

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN
ACCIDENT ON THE CHICAGO, BURLINGTON & QUINCY RAILROAD
NEAR POTTSTOWN, ILL., ON AUGUST 3, 1932.

September 17, 1932.

To the Commission:

On August 3, 1932, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train and a passenger train on the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad near Pottstown, Ill., which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 1 passenger, 1 mail clerk and 4 employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with the Illinois Commerce Commission.

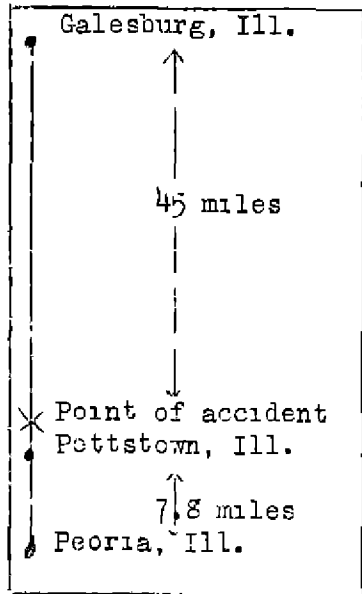
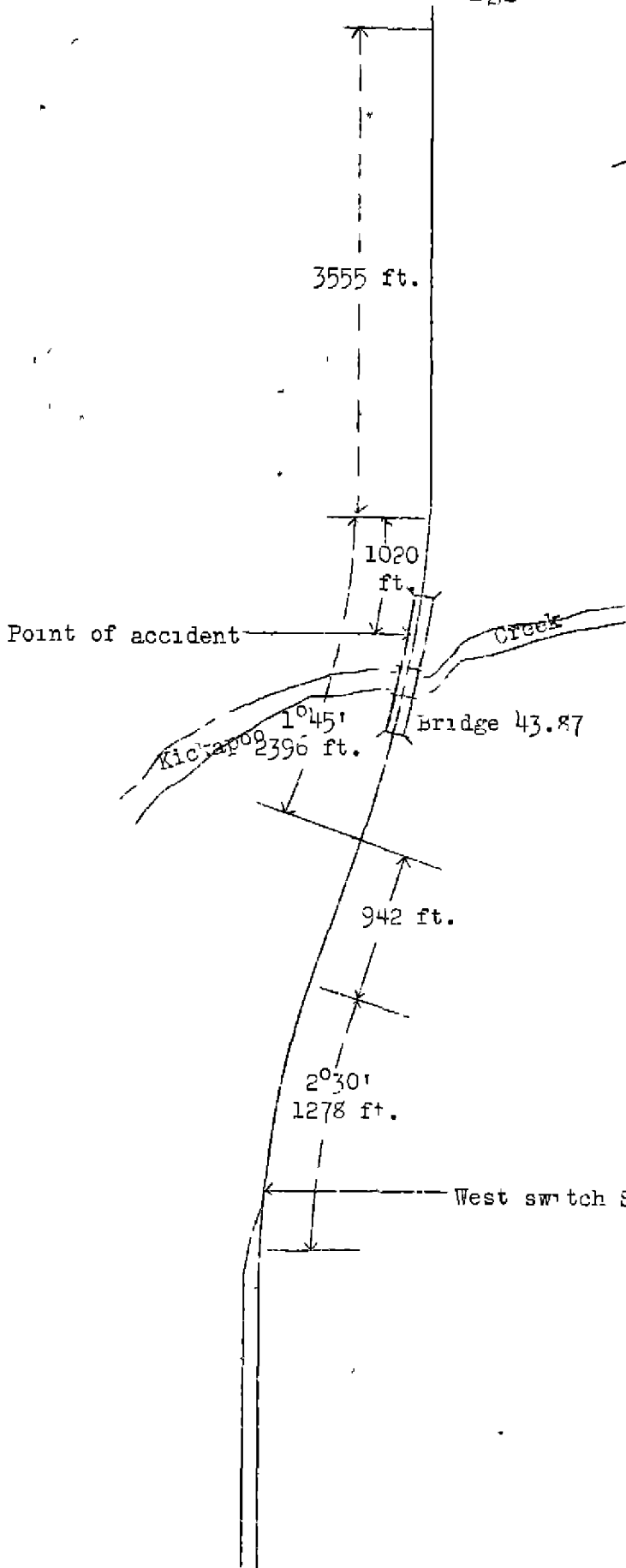
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Galesburg and Peoria Subdivision of the Galesburg Division extending between Galesburg and Peoria, Ill., a distance of 53.8 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders and a manual block system. The accident occurred on the west approach to bridge 43.87, located approximately 3,590 feet west of the switch leading to a spur track at Pottstown. Approaching this point from the west the track is tangent for a distance of 5,555 feet, followed by a 1° 45' curve to the right 2,396 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 1,020 feet from its western end. At the point of accident the grade is level; the track is laid on the concrete slab abutment of bridge 43.87, the surface of which is 13 feet above the ground line. On account of the curve and trees on the south side of the track, a caboose standing at the point of accident can first be seen from the cab of an eastbound motor car at a distance of 991 feet. The maximum speed permitted by time-table for passenger motor cars is 40 miles per hour.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 6.31 a.m.

Description

Eastbound freight train extra 5329 consisted of 91 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 5329, and was in charge of Conductor Camper and Engineer Burkhalter. This train departed from Chambers Street, Galesburg, at 3.42 a.m.; at Yates City, 21.4 miles from Pottstown and the last open office, the crew received a copy of train order No. 108, Form 19, directing them to run ahead of No. 56 Yates City to Peoria. Extra 5329 departed from Yates City at 5.07 a.m., according to the train sheet, stopped to pick up a



Inv. No. 1777
 Chicago, Burlington & Quincy RR
 Pottstown, Ill.
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car on the team track at Pottstown, after picking up this car the train was pulled ahead a distance of approximately 1,020 feet where it was again stopped to set out a car with a hot box, and while standing at this point the rear end of the train was struck by train No. 56.

Eastbound passenger train No. 56 consisted of motor car 9666, 1 express car and 1 combination baggage and mail car, and was in charge of Conductor Gripp and Engineman Cebert. The motor car was of all-steel construction and the other two cars were of wooden construction. This train departed from Galesburg at 5.17 a.m., two minutes late, according to the train sheet, and at Yates City the crew received a copy of train order No. 108, previously mentioned, together with clearance card Form A and a permissive card Form C, the latter reading:

C&E train No. 56 proceed expecting to find train extra 5329 east in the block between Yates City and Peoria.

with the notation at the bottom reading:

Enginemen receiving this card will proceed as indicated, at restricted speed where the view is obscure.

Train No. 56 departed from Yates City at 5.55 a.m., on time, and collided with the rear end of extra 5329 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 20 and 35 miles per hour.

The caboose of extra 5329 was derailed and the superstructure was practically demolished. Motor 9666 stopped on its side with its front end on the ground 13 feet below the level of the bridge; the rear end was supported by the floor of the bridge approach and was still coupled to and held up the front end of the express car about 6 feet above the rail which leaned to the right at an angle of about 45°; the rear trucks remained on the rails. The last car in train No. 56 was not derailed or damaged. The employee killed was the flagman of extra 5329 and those injured were the engineman, conductor, express messenger and roadmaster of train No. 56.

Summary of evidence

When extra 5329 stopped at Pottstown, Engineman Burkhalter whistled out a flag and after a car was picked up he recalled the flagman. The train was then moved ahead a distance of about 15 car lengths when he received a stop signal from the head brakeman and he stopped the train with the straight air brake. The brakeman had told him that there was a hot box in the train and that he would go back and put water on it and ride the car to Peoria. However, Head Brakeman Riutzel found the journal

on the twenty-sixth car in flames and the brass broken, and gave the engineman a stop signal in order to set the car out; he then looked back and saw the conductor about 15 or 18 cars to the rear, giving a signal which he interpreted to be a cut-off signal. Engineman Burkhalter stated that the train had just stopped when the collision occurred. He did not whistle out a flag when the train stopped a second time as there was not sufficient time to do so and get an understanding of what was going on. When he recalled the flagman after making the first stop he did not receive a signal from the rear end and did not know whether or not the flagman came in, out as train No. 56 was due at Pottstown he said he did not expect the flagman to return to the caboose.

Conductor Camper, of extra 5329, stated that the flagman knew they had received a message to pick up a car at Pottstown and just before stopping at Pottstown the flagman told him that they had a hot box ahead. Conductor Camper said he instructed the flagman to go back and stop train No. 56, as that train was then due out of Edwards, 6 miles west of Pottstown, and if he did not return to the caboose before they left, to ride on train No. 56. The flagman left the caboose with a red flag, torpedoes and fuses, just as the train came to a stop. Conductor Camper then started forward over the top of the cars, but before he reached the head end of the train the car had been picked up, the engineman had called in the flag, and pulled ahead about 20 or 30 car lengths when another stop was made. The conductor was then about 10 or 12 cars behind the twenty-sixth car in the train, from which car the brakeman had given the signal to stop the train in order to set out the car with the hot box. Conductor Camper said he gave the brakeman a signal for the engineman to whistle out a flag, but apparently the engineman failed to get the signal as he did not whistle out a flag the second time. Just after the brakeman cut off the car with the hot box he heard two blasts of the whistle of train No. 56 answering either the flagman's signals or the torpedoes and in about 30 seconds he heard the crash and saw an explosion. After the accident torpedoes were found about 36 rail-lengths west of the point of accident. The body of the flagman was found under the caboose; apparently he had returned to the caboose when recalled after the first stop was made. Conductor Camper stated that the flagman had been working with him since December last, that he had been promoted to conductor, and had always properly protected the rear of their train on previous occasions.

Engineman Cebert of train No. 56 stated that at Yates City he received the order stating that extra 5349 would run ahead of train No. 56, together with a clearance card and a permissive card, Form C, the provisions of which he thoroughly understood. A stop for passengers was made at Edwards, 6 miles west of Pottstown, and the train was about two or three minutes late in leaving that point, their scheduled time being 6.21 a.m. Engineman Cebert stated that at Edwards he noticed a car with a hot box which had been set out by extra 5329; he worked gas until he got started out of town, then shut off and drifted around the curves

at a speed not in excess of 20 miles per hour. When he struck the torpedoes approaching Pottstown he made a service application of the brakes and sounded two short blasts on the whistle. He then saw the caboose ahead on the bridge and placed the brake valve in emergency position, but the brakes did not seem to take hold which he thought was due to the fact that a service reduction had just been made and also to the fact that the rail was wet with dew. He saw the brakeman in the doorway of the caboose, then step down on the right side and walk along the side of the caboose on the bridge. Engineman Cebert knew that extra 5329 had work to perform at Pottstown and he was expecting to find a flagman or fusee. Engineman Cebert further stated that the air brakes were tested before leaving Galesburg, a running test was made and the brakes were found to be working properly en route.

Conductor Gripp of train No. 56, stated that after leaving Yates City the speed of their train was reduced at several points en route and stops were made at Qin and Edwards. He was not concerned or alarmed at the speed of his train; the engineman could see where he was going and he thought he would control the train properly. He did not consider it necessary at any time to apply the brakes or to signal the engineman to reduce speed. The brakes were not applied until the train struck the torpedoes, at which time Conductor Gripp estimated the speed to have been 30 or 35 miles per hour. He did not feel an emergency application of the brakes and thought the speed had been reduced to about 25 miles per hour at the time of the accident.

Brakeman Warning, of train No. 56 stated that after leaving Yates City the engineman reduced speed on some of the curves and increased it on straight track. He estimated the speed to have been about 35 miles per hour when he heard the two torpedoes explode which he thought were about 6 or 8 feet apart. A service application of the air brakes was made, followed by a release, and Brakeman Warning did not think the speed had been materially reduced at the time of the accident.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Flagman Buck of extra 5329 to provide proper flag protection and by the failure of Motorman Cebert, of train No. 56, to operate his train under proper control in accordance with the rules governing operation under a permissive card Form C.

After the accident two torpedoes were found 9 feet apart approximately 1,096 feet west of the point of accident; as the caboose first stopped about 1,020 feet west of the point of accident, it is obvious that the flagman did not go back a sufficient distance to protect the rear of his train, having placed the two torpedoes only 76 feet from the caboose, notwithstanding that he had been specifically instructed by the conductor to flag train No. 56, and knew that train No. 56 was then due out of Edwards, only 6 miles distant, and that there

was a hot box in their train which would probably cause additional delay, it appears that he took no action whatever to protect his train when the second stop was made as he was seen by the engineman of the following train in the doorway of the caboose. As he was killed as a result of the accident no explanation can be offered for his failure properly to protect his train.

The evidence indicates that Engineman Cebert of train No. 56 was expecting to find the freight train protected by flag. However, he held a permissive card which required him to proceed at restricted speed where view is obscure, he was fully aware of the fact that extra 5329 had work to perform at Pottstown, and had seen the car with a hot box on the side track at Edwards which had been set out by the extra train, which would necessarily have resulted in further delay to that train, yet he approached Pottstown at a relatively high rate of speed where the view was considerably restricted.

The brakes had been tested at Galesburg, the initial terminal, and functioned properly en route, all stops being made satisfactorily, the last stop being at Edwards, 4.87 miles west of the point of accident. A service application was made at the time the torpedoes were struck, and the engineman stated that he then placed the brake valve in the emergency position but that the rail was wet and the brakes did not seem to take hold. Neither the conductor nor the brakeman felt an emergency application, the brakeman stating that the brakes were released after the service application was made, and the rails were found to be dry after the accident. Under the rules, Engineman Cebert should have been operating his train at a speed which would have enabled him to "stop short of train, obstruction, or anything that may require the speed of a train to be reduced".

Both Flagman Buck and Engineman Cebert were experienced men. Flagman Buck had been promoted to conductor in 1927 and Engineman Cebert to road foreman in 1922.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. Borland,
Director.