

BEER, Spencer Trobridge "Tommy" 5 November 1942

Designation
Engine Driver

Accident Location
Swan View

Accident Due to
Loco F398 Runaway

Spencer "Tommy" Beer was 44 years of age when he died after being gassed in the Swan View Tunnel. His double headed train stalled in the tunnel and then ran away back down the grade to catch points at Swan View where it crashed. Three other engine crew were injured in the crash. Spencer, who went by the nick name "Tommy", lived in Mount Lawley with his wife, Maud Alice and their family. He is interred at Karrakatta Cemetery (ANGLICAN/LB/0684).

GOODS TRAIN SMASH

Engine Driver Killed

CAREERED BACKWARDS FROM TUNNEL

SPECTACULAR WRECK AT RUNAWAY SIDING

Perth, Nov. 5.

One of the most spectacular train smashes in the history of Western Australia' occurred shortly after midnight on Wednesday when a goods train, which was being hauled by two engines, got out of control on a steep gradient near Swan View, about 14 miles from Perth, careered backwards down the line and was wrecked. An engine driver died as a result of severe injuries while the other three members of the engine crews were admitted to a private hospital suffering from injuries.

The victims were:

Dead: Spencer Trobridge Beer (44), married, of First Avenue, Mt. Lawley.

Injured: David Robertson (48), of Amherst Street, West Midland, burns and minor injuries; Clement Frederick Dove (23), of Cope Street, Midland

Junction, burns and minor injuries; Percy Griffiths (24), of Wright Street, East Perth, concussion and burns. The condition of the three men at midnight was satisfactory.

The train passed through the Swan View station about 11.40 o'clock on Wednesday night, on its way from Perth to Kalgoorlie. Two engines, an L class and A.S. class, were pulling a heavy load of 53 trucks, carrying mainly personal effects, perishables and livestock. The train stopped in the long tunnel, about half a mile from the Swan View station, in the first line of hills in the Darling Range. Shortly afterwards the train began to run backwards and became out of control. It careered down the grade and passed through the Swan View station at a terrific speed. The train ran madly on and crashed about 250 yards farther on into a runaway siding, to which it was diverted automatically from the main railway by emergency points. The heavily laden train crashed with terrific force into the dead end of the safety line. Trucks were telescoped and splintered and goods and livestock were thrown some distance from the smash. Many livestock were killed. A railway official described the smash as the worst in the history of the State. He said that more material had been damaged than in any previous accident, although more loss of life occurred in a smash about 20 years ago, when a heavily laden timber train got out of control near Wokalup.

Guard Jumps Clear

The guard of the train, Percy Cornelius O'Sullivan, had a narrow escape from injury. When the train started to run backwards he tried unsuccessfully to apply the brakes. He jumped from the moving train and was unhurt. He later walked to the scene of the smash. First on the scene was Mr. Tomkins, a railway engine driver, who lives about 100 yards away. He found the crew of the two engines in a state of collapse, and Beer appeared to be badly injured. The police were notified and Constables Napier and Taylor attended from Midland Junction. Members of the Midland Junction St. John ambulance had a difficult job in extricating the injured men from the cabins of the engines,

Robertson (driver) and Dove (fireman) were in the leading engine, while Beer (driver) and Griffiths (fireman) were in the load (sic) engine. The injured men were taken to a private hospital in West Midland, but Beer was found to be dead on arrival. The coroner has been notified and a postmortem has been ordered.

Chaotic Scene

Railway and police officials visited the scene of the smash early yesterday morning. Wreckage was strewn along side both sides of the line, and trucks were piled high on top of a mound of twisted wood and iron. Amidst the chaotic scene were scattered dead, cows and pigs, kegs of beer, fruit and vegetables, cases of personal effects and broken bottles. A truckload of cattle in the middle of the rain was unharmed, and trucks of coal remained on the line. One engine remained on the line, while the other was on the line with the exception of the rear wheels of the tender. The railway telephone line was brought down, and a signal mast and its square concrete buttress formed part of the wreckage.

Traffic was disorganised and had to be diverted to the Mundaring line. The Inward bound Westland express came in by way of Mundaring and Darlington and was not seriously delayed. A breakdown gang was early on the scene, and yesterday afternoon had cleared the wreckage from the main line to Perth. The up (or outward) line is expected to be cleared by this afternoon. The Deputy Commissioner of Railways, Mr. J. F. Tomlinson, said today that the load of the train was well within the capacity of the two engines. The cause of the accident had not yet been determined, and for this purpose a board of inquiry had been appointed. It would consist of Messrs. S. J. Hood, chief civil engineer, who would be chairman; R. M. Evans, deputy chief traffic manager, and J. Flaherty, superintendent of locomotive running. Mr. Tomlinson said that the board would hold an inquiry into the incident and make a report to the commissioner at an early date.

Source: Trove/Kalgoorlie Miner (WA) Friday 6 November 1942 Page 4.

TRAIN SMASH KILLS DRIVER

A driver was killed and three members of the crew of a double engine train were injured when the train ran backwards and crashed into a dead end near Swan View early today. Where the smash occurred was, today, a scene of indescribable confusion. Experienced railway men described it as the most terrific crash they could .

Official inquiries into the cause of the accident are now proceeding but it is believed that the train, which comprised two engines and 50 trucks, stopped in the Swan View tunnel. It is suggested that members of the engine crews were overcome by fumes, and the train, out of control, began its backward, downward runaway of about half a mile, gathering speed all the time. Killed was 44-year-old engine driver Spencer Beer, of First Avenue, Mt. Lawley. Injured were: Twenty-four-year-old fireman Percy Griffiths, of Wright Street, East Perth. Forty-eight-year-old engine driver David Robertson, of Amhurst Road, West Midland. Twenty-three-year-old fireman Clement Frederick Dove, of the corner of Hooley and Cope Streets. Midland Junction.

Fireman Griffiths was seriously injured. He and Fireman Dove and Engine-driver Robertson are in Nurse Baker's Hospital, Midland Junction.

Guard P. C. O'Sullivan had a lucky escape from injury. He leapt from the train as it ran backwards down the grade, was unhurt.

Midland Junction police were notified of the smash, and they with a St. John ambulance from Midland Junction went to the scene. Driver Beer was so badly hurt that he was, dead when brought to a private hospital in Midland Junction. No official estimate of the extent of the damage or of the likely effect on train traffic is yet available. Driver Beer, victim of one of the most spectacular smashes in local railway history, leaves a widow.

Dead Cows

The heavily-laden train smashed with terrific force into the dead-end. Trucks and vans were forced into a jumbled mound of wreckage. One of them was suspended about 40ft above the permanent way it hung by its buffer chains to another truck but a breakdown crew erected a platform of sleepers beneath it because it threatened to topple to the permanent way. This truck formed the 'peak' of the heap of twisted and shattered freight cars towards the rear end of the train. Jammed in between the twisted frames of undercarriages and splintered woodwork was the carcass of a cow. Another dead cow and calf which must have been hurled anything up to 40 yards were lying in the permanent way.

A freak feature of the chaotic conditions was that a truck load of cattle in the middle of the train was unharmed, while the floor of the adjoining truck was littered with the carcasses of dead pigs. Another oddity was that for every bottle of beer smashed a great many remained intact. Kegs of beer were scattered round the embankment. Another curiosity was to find that trucks of coal did not show the slightest damage while nearby trucks and vans were smashed to matchwood and their under-carriages ripped completely away and bent and broken. Some of the trucks toppled over the embankment; others were turned at right angles to the line; others remained on the rails undamaged.

Terrific Speed

It is imagined that from the time the train entered on its breakneck plunge to disaster from somewhere in the Swan View tunnel, it gathered terrific speed while the crews of both locomotives made frantic efforts to check its mad rush. The smash occurred about 50 yards on the Perth side of the Swan View station and about half a mile from the entrance to the tunnel itself.

The two engines an L class and a P class were pulling a heavy load consisting largely of perishables and personal effects for goldfields and other inland towns. Swan View station is at the foot of the first line of hills of the Darling Ranges. The gradient is fairly steep and because of this and the tunnel it is a section of line on which engine crews have always to exercise great caution. The section comes within the automatic signal system of the main eastern railway, and where the crash occurred is a runaway deadend, constructed for emergency, use. The runaway train took this emergency line but finally crashed beyond it. It was the guard's van and trucks nearest to it that showed the main result of the terrific impact. Personal effects were cast into a hopeless jumble. Attache cases, fruit, vegetables and other perishables were in an indescribable mixup. The railway telephone line brought down and a signal mast and its 3ft. Square concrete buttress formed part of the wreckage.

Heard Crash

The guard's van was tossed some distance beyond the dead-end, and in the resulting wreckage some chickens in the yard of a neighboring house were killed by the hurtling debris. A man living within 50 yards of the scene heard the crash but until this morning did not know what had happened. 'We get so much jiggering and shunting about here that I heard it but went to sleep again,' he said.

An interesting feature was that the leading locomotive remained on the rails and showed no trace of damage. The tender of the rear one left the rails and was severely dented. Clearing of the permanent way and reclamation and sorting out of the freight will be one of the toughest jobs 'the breakdown gang has yet handled. All traffic was delayed but the department made such efficient use of the Mundaring diversion line that travellers were subjected to the least possible inconvenience.

Source: Trove/The Daily News (Perth) Thursday 5 November 1942 Page 1.

FAMILY NOTICES

BEER. A tribute of respect to the memory of "Tommy" (Spencer Trobridge). accidentally killed, railway accident. Swan View. November 5. Ever remembered

Source: Trove/The West Australian (Perth) Thursday 12 November 1942 Page 1.