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Autor: Dawes, Ron
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Lausanne - City of disaster

by Ron Dawes

Photographs by Alan Dawes

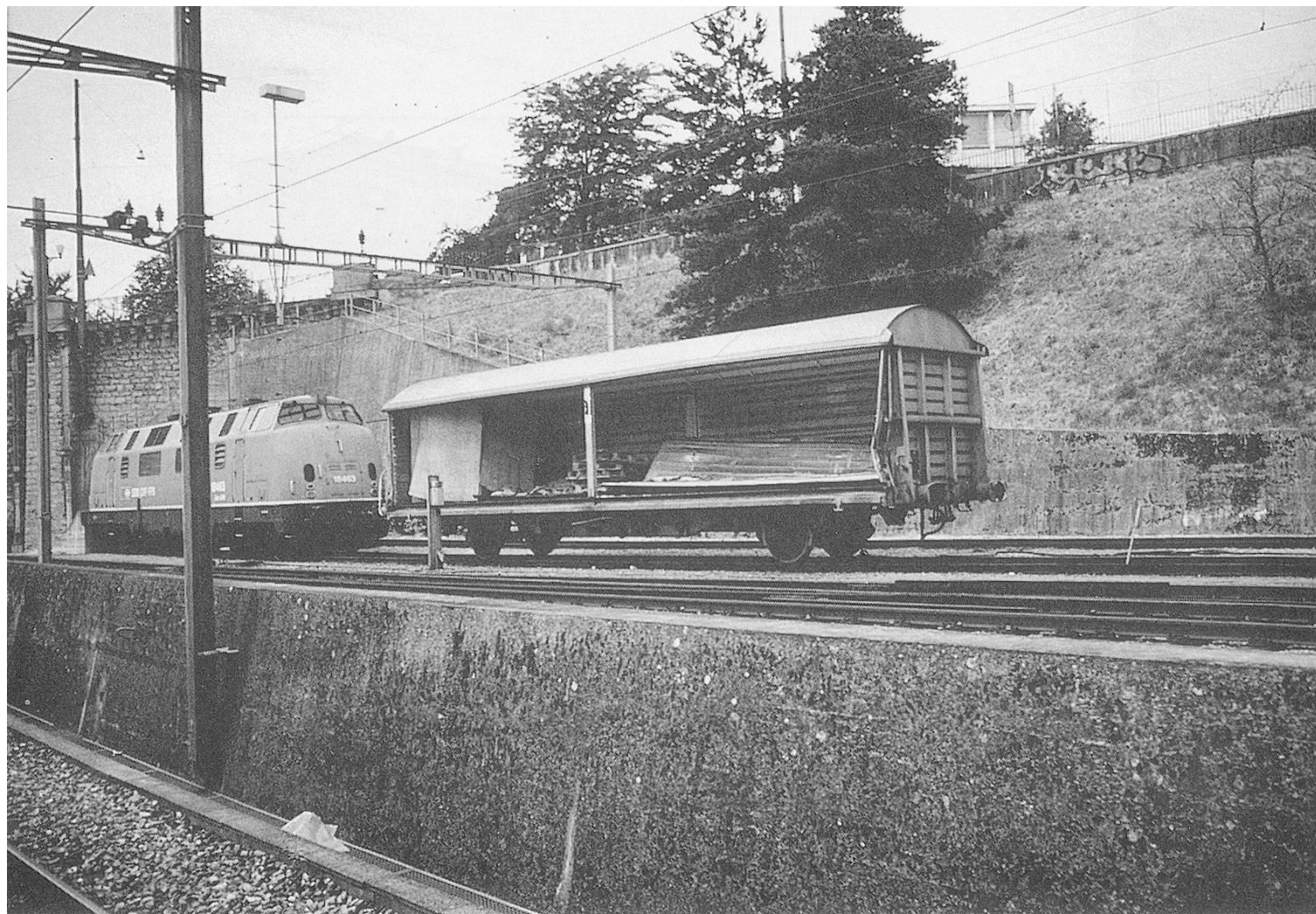
When my brother and I arrived at Genève Aeroport on Saturday 2 July, we were informed by our tour company representative that we could experience problems on our onward rail journey to Montreux as the line through Lausanne had just reopened after having been closed for three days. Naturally this aroused our curiosity and by later reading the local press, we realised we had arrived just after a major disaster.

We discovered that each evening at 23:45, a freight train leaves Schweizerhall Freight Depot in Basel to travel via Olten, Bern, Fribourg, Lausanne and Vevey to a freight depot at Denges. The cargo on the train on the evening of 28 June 1994 included two tankers containing 80,000 litres of toxic products and flammable liquids. Everything went smoothly until 02:33 on Wednesday 29 June, when the train arrived at Lausanne for reversal. As its normal route through the station was blocked

The scene outside Lausanne depot on 2 July, with track replacement under way.

by track works it was diverted through Platform 3 before stopping for reversal to take the Rhône Valley route. During the reversal procedure 14 wagons were derailed with five toppling completely over and the two wagons previously mentioned were ruptured. Emergency arrangements were immediately implemented and over the next 48 hours, because of the danger of explosions and toxic discharges, the area around the station was evacuated on two separate occasions. Bathing in Lac Lemman was also prohibited in the area in case any of the spilt toxins found their way into the local water system.

Train services were terminated at Pully in the east and at Renens at the west during the closure, with passengers being transferred to either buses or the Metro. The local authorities later went on record that they were within a fingertip of experiencing a disaster on the scale of the one which occurred at Bhopal, India.



When we travelled though on the Saturday, just after the lifting of the blockade, we noticed that the pointwork at the Genève end of platforms 1-3 had been completely destroyed and that the wagons were being rerailed, after having been emptied by the fire brigade, in preparation for their onward journey to the Ciba-Geigy plant at Monthey. We were further surprised to read the next morning that the wagons had derailed again at 17:00 on the Saturday evening at Lutry, blocking the Rhône valley route. The SBB then decided to take no further risks and transferred the wagons onto a low-loader and taken to Monthey by motorway with an escort of police and fire brigade.

In all it was Tuesday 5 July before Lausanne station was fully reopened and in particular Regional trains from Yverdon and the Paris TGV were finally allowed back into Lausanne station.

As a result of the accident, the Federal Government lifted the SBB's obligations to transfer dangerous cargoes. This obligation was reinstated a week later at the SBB's request and at the same time it was decided

Possibly the culprit, an unidentifiable 2-axle van, less sides in the siding west of Lausanne. The ex DB Am4/4 is doing some useful work.

that the train involved was to be rerouted through Biel, Neuchâtel and Yverdon to avoid the need to traverse Lausanne.

The citizens of Lausanne thought that their problems were over, but at 16:06 on Friday 8 July, the roof at the west end of the main station building caught fire. Happily there were no casualties but the station had to be evacuated again and staff in the buffet, who lived in apartments in the attic, lost their belongings through fire and water.

Train services were resumed from all but Platform 1 at 19:30 and everything was back to normal the next day when we travelled though. Sometime during the day, the ceiling in the waiting room, which had been sealed off, collapsed as a result of the weight of water thereon.

Damages will run into millions of francs and in the meantime, railway administrative staff who worked in the devastated area will be working for several months in 14 Portacabins,

which are being positioned on the platforms.

Further damage occurred on Thursday 14 July, when a massive rain and thunderstorm hit the Lausanne area, further flooding the damaged area. The cause of the fire was still uncertain when we returned home on 16 July.

It is to be hoped that the good citizens of Lausanne have suffered enough and will not be experiencing any more problems for some time to come.

Further notes on the derailment

We have since seen the report in *Modern Railways* concerning the derailment, which differs from Ron Dawes' account, and agrees with the information we had at the time where the train stopped for crew change before proceeding to Lausanne Triage (marshalling yard) for reversal. The train in question was proceeding east-west and was diverted over a sinuous route in order that a crew exchange could take place. The practice at the time was to use passenger rated braking force. Unfortunately, an unloaded 4-wheel Tranfesa wagon was sandwiched between two rakes of loaded bogie wagons. With the front end braking sharply and the rear end still on a 1 in 50 down grade, this wagon was pushed off the track at the reverse curve of the crossover and bumped along the permanent way into the station. As at this hour of the morning there was no-one around to observe this, the relief crew took over unaware that the wagon was off the rails.

When they got the right away, the Transfesa van was dragged along until it encountered more pointwork at the west throat and turned broadside on across the tracks, derailing the following 14 vehicles.

As Ron Dawes reported, the SBB were relieved of their obligation to convey dangerous cargoes. They immediately stiffened regulations concerning these vehicles and issued new instructions concerning the make-up of freight trains. It was further decided that, where older 4-wheeled stock was incorporated in the rake, the less severe goods braking regime would apply to the locomotive and leading five wagons so that the brake force was applied to the rear of the train.



Fred Ward remembers

Schwyz, 16 September 1963. Tram No 3 on one of the *wider* parts of the main street. This line was in superb condition and did not close from choice, but fell foul of a road widening scheme on the road to Brunnen, which took away its road side track. The compensation was insufficient to permit them to relocate the line, a great pity since it was a nice little line, with everything maintained to a very high standard.

Renumbering of the RhB Tm2/2

New No.	Previous No.	Date New	New No.	Previous No.	Date New
15	64	1957	21	57	1965
16	65	1957	22	58	1965
17	66	1957	23	59	1965
18	67	1957	24	60	1965
19	62	1962	25	61	1965
20	63	1962	26	56	1969