Inv-272

July 9, 1915.

In re Investigation of Accident on the Seaboard Air Line Railway near Alton, Ala., on June 9, 1915.

On June 9, 1915, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Seaboard Air Line Railway near Alton, Ala., resulting in the death of 3 employees and the injury of 9 passengers. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Division of Safety reports as follows:

Westbound passenger train No. 5, consisting of locomotive 94, 1 coach, 1 dining car, 2 sleeping cars, and 1 observation car, was en route from New York, N. Y., to Birmingham, Ala., and was in charge of Conductor Carter and Engineman Brooks. This train left Atlanta, Ga., at 6.01 p.m., 41 minutes late, passed Hellington, the last telegraph station east of the point of derailment, and 55.2 miles distant therefrom, at 8.52 p.m., 23 minutes late, and was derailed at 10.20 p.m. at a point about 2.9 miles west of Alton while running at a speed of about 40 miles per hour.

The entire train was derailed at a point 660 feet west of mile post No. 727. Locomotive 94 turned over on its left side, came to rest 260 feet beyond the point of derailment, and was considerably damaged. The tender broke loose and came to rest on the right hand side of the locomotive with the tank reversed. The principal damage on the cars was to the trucks and air brake equipment. The road foreman of engines, who was riding in the locomotive, the engineman, and fireman were killed. The weather at the time was clear.

This part of the Seaboard Air Line is a single-track line, operated by train orders and time-table rights. The track is laid with 75-pound steel rails, 33 feet in length, with about 18 ties under each rail, and ballasted with about 18 inches of slag, all of which is in good condition. At the point of derailment the track is laid on a 9-foot fill with a grade of 1% descending for eastbound trains. The track in this vicinity runs through a rugged and rough section of the country and is made up of a series of curves, cuts, and fills. Approaching the point of derailment from the east there is a 6-degree curve leading toward the left, 950 feeet in length, then a tangent 295 feet in length, then a 6-degree curve leading toward the right, 900 feet in length, then a tangent 900 feet in length, followed by a 3-degree curve leading toward the left. It was on this latter curve that the derailment occurred.

After derailment, an examination was made of the track and it was found that one of the rails on the left hand side of the track was out of place and lying about 14 inches in toward the center of the track, without any marks on it to indicate that it had been struck by train No. 5. At this same point several spikes, bolts, nuts, and a fishplate were found which had been removed from this rail, the marks on the heads of the spikes indicating that they had been recently pulled, while marks on the ties indicated that a clawbar had been used in removing the spikes. Furthermore, at this same point, the first three ties east of the initial point of derailment were cut and marked by the wheels of train No. 5 at the place where the rail

in question would have been lying had it been in its proper place in the track. In clearing away the wreckage, a clawbar and track wrench were found about 100 yards from the scene of the accident, these, no doubt, being the instruments used in removing the rail.

This accident was caused by one of the rails having been removed from its place in the track with malicious intent. The wheel marks on the ties, and the fact that the rail which was found near the center of the track was not damaged and showed no wheel marks, is convincing evidence that this rail was not in place when train No. 5 reached the point of derailment.

The next day after the accident, three men were arrested and charged with wrecking train No. 5 by removing a rail from the track. Two of these men have confessed, implicating the third man, and all three are now being held for trial on this charge.