

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION
WASHINGTON

INVESTIGATION NO. 2762
THE GULF, COLORADO AND SANTA FE RAILWAY COMPANY
REPORT IN RE ACCIDENT
AT NOVICT, TEX., ON
JANUARY 13, 1944

SUMMARY

Railroad: Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe
Date: January 13, 1944
Location: Novice, Tex.
Kind of accident: Rear-end collision
Trains involved: Passenger : Passenger
Train numbers: Second 75 : Extra 1279 South
Engine numbers: 3432 : 1279
Consist: 12 cars : 4 cars
Speed: Standing : 30 m. p. h.
Operation: Timetable and train orders
Track: Single; tangent; 0.4 percent
descending grade southward
Weather: Snowing
Time: About 12:52 p. m.
Casualties: 7 killed; 105 injured
Cause: Failure of the Gulf, Colorado and
Santa Fe Railway Company to pro-
vide adequate safeguards for
movement of trains
Recommendation: That the Gulf, Colorado and Santa
Fe Railway Company establish an
adequate block system on the line
on which this accident occurred

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

INVESTIGATION NO. 2762

IN THE MATTER OF MAKING ACCIDENT INVESTIGATION REPORTS
UNDER THE ACCIDENT REPORTS ACT OF MAY 6, 1910.

THE GULF, COLORADO AND SANTA FE RAILWAY COMPANY

February 21, 1944.

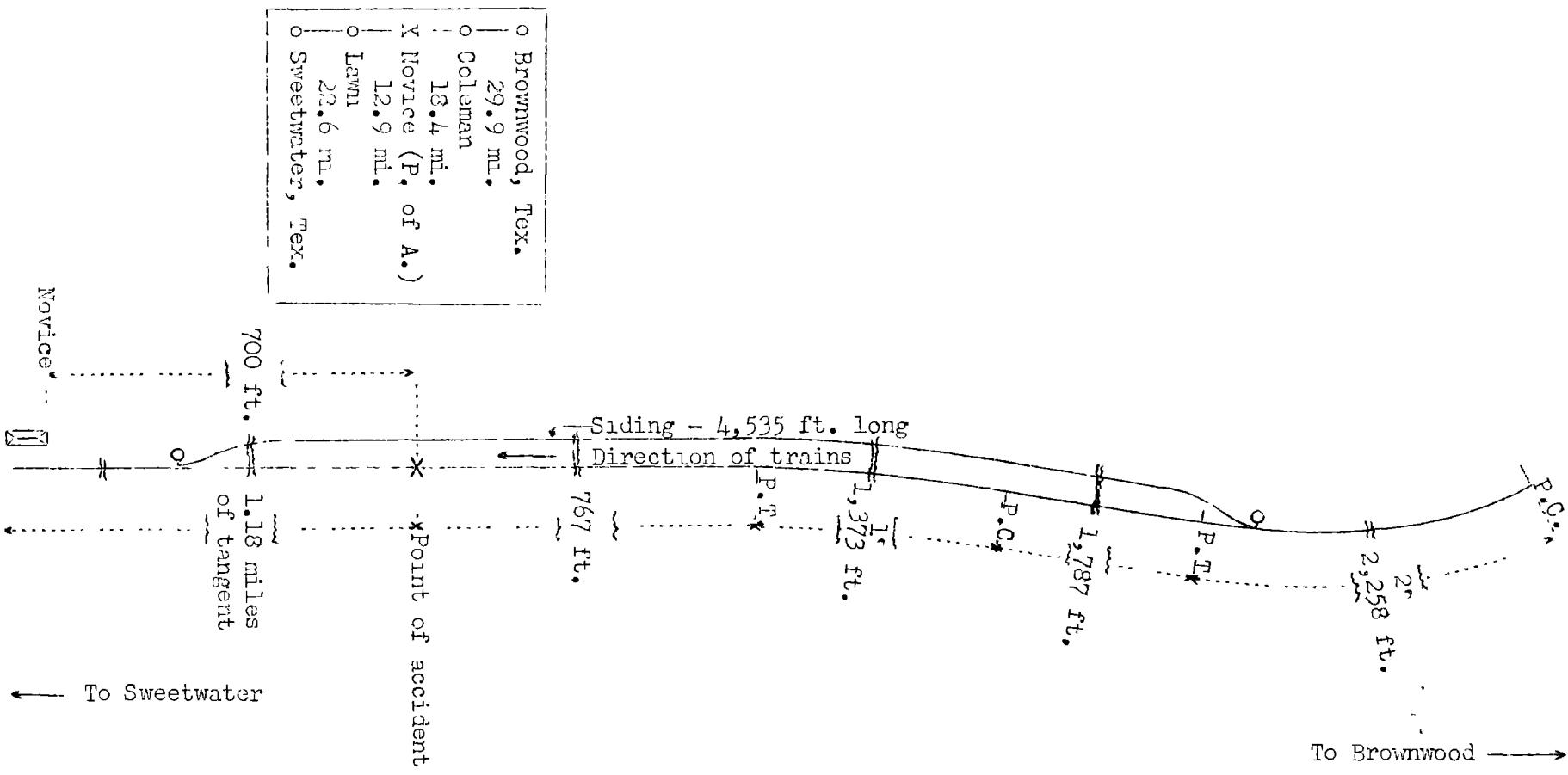
Accident at Novice, Tex., on January 13, 1944, caused by failure of the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway Company to provide adequate safeguards for the movement of trains.

1
REPORT OF THE COMMISSION

PATTERSON, Chairman:

On January 13, 1944, there was a rear-end collision between two passenger trains on the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway at Novice, Tex., which resulted in the death of 7 passengers, and the injury of 82 passengers, 10 Pullman employees, 6 dining-car employees, 2 business-car attendants and 5 train-service employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with a representative of the Railroad Commission of Texas.

¹Under authority of section 17 (2) of the Interstate Commerce Act the above-entitled proceeding was referred by the Commission to Chairman Patterson for consideration and disposition.



Inv-2762
Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway
Novice, Tex.
January 13, 1944

Location of Accident and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Southern Division designated as the Sweetwater District and extending between Brownwood and Sweetwater, Tex., 113.8 miles. In the vicinity of the point of accident this was a single-track line over which trains were operated by timetable and train orders. There was no block system in use. The accident occurred on the main track 700 feet north of the station at Novice. From the north there were, in succession, a 2° curve to the right 2,258 feet in length, a tangent 1,787 feet, a 1° curve to the left 1,373 feet, and a tangent 767 feet to the point of accident and 1.18 miles beyond. At this point the grade was 0.4 percent descending southward.

Operating rules read in part as follows:

11. A train finding a fusee burning on or near its track must stop and wait until it has burned out, before proceeding.

35. Fusees, which will burn for five minutes with a red flame, are to be used in addition to other signals for protecting trains. They may be dropped from a moving train as a signal against a train following, or in case of a severe snow or rain storm or in thick weather, or when trains are stopped under conditions that will not admit of flagman getting back far enough to insure protection against following trains, or in any manner which any particular emergency may demand.

91. Unless some form of block signal is used, trains in the same direction must keep at least five minutes apart, except in closing up at stations. A train following a passenger train must keep at least ten minutes behind it.

99. When a train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately with flagman's signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection, placing two torpedoes and, when necessary, in addition, displaying lighted fusees.

* * *

When a train is moving under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must take such action as may be necessary to insure full protection. By night, or by day when the view is obscured, lighted fusees must be thrown off at proper intervals.

* * *

Bulletin B-3-41943, dated April 19, 1943, read in part as follows:

1. In daytime the flagman should ride the rear end of the car first ahead of the business car when there is but one business car attached to the train. * * *

* * *

The maximum authorized speed for the trains involved was 70 miles per hour.

Description of Accident

Second 75, a south-bound first-class passenger train, consisted of engine 3432, one box car, one baggage car, one baggage-mail car, five coaches, one dining car, two Pullman sleeping cars and one business car, in the order named. The second and eighth cars were of steel-underframe construction, and the remainder were of steel construction. This train departed from Coleman, 18.4 miles north of Novice and the last open office, at 12:22 p. m., 4 hours 39 minutes late, and stopped at Novice at 12:51 p. m. About 1 minute later the rear end was struck by Extra 1279 South.

Extra 1279 South, a south-bound passenger train, consisted of engine 1279, three tourist-sleeping cars and one baggage car, in the order named. The cars were of steel construction. After a terminal air-brake test was made this train departed from Brownwood, 48.3 miles north of Novice, at 11:35 a. m., passed Coleman at 12:32 p. m., and while moving at an estimated speed of 30 miles per hour it struck Second 75.

The force of the impact moved Second 75 southward about 40 feet. The front end of the ninth car telescoped the rear portion of the eighth car a distance of about 25 feet. The passengers killed were in the eighth car. The rear portion of the twelfth car was crushed inward a distance of about 8 feet. Engine 1279 was derailed and badly damaged, and stopped upright and in line with the track. The front end of the first car of Extra 1279 was badly damaged.

It was snowing at the time of the accident, which occurred about 12:52 p. m.

The train-service employees injured were the engineer, the fireman, the conductor and two brakemen of Extra 1279 South.

During the 30-day period preceding the day of the accident, the average daily movement in the vicinity of the point of accident was 11.26 trains.

Discussion

About 1 minute after Second 75 stopped at Novice the rear end was struck by Extra 1279 South.

As Extra 1279 South was approaching Novice the speed was about 35 miles per hour. The air brakes had functioned properly at all points where used en route. The enginemen were maintaining a lookout ahead. Because of falling snow, visibility in the vicinity was restricted to a distance of about 800 feet. The ground was covered with 8 to 10 inches of snow. No warning signal was seen or heard, and the first the enginemen knew of anything being wrong was when the fireman saw the rear of the preceding train about 800 feet distant. He called a warning to the engineer, who immediately moved the brake valve to emergency position. The speed of Extra 1279 was about 30 miles per hour when the collision occurred.

Under the rules, the flagman of Second 75 was required to furnish flag protection for his train when the speed was first reduced for stopping at Novice. The rear car of this train was a business car and, in accordance with bulletin instructions, the flagman was stationed on the rear platform of the second rear car. He dropped a lighted 10-minute fusee on the west side of the track about 2,200 feet north of the point where the rear end of his train stopped. Soon afterward he looked northward from the east side of his train and saw Extra 1279 approaching about 800 feet distant. Before his train stopped he alighted to give flagging signals, but fell in the snow, and the collision occurred immediately afterward. After the accident occurred the remains of a burned fusee were found where the flagman said he dropped the lighted fusee.

In this territory, trains were being operated by timetable and train orders only. The only provisions for spacing following trains was by the time-interval method enforced by operators at open stations, and by burning fusees dropped by flagmen. The rules required that a train following a passenger train be spaced at least 10 minutes behind the preceding train. In this case the preceding train passed Coleman, the last open office and 18.4 miles north of the point of accident, 10 minutes before the following train passed. However, the time-spacing method which was in use did not provide means for spacing trains except at open offices, and the collision occurred before the trains reached Lawn, the next open office, 12.9 miles south of Novice. Unless the following train received flagging signals, there was no provision that prevented this train from moving at the maximum authorized speed of 70 miles per hour from Coleman to Lawn. Although the rules applicable to this case required that a 10-minute interval be maintained between these trains, the carrier furnished only 5-minute fusees. However, the flagman

of the preceding train used 10-minute fusees, which he had obtained from another source. Evidently the light of the fusee dropped by the flagman just north of Novice was obscured by the deep snow, as the enginemen of the following train were positive that they did not see any warning signals in that vicinity. Tests disclosed that the flare of a lighted fusee lying in 6 inches of snow could not be seen. A trainmaster who was on the preceding train thought the flagman of that train complied with the provisions of the flagging rule.

The book of operating rules of this carrier contains manual-block rules which provide, among other things, that no train may be permitted to enter a block occupied by a passenger train, and no passenger train may be permitted to enter a block occupied by any train, except in case of emergency. If the manual-block system had been in use in this territory, the following passenger train would not have been permitted to enter an occupied block, and this accident would not have occurred.

Cause

It is found that this accident was caused by failure of the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway Company to provide adequate safeguards for the movement of trains.

Recommendation

It is recommended that the Gulf, Colorado and Santa Fe Railway Company establish an adequate block system on the line on which this accident occurred.

Dated at Washington, D. C., this twenty-first day of February, 1944.

By the Commission, Chairman Patterson.

(SEAL)

W. P. BARTEL,
Secretary.