

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY CONCERNING AN  
ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY  
AT WARBA, MINN., ON JULY 13, 1932.

August 18, 1932.

To the Commission:

On July 13, 1932, there was a side collision between two freight trains on the Great Northern Railway at Warba, Minn., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of three employees.

## Location and method of operation

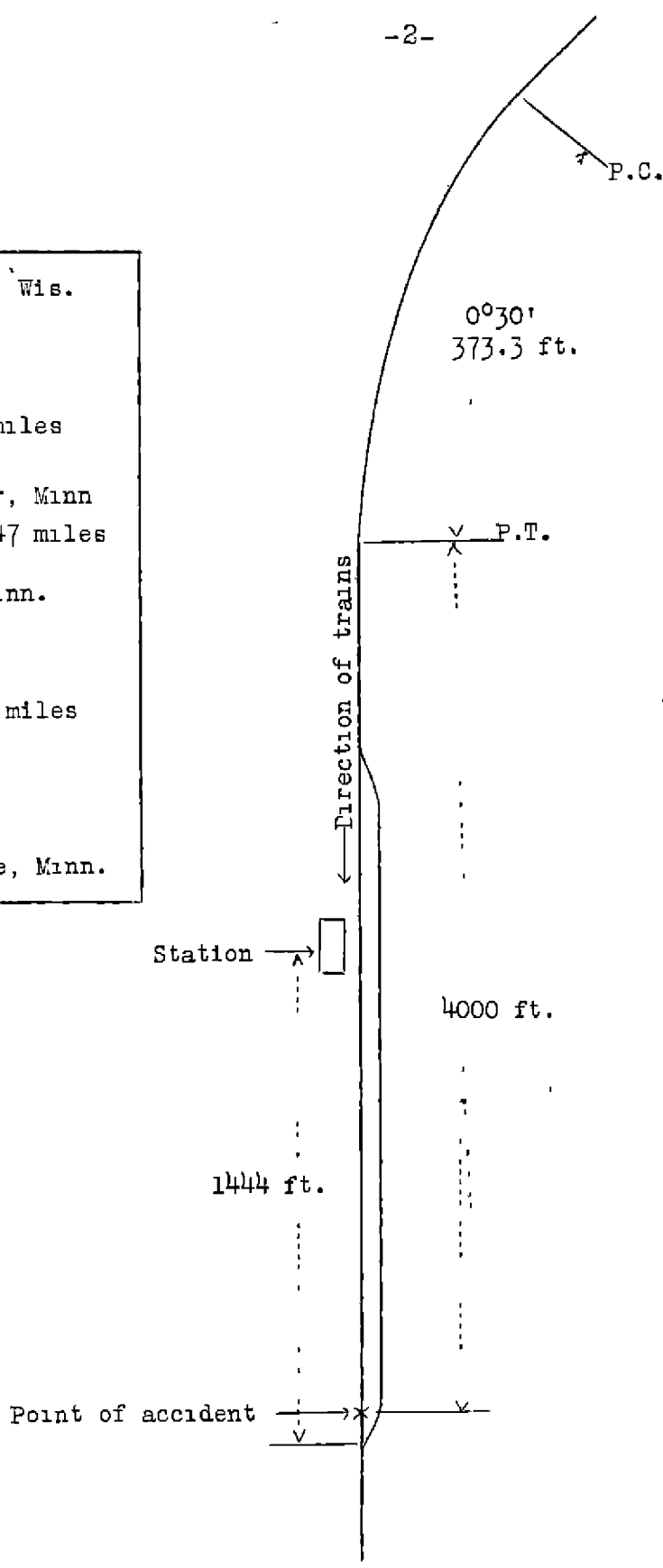
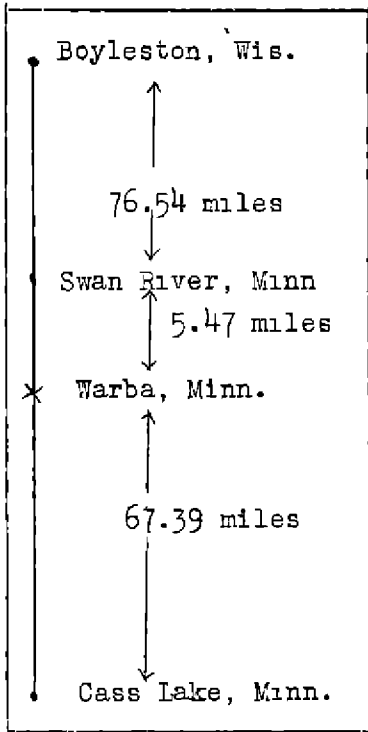
This accident occurred on the Third Sub-Division of the Mesabi Division, which extends between Boylston, Wis., and Cass Lake, Minn., a distance of 149.4 miles, in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident, this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The passing track at Warba parallels the main track on the south, the west switch being located 1,444 feet west of the station, and the accident occurred at the fouling-point of this switch. Approaching the point of accident from the east, there is a  $0^{\circ}30'$  curve to the left 373.3 feet in length, from which point the track is tangent to the point of accident, a distance of approximately 4,000 feet, and for some distance beyond that point. The grade at the point of accident is 0.171 per cent ascending for westbound trains.

A dense fog prevailed at the time of the accident, which occurred about 4.25 a. m.

## Description

Westbound freight train extra 1132 consisted of 11 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1132, and was in charge of Conductor Henretty and Engineman Ellison. This train departed from Swan River, the last open office, 5.47 miles east of Warba, at 4 a. m., and arrived at Warba at 4.15 a. m. After picking up 10 cars on the passing track the train started to back into the passing track at the west switch and it was while this movement was being made, at a speed of about 5 miles per hour, that the tender of the engine was struck by train No. 413.

Westbound freight train No. 413 consisted of 70 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2014, and was in charge of Conductor O'Brien and Engineman Adleman. This train passed Swan River at 4.15 a. m., nine minutes late, passed the station at Warba and



Inv. No. 1773  
 Great Northern Railway  
 Warba, Minn.  
 July 13, 1932.

collided with the side of extra 1132 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 8 and 12 miles per hour.

Engine 1132, its tender and the first car in the train were derailed to the left and were thrown over on their left sides. Engine 2014 and its tender were derailed to the right, the engine being overturned on its right side and stopping parallel to the track with its forward end about 100 feet west of the switch. The first two cars in train No. 413 were also derailed to the right and stopped on their sides a short distance behind the tender. Both engines were badly damaged. The employee killed was the fireman of extra 1132 and the employees injured were the engineman of extra 1132 and the fireman and conductor of train No. 413.

#### Summary of evidence

Engineman Ellison, of extra 1132, stated that the fog in the vicinity of Warba was so heavy that he could not see for a distance of two car-lengths. His train was backing into the passing track at a speed of 5 or 6 miles per hour when he first observed the headlight of an approaching engine, only about 20 feet away, the collision occurring immediately afterwards. He was aware train No. 413 was following his own train but did not whistle for flag protection when stopping at Warba, although he knew the rules required him to do so, his reasons being that he had not been in the habit of whistling out a flag at all times, that the work to be performed would require only about five minutes, and that the conductor was on the rear of the train and would take care of the flag protection.

Conductor Henretty, of extra 1132, stated that before his train left Swan River the operator told him that train No. 413 would not pass that point until about 4.30 a. m. Owing to the foggy weather he gave the operator a message addressed to the conductor and engineman of train No. 413 to the effect that his own train would pick up cars at Warba and at Blackberry, this message being intended as a warning to the crew of that train to be on the lookout. Two fusees were dropped off between Swan River and Warba and upon arrival at the latter point, at 4 15 a.m., the train was stopped with the rear car and caboose standing on the main track just clear of the west passing-track switch, where they were left standing while the cars were picked up from the passing track, it being his intention to depart ahead of train No. 413, he instructed the flagman to help with the work of picking up the cars. About four or five minutes after the train stopped he thought he heard the rumble of an approaching train and immediately procured a fusee from the caboose, and after instructing the rear brakeman to back the train into the passing track so as to permit the approaching train to pass, he went back to flag with the burning fusee. On reaching a point about 23 car-lengths from the caboose the headlight of the approaching train came into view, it then being about 10 or 12 car-lengths distant, and he at once gave stop

signals with the fusee but did not remember whether these signals were acknowledged. He knew that train No. 413 was due at Warba at 4.18 a. m., understood the rules required that flag protection be afforded under any circumstances in which a train might be overtaken by a following train, and said there was ample time to have afforded protection after his train came to a stop, but the reason he did not do so was because he relied on the information given him by the operator at Swan River concerning the time of train No. 413 together with the fact that he did not think it would require more than five minutes to pick up the cars and depart from Warba. Conductor Henretty further stated that even had his engineman whistled out a flag he would not have gone back any sooner than he did.

Rear Brakeman Milner, of extra 1132, said that before the train stopped at Warba the conductor had instructed him to handle the switching, leaving to the conductor the duty of protecting the rear of the train. He stood on the rear platform of the caboose with a red fusee while the train was backing into the passing track and the caboose was about 10 or 12 car-lengths from the switch when the engine of train No. 413 passed him, traveling at a speed of 20 or 25 miles per hour.

Engineman Adleman, of train No. 413, stated that before departing from the initial terminal the regular air-brake test was made and that the brakes functioned properly en route. While the engine was passing the station at Swan River, train orders and a message from Conductor Henretty were received, the message was read to him by the head brakeman, and he understood that it was for the purpose of notifying him that extra 1132 was ahead and to approach with caution the stations where that train was to perform work. The fog between Swan River and Warba was much heavier in some places than in others. When his train reached a point approximately 1,500 feet east of Warba he could see the station and the east passing-track switch, but beyond the station the fog was so dense that he could not see anything. He sounded the usual station whistle-signal and two road-crossing signals while approaching Warba, and as there were no torpedoes or burning fusees on the track east of the station he remarked to the fireman and brakeman that extra 1132 must have left that point. Just about the time the engine passed the station he observed a flash of red light about five or six car-lengths ahead and immediately made a service application of the brakes; having previously eased off on the throttle, and when the engine passed this light he saw that it was a red fusee being held by some one standing along the track on his side of the engine, he then applied the brakes in emergency. He estimated the speed when the brakes were first applied at 20 or 25 miles per hour and at the time of the accident at 10 or 12 miles per hour.

Fireman Pink, of train No. 413, stated that his first knowledge of anything wrong was when the engine reached a point

about opposite the station at Warba and then a man waving a red fusee suddenly appeared through the fog, and before he could take any action the engineman applied the brakes in emergency. Head Brakeman Payne was riding on the left side of the engine cab but did not see anything out of the ordinary until after the engine passed the station and he then observed a fusee on the caboose of extra 1132, the fusee being waved violently when the engine passed the caboose. Conductor O'Brien and Rear Brakeman Peters were riding in the caboose at the time of the accident and were not aware of anything wrong until the brakes were applied in emergency shortly before the accident occurred.

### Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to provide proper flag protection, for which Conductor Henretty, of extra 1132, is responsible.

Conductor Henretty had received information from the operator at Swan River that train No. 413 would not pass that point until about 4.30 a.m., with the time at his disposal, he thought his crew could pick up the cars at Warba and then depart before train No. 413 arrived. He instructed his flagman to assist while picking up the cars on the passing track, and made no attempt to provide flag protection himself until he heard the following train approaching, it was then too late to avert the accident. There was no justification for so ignoring the flagging rule, particularly in view of the dense fog which prevailed at the time.

Engineman Ellison said that he did not whistle for flag protection when his train stopped at Warba, as prescribed by the rules, as he thought the train would be delayed only a short time and was depending on the conductor to protect the rear of the train, and in this connection Conductor Henretty stated that he would not have protected any sooner than he did even though the engineman had whistled for protection. The attitude of these two experienced men toward observance of the rules suggests the need for closer supervision on the part of responsible operating officials.

The employees involved were experienced men and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND

Director.