

Local Railway Items from Ottawa Papers 1972

Saturday 12/02/1972 Ottawa Citizen Kingston (CN) Morrisburg

Triple blast turns railcars into missiles

Morrisburg. A vivid plume of flame rising from the mass of twisted railway cars and smouldering debris has so far thwarted attempts to clear the CNR's main line here.

A derailment of 36 cars occurred about 8.15 a.m. Friday, tearing up hundreds of feet of track and sending boxcars careening down embankments and into the bush.

Three major explosions in tanker cars carrying thousands of gallons of propane gas shook homes as far away as seven miles.

One resident likened the first explosion to an earth tremor.

One of the propane-laden cars weighing between 50 and 60 tons, flew about a quarter of a mile through the air after it exploded.

CNR officials speculated that burning gas escaping from the ruptured tank acted like a rocket.

Swathe in trees

The car lifted off the track and cut a neat swathe through the trees - some of which were about 12 inches in diameter at their base.

The trimmed trees indicate that it entered the bush at a height of about 12 feet before rising to about 30 feet above the ground.

The tanker crashed into a service line which joins the main tracks near the scene of the derailment, about a quarter of a mile away.

It then plunged through a wooded area for another 150 feet before coming to rest. Charred telephone poles located along its line of travel indicated the intense heat.

Pieces of splintered limbs from the trees it had struck littered the lines. Some had penetrated more than a foot into frozen ground beside the railway lines.

Tankers explode

A total of three tankers exploded within seconds of the derailment which occurred on a straight stretch of line about two miles east of here.

It was from one of these tankers - lying helter skelter among the other wrecked railway cars that a brilliant orange plume spurted all day Friday.

Fears that the remaining gas in the car might explode, coupled with the knowledge that a fourth propane-laden tanker was also damaged in the derailment, kept recovery crews at a distance.

One CNR spokesperson said crews would wait until the flame went out before attempting to clear the line. The derailment blocked both east and west lines. Trains have been rerouted through Ottawa.

The spokesman said he expected the lines here to be blocked until Monday. Heavy cranes from both Montreal and Toronto were to arrive at the scene Friday afternoon to clear the twisted cars from both sides.

Area sealed off

Within minutes of the derailment police attempted to seal off the area.

Both police and the Morrisburg fire department learned of the explosions by their close proximity to the scene. The provincial police detachment was shaken by the blasts.

Firemen succeeded in reaching the remote scene, but could do little to contain the fire. The fierce heat drove them back as the propane shot flames 100 feet into the cold air.

An inspection of the scene about six hours later, when newsmen were allowed near the potentially dangerous area, revealed scorched fence posts and melted snow as far as 150 feet from the main line.

A total of about 20 cars caught fire and by early evening were still smouldering beside the hissing propane.

A decision had not been made concerning the remaining propane tanker car which had not ignited.

The eastbound freight train had been hauling 77 cars - 59 of which were loaded with general cargo.

While one ruptured tanker spewed grain onto the scorched tracks, another loaded with fruit and vegetables littered the area with hundreds of burned oranges.

Twisted metal, splintered framed and some of the car's wheels were scattered for about 100 feet along the lines.

Curious area residents travelled by snowmobile and on foot to view the scene. Police - fearful that another explosion might occur - cleared the area.

Neither the crew in the locomotive nor in the caboose was injured in the incident. The first car to derail was loaded with steel and was located ten cars behind the engine.

Chlorine gas

The rear portion of the train - including a tanker loaded with toxic chlorine gas - was eventually hauled from the rest of the wreckage by a locomotive sent in from nearby Brockville, one of CN's headquarters.

A police spokesman said an evacuation plan had been drawn up for the people of Morrisburg had the chlorine-laden tanker ruptured.

The only people close to the explosions and derailment were members of a bush party clearing surrounding bush area of dead elm trees.

They reportedly ducked flying chunks of steel as the first propane tanker exploded.

CN officials are continuing their investigation into the derailment as work crews clear the line.

Officials say damage is impossible to estimate, but will run into hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Saturday 19/02/1972 Ottawa Citizen Kingston (CN) Morrisburg

Regular freight and passenger service was restored Friday over a section of CNR track damaged a week ago by the derailment of 36 cars of a freight train. Both east- and west-bound trains have been using the west-bound lane of the double track since Monday. Clearing and repairing the east-bound track had been delayed by a burning propane tank car which exploded after the derailment.

The derailment occurred near this village 20 miles southwest of Cornwall. Some debris remains at the scene, but the final clean-up is expected to be finished Monday.

Monday 28/02/1972 Ottawa Citizen Renfrew Carp
The driver of an oil truck was killed today when his vehicle smashed into the side of a moving train and burst into flames on highway 17 just east of Carp.

Three of five cars in the CNR freight train were derailed.
The driver was enveloped in flames and perished in the truck which burned for more than an hour.
The accident occurred at 10.15 a.m. Police and fireman found the remains of the driver's body after searching for an hour and a half.
Nothing remained of the truck except a small portion of yellow cab. Police said the vehicle belonged to the Shell Oil Company.
A charred licence plate was found in the wreckage. Police believe it is from the truck.
A witness told police it appeared the truck driver was going to attempt to cross the tracks before the train reached the crossing but changed his mind, slammed on the brakes, and skidded 200 feet in the side of the train.
The impact sent three cars sprawling into the snow in flames. The caboose remained on the tracks.
Police said an unidentified railwayman who was inside the caboose when it was hit walked away uninjured. No one on the train was hurt.
Power lines were knocked down and a set of signal lights were torn out of the ground.
Acrid grey smoke blanketed the accident scene as firemen tried to put out the flames in the train.
The truck was swept about 20 feet off the road and into a small creek. Parts of the creek were afire from oil dumped into the water.
Balance illegible.
There is a picture with the caption
Train burns in background while fire-gutted wreckage of oil tanker lies beside tracks at right.

Thursday 27/04/1972 Ottawa Citizen Renfrew Carp
Jury urges loghts at crossings.

A coroner's jury has recommended that signal lights be located at all level crossings on main highways to warn motorists in advance of approaching trains.
The jury was sitting Wednesday at an inquest into the death of Joseph Brideau, whose fully loaded gasoline tanker collided with a CNR freight train on Feb. 28.
Evidence had shown that the visibility is poor at the crossing on Highway 17 near Carp, and there are several distractions for drivers proceeding west on the highway.
These, along with the position of the crossing at the bottom of a hill, were listed as contributing factors to the accident which derailed three of the railway cars and closed the highway for more than 24 hours.
The engineer of the train, Irwin Currie, said the Shell Oil truck, loaded with 8,000 gallons of gasoline, hit the train after veering off the road and knocking over a signal post.
"All hell broke loose" he said. The truck exploded immediately, setting fire to the last three cars.
The jury also recommended that a remote warning light be placed 500 feet north of the Carp railway crossing.

Wednesday 30/08/1972 Ottawa Citizen Lachute Calumet
Lachute. A young garden product salesman still maintains he saw no warning lights before his truck crashed into the side of a Montreal-bound passenger train at Calumet on Aug. 11
Testifying at a Canadian Transport Commission inquiry here Tuesday, Michael Emery, 23, of Gatineau repeated the story he told immediately after the accident which claimed three lives and injured 26.
Mr. Emery didn't go as far as to say the flashing signals weren't working. He claimed he "didn't see them working." He stated positively the bells which normally ring as the lights flash weren't working before the collision occurred.
However, several witnesses called during the inquiry - which ended late yesterday afternoon - contradicted Mr. Emery's evidence.
Ken Hotchkiss, a Canadian International Paper Company purchasing agent, who travels Highway 8 over the level crossing every morning about the same time, said both lights and bells were working normally when he crossed as the CP Rail dayliner approached.
He said he glanced in his rear view mirror as he crossed and saw no sign of the Emery truck. Commission Counsel J.M. Fortier deduced the accident happened seconds after Mr. Hotchkiss left the scene.
Serge Roy, 16, a student living near the level crossing, said he was in his yard shortly after 9 a.m. and heard the bells on the signal posts ringing.
He added, because of his position, he couldn't see if the lights were flashing. He said he saw the Emery truck coming along highway 8, lost it from view behind some bushes, then saw it collide with the dayliner.
A passenger on the train, Laura Ratchky of Windsor, said she was looking out of the window near the Calumet crossing and saw the warning lights flashing.
Gilbert Blakeney, a CTC signalling engineer, said signals were functioning normally when tested shortly after the accident.
The inquiry, chaired by Louis Talbot, was also greatly concerned at the speed the dayliner was travelling as it came through the crossing.
E.J. Hase, director of operations for the CTC, said a statutory speed limit of 24 m.p.h. at all level crossings where an accident has occurred. He said the limit can only be lifted by the commission.
Although accidents had occurred at the Calumet crossing in the past, there was no speed limit at the time of the crash because previous statutory limits had been lifted. He added the 25 m.p.h. limit had been re-imposed since the Aug. 11 accident.
Veteran CPR engineer George Frankland of Ottawa said he put the throttle of his engine in the maximum position as he pulled out of Calumet station where he'd stopped to pick up two passengers.
Mr. Frankland emphasized when the throttle was placed in maximum the train didn't immediately reach top speed.
"The engine accelerates on its own and takes about a mile to reach its top speed of 90 m.p.h." he said. "We were doing about 45 m.p.h. When we went through the crossing, which is about half a mile from the station."

An unexpected discovery
A commotion stirred the Lachute Masonic Hall, where the inquiry was held, when, under cross-examination by the lawyer representing Mr. Emery, Mr Frankland revealed the train's speedometer wasn't working the day in question.
He said he wasn't aware of the problem until after he left the Ottawa Station, and insisted he was experienced enough to judge how fast he was going without the instrument.
(Mr. Hase testified that during tests made by the commission after the accident an engine identical to the one Mr. Frankland was operating was accelerated out of Calumet under the same circumstances and reached a speed of 44 m.p.h. at the crossing).
Mr. Frankland said the dayliner's speed is only restricted on curves - 60 m.p.h. - apart from crossings carrying statutory limits.
He said the train's headlamp was on as it approached the crossing and he gave the warning whistle and activated the bell as usual. He said it was a "fine, clear day."
The dayliner was on the crossing when Mr. Frankland first noticed the Emery truck.
He said his first impulse was to pull the emergency brake. Then he decided the best thing to do was get through the crossing and hopefully avoid the truck.

Mr. Emery said he didn't know the train was approaching until he saw it emerge from behind a line of trees when he was about 125 feet away. He said his radio was off and he couldn't remember whether his windows were raised or not.
He said he applied the brakes and swerved but was too close to avoid impact. He said he approached the crossing at a normal rate of speed.
Killed in the accident on the Ottawa-Montreal line were Bernice Doherty, 49, of Great Falls, Mont., Jeanne Marie Brunelle, of Ste. Therese, Que., both passengers in a CP Rail diesel car and Reginald St-Gelais, 24, of Gatineau, a passenger in the truck. None of the injured was seriously hurt.

September 27 C.P.R. Line Being Lifted Between Douglas And Eganville

In one month's time the C.P.R. line between Eganville and Douglas will no longer exist and all that will be left will be a graded railway bed and memories in older minds of when the line was a busy one.

A Burlington firm, Penvidic Contracting Co., which builds and tears up railways, has been engaged in the ripping up of the Eganville-Douglas line for the past month.

The line is being lifted from the yard in Eganville for 9.7 miles to the switch in Douglas in the area of where the old station was located.

The line between Eganville and Douglas was closed about three years ago because it wasn't paying for itself. The company recorded thousands of dollars in losses.