

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

WASHINGTON

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REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR

BUREAU OF SAFETY

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ACCIDENT ON THE  
ST. LOUIS SOUTHWESTERN RAILWAY

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BUCKNER, ARK.

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NOVEMBER 25, 1936.

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INVESTIGATION NO. 2122

SUMMARY

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Inv-2122

Railroad: St. Louis Southwestern  
Date: November 25, 1936  
Location: Buckner, Ark.  
Kind of accident: Rear-end collision  
Trains involved: Freight :Freight  
Train numbers: No. 65 :Extra 580-581  
Engine numbers: 583 :580-581 coupled  
Consist: 22 cars, cabooses :38 cars, cabooses  
Speed: Standing :18-35 m.p.h.  
Track: 1° 52' left curve then tangent 1,002 feet  
to point of accident; 0.2 percent descend-  
ing grade; view obstructed; no block-signal  
system  
Weather: Clear  
Time: 9:40 p.m.  
Casualties: 2 killed; 2 injured  
Cause: Failure to provide proper rear end pro-  
tection.

January 22, 1937.

To the Commission:

On November 25, 1936, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the St. Louis Southwestern Railway at Buckner, Ark., resulting in the death of 2 employees and the injury of two employees.

#### Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Pine Bluff Subdivision of the Northern Division, extending between Pine Bluff Shops and Texarkana, Ark., a distance of 152.43 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred at a point 973 feet south of the depot at Buckner; approaching this point from the north the track is tangent for a distance of 8,381 feet, then there is a  $1^{\circ} 52'$  curve to the left 338 feet in length, followed by 1,002 feet of tangent to the point of accident, this tangent extending for more than 1 mile beyond. The grade for south-bound trains is 0.60 percent ascending for a distance of 3,833 feet, level for 967 feet, and then 0.20 percent descending for 87 feet to the point of accident.

The depot at Buckner is located on the west side of the tracks; there is a public road crossing at a point 149 feet north of the depot, and another at a point 193 feet south of the depot. The passing track at Buckner is 3,746 feet in length and parallels the main track on the east; a track 1,140 feet in length and known as the mill or house track, leads off the passing track. The south switch of the passing track is located 2,182 feet south of the depot and the south switch of the mill track is located 476 feet south of the depot.

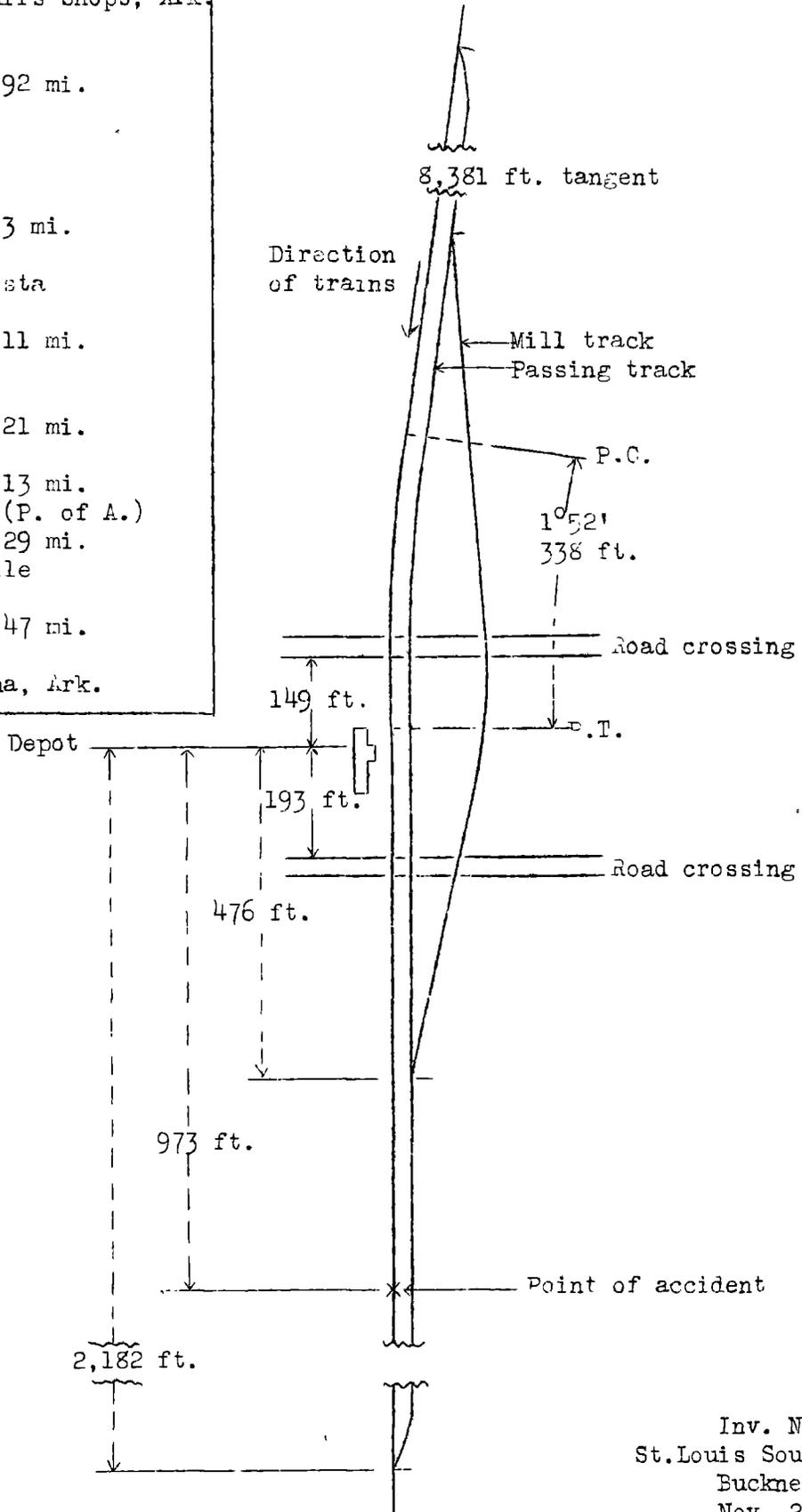
On account of the curvature and several freight cars standing on the mill track, together with the engine of the train ahead coupled to four cars and performing work on the mill track, the view of the markers of the train standing on the main track ahead was materially restricted from the fireman's side of the following train.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred about 9:40 p.m.

#### Description

Train No. 65, a south-bound freight train, consisted of 22 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 583, and was in charge of Conductor Smithey and Engineman Ruffner. This train left

o Pine Bluffs Shops, Ark.
70.92 mi.
o Camden
11.3 mi.
o Dunn Vista
19.11 mi.
o McNeil
5.21 mi.
o Waldo
8.13 mi.
x Buckner (P. of A.)
8.29 mi.
o Lewisville
29.47 mi.
o Texarkana, Ark.



Inv. No. 2122  
St. Louis Southwestern Ry.,  
Buckner, Ark.  
Nov. 25, 1936

McNeil, the last open office, at 8:15 p.m., according to the train sheet, 6 hours 50 minutes late, and stopped at Waldo, 5.21 miles south thereof and 8.13 miles north of Buckner, where station work was performed and Extra 770 North was met. Train No. 65 departed from Waldo about 9:10 p.m., according to the conductor, and on reaching Buckner it stopped on the main track. The engine and first four cars were then uncoupled and entered the mill track through the south switch of the passing track; while this movement was being made the caboose was struck by Extra 580-581.

Extra 580-581, a south-bound freight train, consisted of 38 cars of gravel and a caboose, 2,850 tons, hauled by engines 580 and 581, coupled, and was in charge of Conductor Coburn and Enginemen Ammons and Doty, respectively. This train met Extra 770 at McNeil and departed therefrom at 9:13 p.m., according to the train sheet, and collided with the rear end of Train No. 65 at Buckner while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been between 18 and 35 miles per hour.

The caboose and three rear cars of Train No. 65 were derailed and practically demolished. Engine 580, the lead engine, stopped on its right side west of the tracks, with its front end 192 feet south of the point of collision and engine 581 stopped on its left side opposite engine 580. The six head cars of Extra 580-581 were derailed and damaged, one of them being completely destroyed. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman of engine 580, and the employees injured were the engineman and fireman of engine 581.

#### Summary of evidence

Flagman Stallworth, of Train No. 65, a qualified conductor, stated that he was thoroughly familiar with the requirements of the flagging rule which provides that when a train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train the flagman must go back immediately with proper signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection. His train left Waldo on arrival of Extra 770 North, and the same order which advanced his train to Waldo established a meet between Extra 770 North and Extra 580-581 South at Buena Vista, located 24.32 miles north of Waldo. After leaving Waldo he rode in the caboose cupola; he did not know that there was work to be done at Buckner and when the speed of the train was reduced approaching that point he thought it was for the purpose of giving Brakeman Treadwell on the head end an opportunity to get off and look in the bill box at the depot to see if there were any instructions about work to be performed at Buckner. Flagman Stallworth did not drop off a lighted fusee when the speed was reduced and he did not hear Conductor Smithey tell him to do so; otherwise he said that he would have done so.

Flagman Stallworth kept looking toward the depot for the brakeman, but he did not see him until the caboose was opposite the depot and then the brakeman handed him some way-bills for the conductor. After handing the bills to the conductor, the flagman got off the caboose opposite the south switch of the mill track, opened that switch, then started back with full flagging equipment as the engineman had whistled out a flag. On his way back he walked along the mill track and began opening the knuckles of several cars on that track. Just after completing this work he heard the following train approaching and he immediately ran to the engineman's side of the main track, attempting to light a fusee as he ran, but it did not ignite; he did not know the reason it did not light nor did he know what became of it afterward. The lead engine had not quite reached the north switch of the passing track when he began giving stop signals with his lighted white and red lanterns, and at the same time alternately tried to light a fusee. His stop signals were answered as the engines passed him, and the brakes on the train were set and fire was flying from the wheels; the caboose stopped with its front end opposite where he was standing, which was north of the curve and a short distance south of the north switch of the mill track. He got on the caboose with his red and white lanterns, after which he walked southward to the depot and reported the accident by telephone; he then left his red lantern near a pole close to the highway crossing south of the depot while he assisted the conductor in caring for the injured fireman. Flagman Stallworth was positive that his red lantern was lighted when he gave the stop signals. He said that he opened the south mill track switch merely to assist with the work and he gave as his reason for not dropping off a fusee when the speed was being reduced north of the depot, the fact that he thought his train was going to continue through Buckner, and he did not know it was going to stop until his caboose reached a point opposite the brakeman who had gotten off the engine at the depot. He estimated that about three minutes elapsed from the time he got off the caboose until the accident occurred, and with the exception of two short blasts in answer to his flagging signals when the engines were about opposite him, he did not hear any whistle signals sounded by the following train as it approached Buckner. He did not think that the order which established the meet at Buena Vista between the following train and Extra 770 North, had influenced him to depend on the meet being made between those trains at that point, or had caused him to believe that this would give him plenty of time to afford proper rear end protection at Buckner; however, he said that had he known that this meeting point had been changed to McNeil, he would not have stopped to open the south switch of the mill track or the knuckles of the cars on that track.

Conductor Smithey, of Train No. 65, stated that his train left Waldo at 9:10 p.m., and when approaching Buckner he told the flagman to drop off a fusee north of the curve involved, but the flagman did not make any reply. The conductor was occupied at his desk and did not look to see whether or not the fusee was dropped off, nor did he pay any particular attention to the flagman, as he thought the following train was not very close, and he figured that the flagman would get off the caboose north of the curve when the speed was reduced; he did not know that the flagman was still on the caboose until he was handed the bills which the swing brakeman obtained from the bill box at the depot. At this time, the flagman started back with full flagging equipment and as he was a qualified conductor, he depended upon him to afford the same proper protection that he had furnished at all other points en route. The first knowledge the conductor had of anything wrong was when he heard the whistle sounded on the engine of the following train and on looking back he saw the reflection of the headlight about opposite the depot. He immediately jumped off the caboose and ran to the right of way fence and as he did so he saw sparks flying from the wheels of the approaching train just prior to the collision, at which time he estimated the speed to have been between 30 and 35 miles per hour. Conductor Smithey said he was not depending upon the order establishing Buena Vista as a meeting point between Extra 580-581 South and Extra 770 North, to give his own train time to perform work at Buckner; however, he said that had he known this meeting point had been changed from Buena Vista to McNeil, he would have used greater precaution in seeing that proper rear end protection was afforded for his own train at Buckner.

Statements of Engineman Ruffner, Fireman Powers, Head Brake-man Throgmorton and Swing Brakeman Treadwell, of Train No. 65, were to the effect that the caboose markers of their own train were burning properly and displaying red to the rear at the time their engine passed it while backing north on the passing track just prior to the accident. They saw the flagman, with lighted red and white lanterns in one hand, run across to the main track and flag the approaching train at a point north of the curve involved. They estimated the speed of that train to have been between 18 and 30 miles per hour and said that sparks were flying from the wheels of Extra 580-581 just prior to the accident. Their own train stopped on the main track at Buckner about 9:35 p.m., and the accident occurred about five minutes later.

Engineman Doty, of second engine 581, stated that the air brakes were tested, and worked properly en route and were under the control of Engineman Ammons of lead engine 580. At Buena Vista, a train order was received changing the meeting point between his train and Extra 770 North, from Buena Vista to McNeil. After making the meet at McNeil his train departed;

approaching Buckner the station signal and road crossing signals were sounded on the engine whistle and the speed was between 40 and 45 miles per hour when passing the north switch of the passing track; the throttle was slightly open on his own engine. The first knowledge he had of anything wrong was when the air brakes were applied in emergency while the road crossing signal was being sounded a short distance north of the depot and he saw a man with a white lantern standing about 10 feet west of the track between the depot and the highway crossing north thereof. The throttles on both engines were closed at that time and the smoke from the lead engine was trailing, which interfered with his vision; Fireman Vaughn shouted something about seeing several red lights ahead on the main track. Engineman Doty got down on the steps to get off and he saw fire flying from the wheels; the collision immediately followed, at which time he estimated the speed to have been about 35 miles per hour. Engineman Doty said that his train did not encounter any torpedoes or fuses and he did not see any flagging signals given with a red light. Fireman Vaughn, of engine 581, was sitting on his seat box maintaining a lookout ahead; when the air brakes were applied in emergency, he first thought his train had struck an automobile, then he saw the left marker light of the caboose on the track ahead and he jumped just prior to the accident. Fireman Vaughn did not see any flagging signals given. Head Brakeman Koonce was sitting on his seat box ahead of the fireman on lead engine 580; his view across the inside of the curve was obstructed by cars standing on the mill track but he saw the flagman run over to the main track from the direction of those cars and begin giving stop signals with a white light from a point three or four car lengths north of the highway crossing north of the depot, at which time his own engine was about fifteen car lengths north of the highway crossing. The air brakes were then applied in emergency, following which he saw the red markers ahead and he jumped before the accident occurred. Between 20 and 35 minutes after the accident he assisted in pulling the rear of his train away from the wreckage and the brakes were still set on the rear cars of his train at that time. Other statements of Fireman Vaughn and Head Brakeman Koonce were similar to those of Engineman Doty.

Conductor Coburn, Swing Brakeman Landrum and Flagman Gunter, of Extra 580-581 South were in the caboose and were not aware of anything wrong until the air brakes were applied in emergency, at which time the speed was about 40 or 45 miles per hour; the accident occurred about 9:40 p.m. Immediately after their caboose stopped Flagman Stallworth of the train ahead came to the left side of the caboose, just north of the north switch of the mill track, and informed them of the accident; the only lamp the flagman had which they saw was a white electric lantern. Conductor Coburn said that at this time Flagman Stallworth remarked: "that meet at Buena Vista caused

it" also that he "didn't have time to light a fusee"; that was the extent of the conversation. Flagman Gunter was in the right side of the cupola and he saw Flagman Stallworth with a white lantern, on the west side of the track about two car-lengths ahead of the point where their caboos stopped, the flagman then came back and crossed to the east side of the track, at the front end of the caboose.

#### Discussion

Under the rules of this railroad, when a train is moving or stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman is required to take necessary action to insure full protection. The rules also provide that conductors must not allow other duties to interfere with the necessary precautions for the protection of their trains, and must invariably require their flagmen to act with utmost promptness and in strict accordance with the rules. Flagman Stallworth fully understood the requirements of the flagging rule; in this instance, however, he did not drop off a lighted fusee when the speed was reduced approaching Buckner, saying that he did not know that work was to be performed at that point, nor did he hear Conductor Smithey tell him to drop off a fusee. After his train stopped, instead of immediately going back to flag, he got off the caboose with his flagging equipment, opened the south switch of the mill track, and began opening the knuckles on several cars standing on that track. After doing this he heard the approaching train and he then ran toward the straight track at the north end of the curve and gave stop signals, but it was too late to avert the accident. Flagman Stallworth entered the service of this railroad as brakeman on May 27, 1913, and was promoted to conductor on August 22, 1920, and had a good record.

Conductor Smithey said that he was busy with clerical duties and did not pay any particular attention to the flagman, who was a promoted man; he relied upon the flagman to afford proper protection and to drop off the fusee as instructed but the flagman made no reply at the time and the conductor did not look to see whether the fusee was dropped off. Conductor Smithey did not know that the flagman was still on the caboose when the train stopped, until the flagman gave him some way-bills that the swing brakeman had picked up; however, at this time the conductor saw the flagman get off the caboose and start back with full flagging equipment and he depended upon him to go back the proper distance. Conductor Smithey should have definitely known that the flagman was affording proper protection.

It appears that both the conductor and the flagman assumed that the train behind was following considerably farther behind than was actually the case. This assumption was undoubtedly

created through their knowledge of the train order establishing a meet at Buena Vista between the following train and a north-bound train. This order, however, was subsequently changed, which resulted in the following train being advanced without these employees being aware of the fact. Furthermore, from their own statements, it is obvious that had they been aware of this change in train orders, greater precautions would have been taken at Buckner to provide proper rear end protection for their train.

The number of trains operated in this territory during the 30 days preceding the date of the accident averaged only slightly less than 17 trains per day. Traffic of this density on a single-track line is sufficient to justify the giving of serious consideration to the advisability of installing an adequate block-signal system with a view to preventing future accidents of this character.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to provide proper flag protection for Train No. 65.

#### Recommendation

It is recommended that the responsible officials of this railway give consideration to the advisability of installing an adequate block-signal system.

Respectfully submitted,

W. J. PATTERSON,

Director.