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ITALIAN RAILWAY DISASTER

MAR 1944

NEWS EXTRACT

Extract from "Stars & Stripes" dated 20 March 44.

Italian Catastrophe: Story Of South Italy Train Wreck

NAPLES, March 20—The South Italy railroad wreck of March 5, in which more than 500 Italian civilians lost their lives, was probably "the most unusual and most ghastly catastrophe in the history of world railroading," the Yankee Boomer, official publication of the Military Railway Service, says in its current issue.

Brig. Gen. Carl R. Gray, Jr., Director General of MRS, the paper said, characterized the accident as one of the "most regrettable" in his railroad experiences. Pending a complete report from an investigation committee he appointed, General Gray did not issue a statement on probable cause. The inquiry group is headed by Lt. Col. Fred W. Okie, Commanding Officer of the 727th Railway Operating Battalion.

The victims, all Italians as to crew and passengers, were said to have died peacefully without ever knowing what happened to them. The freight train they were riding stalled in the depths of a two-mile-long tunnel in a desolate and isolated mountain stretch while the locomotive poured lethal fumes into the damp darkness.

Searching parties who struggled through the tunnel to see what was delaying the train, found the victims lying about as if in sleep,

the rail publication said. There were no signs of panic, the passengers had simply grown drowsy, drifted into unconsciousness and died while they wondered what had halted their passage.

Officials pointed out that the large number of empty freight cars in the string probably accounted for the high death toll. Hordes of refugees and ex-Italian soldiers constantly seek passage to the south, it was said, and in this case kind-hearted Italian crews, not charged with the hauling of valuable military freight probably, "may have looked the other way" as the civilians climbed aboard at stations prior to the tunnel.

The direct cause of the locomotive's halt was not immediately apparent, the Yankee Boomer said, but it was noted that the train was on the upgrade and the fireman might have been on the "deck" to avoid the worst of the exhaust gases and hence had not kept up sufficient steam.

A recent other near-catastrophe in a second Italian tunnel was averted by the coolness and efficiency of an American MRS crew, the publication said. In this incident, the Italian crew was overcome by tunnel gases but Americans on the trip brought the locomotive out. It was cited.

NEWS EXTRACT

Extract from "Stars and Stripes" dated 7 Mar 44.

**Probe Of Rail
Wreck Ordered**

NAPLES, March 6—A full investigation of the southern Italy railway disaster in which 509 persons were asphyxiated aboard a freight train in a tunnel last Friday was ordered today by Brig. Gen. Carl R. Gray, Jr., Director-General of the Allied Military Railroad Service.

Preliminary reports showed that most of the crew and hundreds of unauthorized passengers on the Italian State Railways freight train were killed almost instantly by carbon monoxide gas from the engine. There was apparently no panic.

Operated by a regular civilian crew, the train, consisting of 12 cars of civilian freight and 33 empties, stalled on a slight grade in the tunnel shortly after midnight Friday morning. Riding on the train were several hundred trespassers who are believed to have climbed aboard in the darkness while the train was being switched at a station through which it had passed.

The investigation will be made by a board of Allied military railroad experts and Italian State Railways officials. General Gray characterized the accident as "one of the most regrettable as well as one of the most unusual in the history of railroading."

5593

Report on Railroad Accident

Date 3rd March 1944

Time 0050

Train Cargo

From Buttepaylia

To Potemna

Scene of accident

Obtained by Capt
Stuart from
Gen. di. Karamida
Nov 6/3/44

In the tunnel between
kilometres 1261623 & 1281409
between Belvan & Bella Nivio
Station (Just in Reg. - Western boundary of Potemna District)

Guards 12.8% missing
Casualties Train crew
Dead 3 survivors

Fireman

3 guards

Total

Passengers

Dead 50%

Brief description of accident

5503

The train was proceeding from
Buttepaylia in the direction of
Potemna, a pusher locomotive
being employed in addition to
the ordinary locomotive, due to
the gradient.
Due to the failure of one of the
locomotives the train came to
a standstill in the tunnel
between Nos 1261623 & 1281409
with the result that 501
unauthorised passengers who had
boarded the train between Buttepaylia
& Belvan, in addition to seven
of the train crew, were asphyxiated
D. Street 1944

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