

FIRE FOLLOWS OIL TRAIN WRECK

Neighbors Evacuate Nearly a Mile of Hose Used

(Columbus Evening Dispatch, September 15, 1941)

Flames quickly threaten the village of San Margherita and residents were forced to evacuate their homes. Here a resident of the community carries a chair to one side of the road while on the other is a huge pile of household effects which had been moved from his home. The dense smoke from the fire is as black as night.

Arlington, Grandview and Columbus firemen worked together in fighting the oil fire after a train wreck Monday morning at San Margherita, a small community on Trabue Pike west of the Scioto River. Nearly a mile of fire hose was laid by firemen who had to carry it across the long Trabue Pike Bridge from a hydrant at the Scioto Country club.

From afar the heavy smoke could be seen, this picture being taken from the A.I.U. building. It shows the smoke which caused hundreds of curious from Arlington, Grandview and north Columbus to call newspapers and the fire department to inquire about its source.

Tank Cars Swept by Flames after Trabue Pike Derailment

Fight to Curb Blaze Futile Dropped Drawbar Is Blamed for Wreck Damage Is Extensive

Searing flames fed by gas vapor generated by raw crude oil escaping from 11 derailed crude oil tank cars of an east-bound Pennsylvania R.R. freight train still burned fiercely Monday noon, three hours after a dropped drawbar stalled a 21-car cut at the Trabue Pike crossing of the railroad.

Shortly before noon firemen gave up the futile fight to curb the flames which earlier menaced dwellings and businesses nearby and spread a pall of oily smoke over the northwest section of Columbus. No one was injured.

Officials of the railroad said the accident occurred about 9 a.m. Monday when a dropped drawbar derailed the 34th car in a string of 61 oil cars carrying crude oil to Philadelphia.

Two F.B.I. agents from the Columbus office went to the scene of the wreck on a routine investigation.

Damage to the contents of the cars and to the cars themselves was estimated at thousands of dollars by railroad officials. Trainmen said capacity of the cars ranged from 8000 to 10,000 gallons.

Twenty-one cars were in the stalled cut and the seven rear cars immediately were cut loose and pulled north on the tracks away from the fire by a work engine which was working a mile and a half away.

Later trainmen succeeded in removing two cars from the tail-end of the train and eight others to the front end of the cut, leaving 11 cars burning. Of the 11, three on the front were derailed and toppled over on their sides.

The next five cars piled up in a huge peak and rolled across the track. The two rear cars were derailed but did not turn over. The eleventh car toppled over on the east side of the tracks.

J. L. Helpman, 2673 McGuffey road, 48-year-old flagman riding in the cupalo (sic) of the caboose at the time, said sparks caused by the derailing probably started the fire. The Trabue pike crossing is immediately west of the Gloria club on the River road.

Mr. Helpman said the train was traveling south when the 33rd car dropped its draw bar and the air brakes automatically were applied.

Rushing to the derailed car which already had begun to blaze fiercely, Helpman made his way to within one car of the last derailed tanker and uncoupled the last seven cars and the caboose which were dragged away from the blaze by the work train.

His prompt action was credited with possibly saving the village of San Margherita, an unincorporated Italian settlement near the crossing. Spectators said that if the trailing cars had not been removed they too might have caught fire and spread the fire to nearby dwellings. The engine and the leading cars stopped near the new Dublin road overhead.

Five fire department companies answered the alarm from Columbus and one each from Grandview and Upper Arlington, but firemen were hampered by their inability to secure a strong flow of water.

More than 7000 feet of hose was laid to the scene from Upper Arlington, three pumpers being stationed along the hose line to keep up the pressure.

Despite this, however, pressure was low and often the flow of water stopped entirely. Water which firemen did direct at the blaze had little effect.

A terrific hissing noise caused by the oil escaping from the car hatches under pressure could be heard within a radius of a half mile of the scene. Fire Chief Ed Welch was directing the work. Firemen were unable to get within more than 100 yards of the wreck because of the intense heat.

The accident occurred about 9 a.m. and the derailed cars still were burning at noon.

Trainmen were able to uncouple the first six cars of the cut and Chief Welch said he did not think they would catch fire unless an explosion occurred. Spectators were kept back from the scene by county and state police.

Traffic was detoured in McKinley Avenue, Trabue road, and Dublin road. Power was cut off along the railroad right-of-way to prevent a short circuit.

Engineer of the train was R. E. Stine, of Indianapolis. Milton Scott, Sixteenth and Hamilton avenues was the conductor. J. I. Miller of Columbus was brakeman.

Granville Ramey, age 57, 167 Casparus road, a track walker, said he was walking along beside the train when, "it broke two and the air brakes set."
