

1900

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING
AN ACCIDENT ON THE CHICAGO, MILWAUKEE, ST. PAUL &
PACIFIC RAILROAD NEAR SPECHTS FERRY, IA., ON MARCH
6, 1934.

May 11, 1934.

To the Commission:

On March 6, 1934, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific Railroad near Spechts Ferry, Ia., which resulted in the death of 2 employees, and the injury of 2 employees and 2 mail clerks. The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with a representative of the Board of Railroad Commissioners of Iowa.

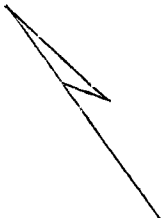
Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Second District of the Dubuque & Illinois Division which extends between Ia Crescent, Minn., and Dubuque Shops, Ia., a distance of 115.7 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-signal system. The accident occurred at a point about 2 miles west of Spechts Ferry; approaching this point from either direction there was a series of short curves and tangents, the accident occurring near the center of a 1°30' curve to the right for west-bound trains which is 313 feet in length. The grade is level at the point of accident. The view was considerably restricted by a steep bluff covered with shrubbery on the engineman's side of an east-bound train.

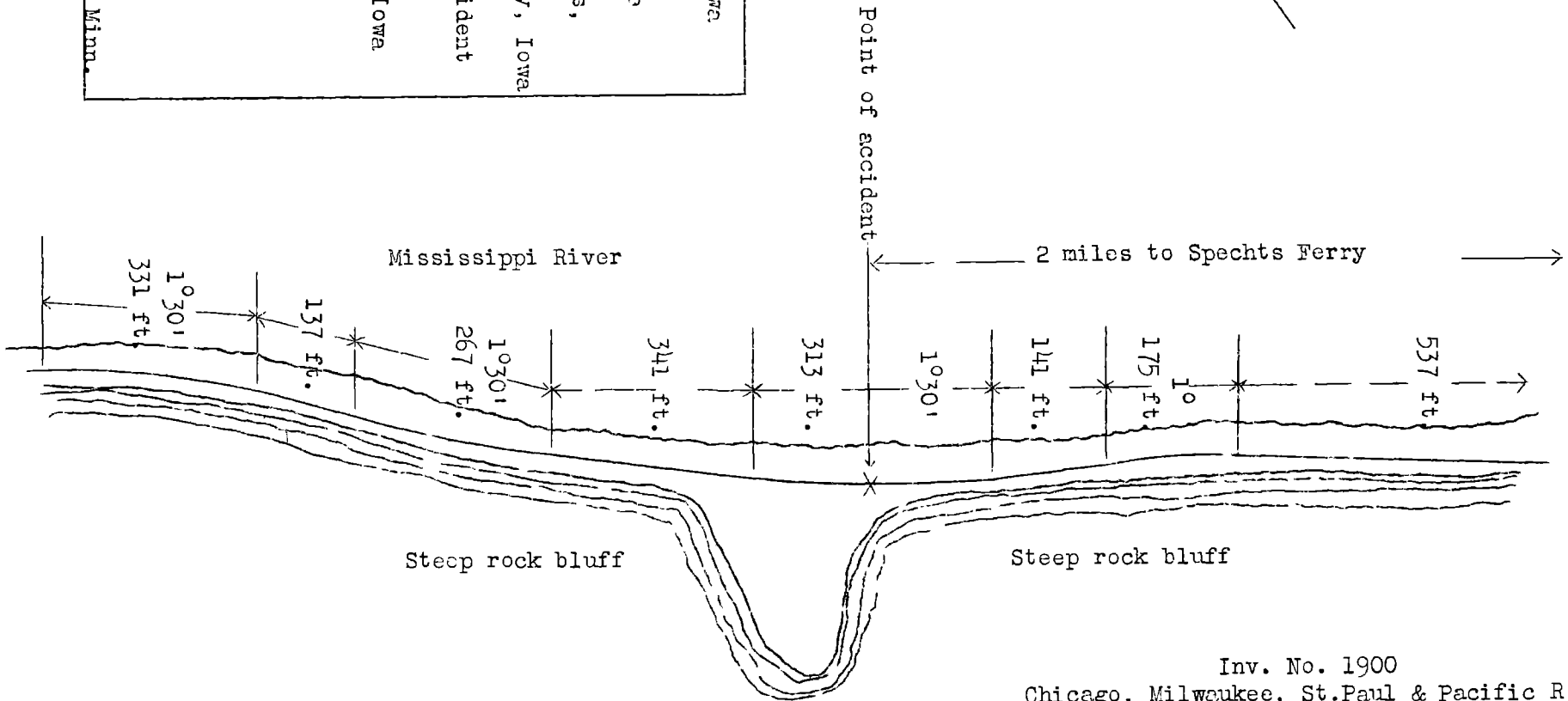
The weather was clear with a strong wind blowing at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4:30 a.m.

Description

West-bound passenger Train No. 3 consisted of 1 combination mail and express car, 2 express cars, 1 coach, 1 Pullman sleeping car and 1 business car, in the order named, all of steel construction with the exception of the business car which was of steel under-frame construction, hauled by engine 6350, and was in charge of Conductor Ross and Engineman Crawford. At Bellevue, 35.1 miles east of Spechts Ferry, the crew



•	Bellevue, Iowa	24.8 mi.
•	Dubuque, Iowa	1.2 mi.
•	Dubuque Shops,	11.1 mi.
•	Spechts Ferry, Iowa	2.0
×	Point of accident	
•	Guttenberg, Iowa	20.4 mi.
•	La Crescent, Minn.	82.2 mi.



Inv. No. 1900
Chicago, Milwaukee, St. Paul & Pacific R.R.
Spechts Ferry, Iowa
March 6, 1934

received a copy of train order 17, form 31, directing them to take siding and meet Train No. 70 at Spechts Ferry. Train No. 3 left Bellevue at 3:21 a.m., according to the train sheet, 18 minutes late, and at Dubuque Shops, 11.1 miles east of Spechts Ferry, the crew received a middle order relative to a meet with another train at that point and also a clearance card, form A, calling attention to their meet with Train No. 70 as per train order 17. Train No. 3 departed from Dubuque Shops at 4:13 a.m., 16 minutes late, passed Spechts Ferry without stopping, and collided with Train No. 70 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been 35 or 40 miles per hour.

East-bound second-class freight Train No. 70 consisted of 38 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 8280, and was in charge of Conductor Belknap and Enginemen Ruprecht. At Guttenberg, 22.4 miles west of Spechts Ferry, the crew received a copy of train order 17, form 19, referred to above, together with a permissive card, form C, directing them to proceed expecting to find a train in the block between that station and Dubuque Shops, and also a clearance card. Train No. 70 passed Guttenberg, the last open office, at 3:58 a.m., according to the train sheet, 2 hours and 38 minutes late, and on approaching Spechts Ferry collided with Train No. 3 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 30 miles per hour.

The engines were locked together and were badly damaged, although they remained upright. The tender and first car in Train No. 3 were derailed to the left. The cistern was torn from the frame of the tender of Train No. 70 and was thrown to the left of the engine, while the trucks and frame stopped behind the engine, derailed; the first five cars in this train stopped in various positions on either side of the track, and the front truck of the sixth car was derailed. The employees killed were the engineman of Train No. 3 and fireman of Train No. 70; those injured were the engineman and brakeman of Train No. 70.

Summary of evidence

Fireman Blauser, of Train No. 3, stated that at Bellevue he thought it was the brakeman who handed him train order 17 which he read and handed to the engineman, who read it and said "Spechts Ferry". At Dubuque Shops the engineman received a train order on the hoop and as they left the engineman handed him the order which he read quickly, together with the clearance card calling attention to the meet with Train No. 70, and gave them back to the engineman. On reaching a point about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of Spechts Ferry the engineman sounded a crossing whistle signal but did not sound the meeting point signal, and on noting that they were between

40 and 70 car lengths from the station he asked the engineman if they were not going to enter the siding at Spechts Ferry for Train No. 70, to which the engineman replied "we meet them at Guttenberg." He then asked the engineman for the orders, whereupon the engineman reached for them and was standing beside his seat box with his back toward the fireman, apparently reading them, when the accident occurred. While the engineman was getting out the orders he resumed his firing, but on looking ahead he saw the headlight of the approaching train and called to the engineman to stop, but he was unable to say whether the engineman applied the brakes. He estimated the speed to have been about 50 miles per hour on approaching Spechts Ferry and said the engineman then eased off on the throttle, reducing the speed, but he was unable to estimate the speed at the time of the accident. It also appeared from Fireman Blauser's statements that the engineman had appeared to be normal and in good spirits; after picking up the mail car at Dubuque the brakes were tested and they also worked properly in making one stop and three reductions in speed en route to the point of accident.

Conductor Ross, of Train No. 3, stated that when he received train order 17 at Bellevue he delivered it to the fireman and said they would take siding and meet Train No. 70 at Spechts Ferry but the engineman did not read the order to him as required by the rules. At Dubuque he talked with the dispatcher on the telephone and was informed of the passengers to be picked up at Dubuque Shops, that Train Second No. 38 would be on the main track, and that Train No. 70 would be at Spechts Ferry at 4:30 a.m. He gave this information to the fireman, who was on the engine, and heard the fireman pass the information across to some one whom he assumed was the engineman. At Dubuque Shops a clearance card was received calling attention to the meet with Train No. 70 as per train order 17, and on leaving that point he collected transportation and then sat down in the smoking compartment of the coach and talked with an engineman who was a passenger. After leaving Dubuque he did not hear the engineman sound any whistle signals and did not realize that the train had passed Spechts Ferry until he felt a hard application of the air brakes followed almost immediately by the accident. At the time the brake application was made the speed was between 40 and 45 miles per hour. Conductor Ross stated that there was no confusion in his mind as to the meeting point and there was nothing to prevent him from taking action to stop the train had he realized that they had passed Spechts Ferry.

Brakeman Grabow, of Train No. 3, stated that he had seen all of the train orders and clearance cards covering the movement of his train and was aware of the fact that they

were to meet Train No. 70 at Spechts Ferry. He saw the conductor walk to the engine and deliver the order at Bellevue, and while at Dubuque he personally heard the conductor tell the fireman that they were to meet Train No. 70 at Spechts Ferry. On passing Edmore, 6.6 miles east of Spechts Ferry, he went to the first baggage car, the second car in the train, to be in position to get out at Spechts Ferry to open the switch. He also started eating his lunch on his way to the baggage car, finishing it after he reached that car. He stated that the high bluff on one side of the track and the river on the other side made it almost impossible to ascertain their location, although he did say that there were two or three shanties along the right of way on the river side, opposite the station and water tank, but he did not look out at any time to get his bearings and did not hear a whistle signal sounded at any time after leaving Dubuque. Brakeman Grabow further stated that he did not feel an application of the brakes prior to the collision; in fact, he was quite certain that the brakes were not applied.

Baggageman Muir, of Train No. 3, stated that he did not see the train orders and that it was not customary for the baggageman to see the orders. He did not hear Brakeman Grabow say that they were to meet Train No. 70 at Spechts Ferry, and was busy sorting the mail sacks and papers, not paying any attention to the location or speed of the train, and he did not think that the brakes were applied prior to the accident.

Conductor Belknap, of Train No. 70, stated that the first intimation he had of anything wrong was when he felt the brakes applied in emergency and the accident occurred about 30 seconds later. The speed was about 30 miles per hour when the brakes were applied and about 20 miles per hour at the time of the accident. The weather was clear and there was a strong wind blowing up dust, but he could see the reflection of the headlight on his engine on the curves, and he thought the wind might have accounted for the fact that he did not hear any whistle signals sounded after leaving Guttenberg. After the accident he noted that both passing-track switch lamps at Spechts Ferry were burning.

Head Brakeman Mehsling, of Train No. 70, stated that he was looking back over the train when he heard the fireman call a warning and also heard the engineman apply the air brakes in emergency and call to him to jump off, but he was unable to get off before the crash. He estimated the speed of their train to have been about 25 miles per hour when the brakes were applied and about 15 or 20 miles per hour at the time of the accident. The statements of Florian Kelley brought out nothing additional of importance.

Operator Jess, who was on duty at Bellevue and delivered the copies of train order 17 to Conductor Ross, stated that there was nothing irregular in the handling of the order; it was clear and legible, and the conductor made no comment when he read and accepted it. There was nothing in the order that might confuse a person as to the station mentioned.

Dispatcher McCurdy, who was on duty at Dubuque Shops and issued the train order involved, stated that Bellevue was the logical place for train order 17 to be issued as it was the only open office where Train No. 3 was required to do work, and also that Train Second No. 38 was to hold the main track in meeting Train No. 3 at Dubuque Shops and for the conductor to get the order at that point it would have been necessary for him to crawl under the freight train. When Train No. 3 arrived at the station at Dubuque Conductor Ross called him on the telephone and during the conversation he told the conductor that Train No. 70 would be at Spechts Ferry at 4:30 a.m.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to obey a meet order.

Under the provisions of train order 17, Train No. 3 was required to take siding and meet Train No. 70 at Spechts Ferry. The fireman of Train No. 3 stated that when the engineman did not sound the meeting-point whistle signal he called the engineman's attention to the order but the engineman told him Guttenberg was the meeting point; Fireman Blauser then asked for the orders and while the engineman was reading them he resumed his firing, after which he looked out and saw the headlight of Train No. 70, the accident occurring very soon thereafter. As the engineman was killed in the accident no reason can be given for his mistake. Neither the conductor nor the brakeman was paying any attention to the location of the train or knew there was anything wrong until about the time the accident occurred, and the baggageman had not seen the orders and said it was not the practice for him to see them.

The rules require that orders on form 31 be delivered to the engineman personally by the conductor and that the engineman read such orders aloud to the conductor, who must compare his own copy with the engineman's reading. It also is required that the engineman sound a meeting point whistle signal at least 1 mile before reaching the meeting point, and if such signal is not given, the conductor is required to take immediate action to stop the train. None of these

rules was obeyed; the conductor delivered the order in question to the fireman instead of to the engineman, and the latter did not read it back to the conductor; the engineman did not sound the meeting-point whistle signal, and no action was taken by the conductor toward stopping the train. The occurrence of this accident was the natural result of the failure to obey the various rules referred to above; these rules were designed for the express purpose of insuring that employees have uniform and correct understanding concerning orders they have received, and also for the purpose of making sure that employees in the train take proper action to bring the train to a stop when it becomes evident that for any reason the train is not being operated in accordance with the rules and orders. Failure to obey strictly the rules governing the handling of train orders and the operation of trains in general is bound to result eventually in disaster, and the situation disclosed by the investigation in this case strongly suggests that the question of obeying important rules had not had that close supervision which is necessary if trains are to be operated with the maximum degree of safety. The responsible operating officials of this railroad should take energetic steps toward correcting this situation at once.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON

Director.