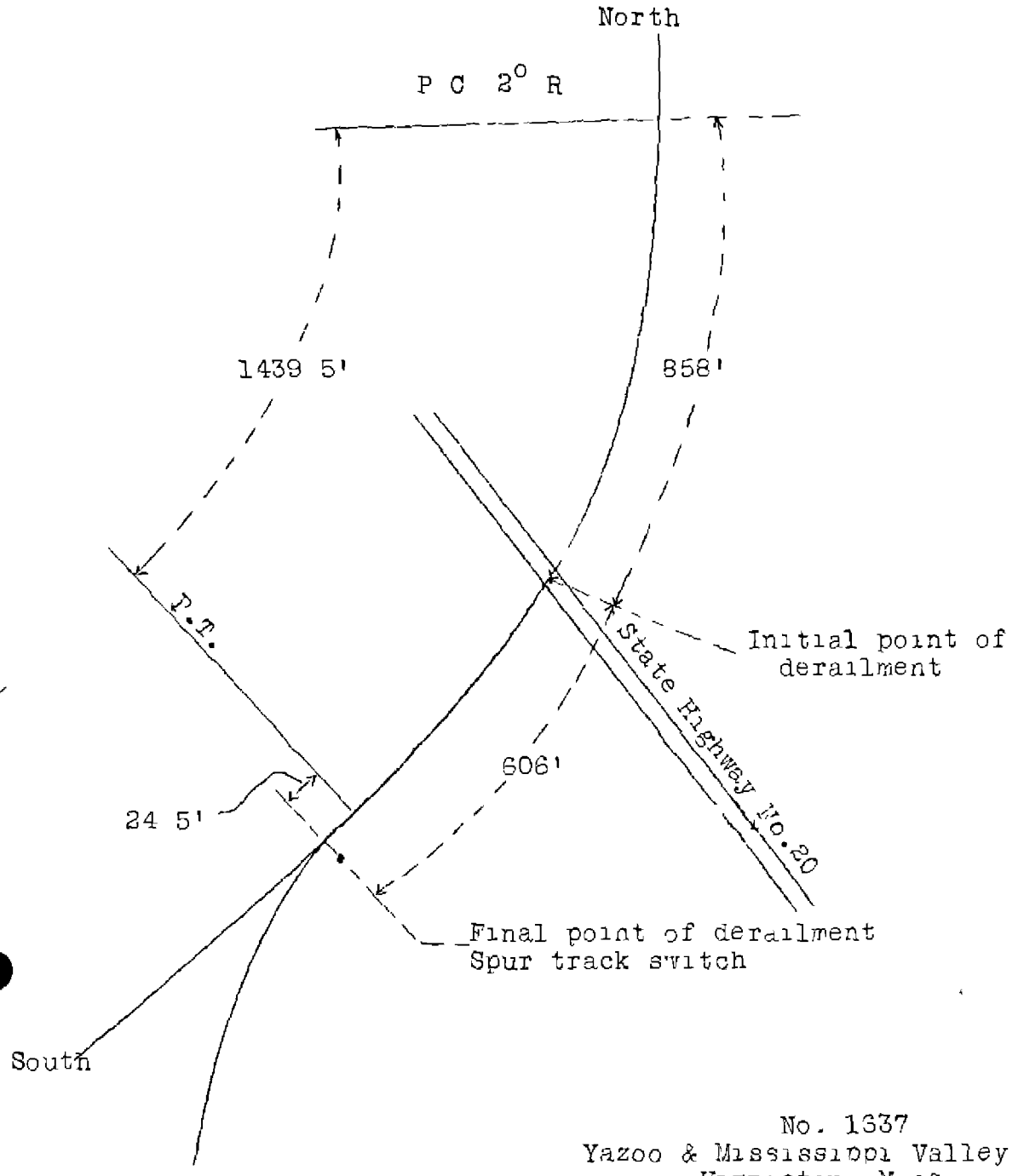
To the Commission:

On May 11, 1930, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Yazoo & Mississippi Valley Railroad near Harriston, Miss., resulting in the death of two employees and the injury of two passengers.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Vicksburg District of the New Orleans Division, extending between Vicksburg, Miss., and North Baton Rouge, La., a distance of 143.7 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 initial point of derailment occurred about 2 miles south of Harriston, at a highway crossing at grade, Mississippi State Highway No. 20, while the final derailment occurred at the facing-point switch of a spur track located 606 feet beyond. Approaching from the north, the track is tangent for a considerable distance, followed by a 2° curve to the right 1,439.5 feet in length, the initial point of derailment occurring on this curve at a point 858 feet from its northern end. The grade for southbound trains is 0.425 per cent ascending at the crossing.

The highway crosses the track from northwest to southeast, and the facing-point switch involved is located 24.5 feet south of the curve, on tangent track, and leads off the main track to the left. The crossing planks between the rails consist of oak timbers, 4" x 10", laid between the rails; the flangeways, between the rails and crossing planks, are 2½ inches in width. The first mark of derailment appeared on the crossing plank on the east side of the track, the high rail of the curve, at a point 6 inches south of the center line of the crossing.



No. 1337
Yazoo & Mississippi Valley R R ,
Harriston, Miss ,
May 11, 1930

The track is laid with 90-pound rails, 39 feet in length, on treated ties, single-spiked, tie-plated, and ballasted with gravel. The track is well maintained. Under the rules, the maximum permissible speed for a passenger train with a passenger engine is 55 miles per hour.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 2.15 a.m.

Description

Southbound passenger train first No. 15 consisted of one baggage and mail car, one baggage and express car, three coaches and three Pullman sleeping cars, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 1118, of the 4-6-2 type, and was in charge of Conductor Day and Engineman Maddux. This train left Harriston at 2.10 a.m., according to the train sheet, 10 minutes late, and on reaching a point about 2 miles beyond, it was derailed while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 30 and 35 miles per hour.

Engine 1118 apparently had only the wheels of the lead truck derailed at the crossing, but on encountering the closed facing-point switch, the engine followed the spur track, while the cars followed the main track. Engine 1118, together with its tender, came to rest on its right side, diagonally across the spur track, the front end of the engine being about 250 feet south of the switch. The first two cars were derailed to the right of the main track, but remained upright. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Day was going back through the train and was just passing from the second to the third coach when he felt a jar, as a result of the derailment at the spur-track switch, and then he heard the noise caused by the steam escaping from the overturned engine. He estimated the speed to have been between 30 and 35 miles per hour at the time of the accident. After rendering assistance he went back to the highway crossing, Train Porter Sheperd having gone back ahead of him. On arrival at that point, the conductor saw where the engine truck had mounted the east or high rail of the curve. Conductor Day said that a piece of terra cotta pipe had been placed on the east rail, the crushed pipe being on top of the rail and packed and in the flangeway of the crossing, and that directly opposite, on the west rail, there was a piece of timber, about 2" x 4", that had been cut in two, the train having run over it, part of the timber being on each side of the west rail. The derailed

engine-truck wheels had marked the ties from the crossing to the spur-track switch, which was closed and locked. Conductor Day thought that the air brakes applied in emergency as a result of the train line breaking when the engine overturned, and that Engineman Maddux was unaware that the engine truck had become derailed at the crossing. At Harriston the conductor personally delivered a train order, clearance car and register check to the engineman, who was oiling around the engine, and at that time the headlight was burning brightly. In his opinion, the accident was caused by someone having placed obstructions on the track at the crossing. Flagman Hattaway and Train Porter Sheperd gave testimony similar to that of Conductor Day.

Supervisor of Track Brevard arrived about one-half hour after the occurrence of the accident and found conditions to be practically as stated by Conductor Day. Supervisor Brevard said that there were splinters or pieces of wood in the flangeway of the west rail of the crossing, which had evidently been driven in the flangeway for the purpose of giving the timber that was laid across the rail a firm bearing, being of a different material than the timber that laid across the rail. The terra cotta pipe was about 13 or 15 inches in diameter and about 7/8 inch thick. There was no indication of derailment north of the crossing, nor anything with respect to track conditions that would have contributed to the accident. Supervisor Brevard stated that the track is patrolled every day and that all men who petrol the track are instructed to keep the flangeways at the crossing cleaned out, as gravel is rolled into them by passing vehicles. Supervisor Brevard also said that about three weeks prior to the accident, it was reported that switch lamps had been tampered with at two different locations, Yokena and Lorman, located 36.2 and 7.1 miles, respectively, north of Harriston; although he immediately conducted an investigation, it was not ascertained who did the tampering. Supervisor Brevard was of the opinion that the terra cotta pipe and timber were taken from around the old mill site at the spur track involved, as quantities of the same material were lying around in that locality, and that it had not dropped on the crossing from some passing vehicle, saying that it had been deliberately placed on the crossing and that the accident was caused by these obstructions. Section Foremen Aldridge and Farr gave testimony similar to that of Supervisor Brevard.

The last train to pass over the crossing was northbound first-class train No. 13, which passed that point about 9.32 p.m. the night of the accident.

Conclusions

The accident was caused by obstructions on both rails of a curve at a highway grade crossing, apparently having been placed there by someone with malicious intent.

The evidence indicated that the terra cotta pipe and timber had been placed on the track at the highway crossing, as it would not have been possible for them to have been lying in the position they were, across each rail and with splinters or pieces of wood of different material driven in the flangeway, had they fallen from some vehicle as it passed over the crossing. It also appeared that switch lamps had recently been tampered with in this territory. Apparently, the terra cotta pipe and timber were placed on the track by someone with malicious intent, who obtained them from an old mill site several hundred feet distant from the crossing.

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.