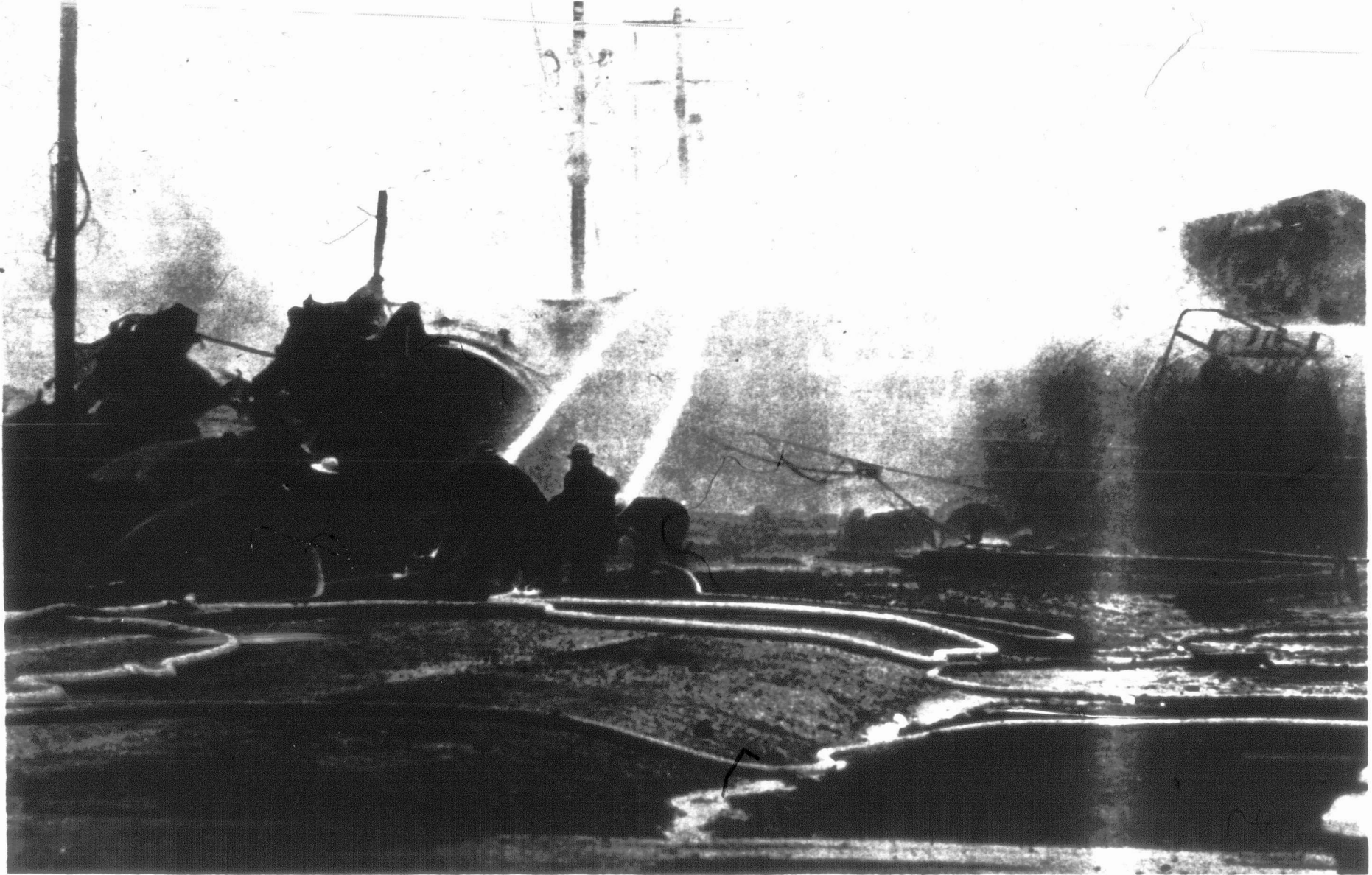


## the wreck



# Failure of 'hotbox' caused train derailment

By JOHN STEWART

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Canadian Pacific Railways is blaming the derailment of railroad cars which resulted in the explosion on Mavis Road on the failure of what is termed a "hotbox."

The technical reason given by CPR for the problem was an "overheated journal bearing," known informally as a hotbox, which resulted in the end of an axle breaking off and leading to derailment.

But a union official said from Montreal Monday that CP may have been too hasty in naming the cause of the accident.

"They always say it's a hotbox," said Keith Burnett, chairman of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers which represents CP engineers. "From what I've seen on television, I don't know how anybody could get close enough to the scene to inspect it, with that fire."

"It could be a lot of things. It could have been a broken wheel, or a broken axle, or a broken flange or a fault in the rail."

CP says the overheated bearing which caused the break was on either a Chesapeake and Ohio box car or a North American CAR Company tank car. They were 33rd and 34th in the 106-car train, which was being hauled

by three locomotives.

Thirty-nine of the cars contained dangerous materials, most of them propane. There was only one car containing chlorine, which caused the evacuation.

Ken Smith of CP says the company can say what caused the accident because it has examined pieces of the wheel assembly found near the scene. The "hotbox" which encountered the problem was of the conventional type. It was not the "roller bearing", in which oil is used to reduce friction. That type used on new cars.

The train originated in Windsor, and picked up cars in Chatham and Sarnia.

The cars containing dangerous materials were isolated from cars which carried people, from cars which carried motors which might be ignition sources, and from cars with flatbeds carrying heavy equipment which might do a lot of damage if toppled over.

Smith says that when the railway is picking up cars from a town such as Sarnia, which has many petroleum and chemical industries, it is impossible to keep cars with dangerous chemicals completely separated.

According to CP, the train underwent a mechanical

inspection by a qualified maintenance employee in Chatham, was inspected again in London and at five additional points by CP employees. The track where the accident occurred was rebalanced and ties were replaced last summer. On Oct. 11, CP's computerized track reconditioning car indicated that there was no problem with track alignment.

Locomotive Engineers' chairman Burnett says that there are adequate regulations in effect to minimize the dangers of this type of accident. If those procedures were followed "there should be no problem."

CP personnel are "pretty well trained" to recognize potential problems, the union head feels. He said CP and the Canadian Transport Commission "do everything they can to ensure safety, but there's no failsafe system."

Smith says that so far in North America this year, CP has the lowest accident rate of any railway. They have experienced 5.67 accidents per million locomotive miles. An accident is considered anything which causes more than \$750 in property damage. The rate for last year was 6.53. For 1977 it was 6.26 and for 1976 it was 7.75 accidents per million locomotive miles.

