

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE ATLANTA JOINT TERMINALS AT ATLANTA, GA., ON
NOVEMBER 22, 1925.

January 29, 1926.

To the Commission:

On November 22, 1925, there was a collision between a freight train and a cut of cars being shoved by a yard engine on the Atlanta Joint Terminals at Atlanta, Ga., resulting in the death of one employee, who was off duty, and the injury of one employee, who was on duty.

Location and method of operation

The Atlanta Joint Terminals is a switching agent and performs the switching and handling of trains of three of the railroads entering Atlanta, movements are made under yard-limit rules, expecting to find the track occupied. The accident occurred at Bell street, in Atlanta yard, on the westbound main track at a point about 2,400 feet east of the crossover switch marking the end of the eastbound main track, this is a trailing-point switch for westbound trains. The Union Station at Atlanta is located about 800 feet west of this switch. At a point approximately 2,800 feet east of Bell street there is a crossover connecting the two main tracks, known as the Boulevard crossover, while the west switch of what is known as the Ice Track, this track being located north of and paralleling the main track, is located 2,300 feet farther east. Approaching the point of accident from the east the track is tangent for a considerable distance followed by a compound curve to the right 3,550 feet in length, the curvature varying from $0^{\circ}45'$ to $2^{\circ}20'$, the accident occurring on this curve at a point about 1,100 feet from its eastern end, where the curvature is $1^{\circ}30'$. The grade is 0.37 per cent ascending for westbound trains.

The weather was foggy at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 12.32 a.m.

Description

Engine 115, headed west, in charge of Foreman Stephens and Engineman Corley, shoved a cut of 40 cars westward from the Ice Track, departing at about 12.15 a.m.,

for delivery to the Southern Railway. Just before reaching the Boulevard crossover the yard transfer was brought to a stop on the westbound main track to permit westbound Louisville & Nashville freight train No. 44, consisting of 57 cars and 2 cabooses, hauled by engines 1293 and 1356, to use the crossover and proceed the yard transfer on the westbound main track. As train No. 44 approached the crossover switch marking the end of the eastbound main track, a hand stop signal was received from the crew of a switch engine on the eastbound main track, which crew was using the crossover to switch Louisville & Nashville passenger train No. 18, at the Union Station, but train No. 44 was not brought to a stop until it fouled the crossover. A back-up movement was therefore made and shortly afterwards before the head end of train No. 44 had cleared the crossover, its rear caboose collided with the leading car, a gondola, of the yard transfer being shoved ahead of engine 115, which had followed the freight train down the westbound main track from the Boulevard crossover at a low rate of speed, estimated to have been between 3 and 5 miles an hour.

As a result of the impact the rear caboose of train No. 44 telescoped the caboose ahead of it a short distance, while only slight damage was sustained to the gondola car at the west end of the transfer cut. The employee killed was a conductor who was on the rear platform of the leading caboose at the time of the accident.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Dorsey, of the lead engine of train No. 44, stated that on approaching the crossover switch marking the end of the eastbound main track he received a hand stop signal and he immediately applied the air brakes, bringing the train to a stop fouling the crossover. Shortly afterwards, Brakeman Gilstrap told Engineman Dorsey that Conductor Chapman said to back up slowly and clear the crossover. Engineman Dorsey said he backed his train a distance of about three car-lengths and then stopped thinking the head end of his train was clear of the crossover, and that a few seconds later the collision occurred, he said he could not see the crossover switch as it was on the fireman's side. He estimated that it was about three minutes from the time of the first stop at the crossover, just before backing up, until the accident occurred, and that vision was restricted by the fog and smoke to about six or eight car-lengths. The statements of Fireman Garwood practically corroborated those of Engineman Dorsey, while the statements of Engineman Hicks, of the second engine were to the effect that his train was standing at the time of the accident.

Conductor Chapman, of train No. 44, stated that at the time his train was brought to a stop fouling the crossover, Pilot Taylor, of the switch engine, told him they were using the crossover to switch L. & N. passenger train No. 18 at the Union Station, and asked him to back train No. 44 to clear the crossover. Conductor Chapman said he told Pilot Taylor it would be necessary for him to go to the rear of his train before backing up, and that he told Brakeman Gilstrap to tell Engineman Dorsey to back the train slowly after he got to the rear end. Conductor Chapman stated that he then started running toward the rear of his train, along the south side, and on reaching a point about 15 car-lengths from the engines he climbed up on top of the cars to avoid danger of being struck by the switch engine, which was then moving eastward on the eastbound track, and after going back about 5 additional car-lengths he felt a jar and thought the air brakes had been applied from the rear by the flagman. Conductor Chapman further stated that it was his intention not to have the back-up movement started until he had reached the rear end of the train, and that he did not know whether or not his train was moving backward or standing at the time of the accident. He also made a statement that he did not know whether his train was moving or standing while he was on his way back toward the rear end.

Brakeman Gilstrap, of train No. 44, stated that after fouling the crossover Conductor Chapman told him to tell Engineman Dorsey that the conductor was going back to look out for the train, and to back up easy and look out for him. Brakeman Gilstrap did not know whether or not his train had started to back up, was moving backward, or standing at the time of the accident, although he said he was standing in the gangway of the lead engine when he felt the application of the brakes.

Flagman Kincaid, of train No. 44, stated that he was riding in the caboose of his train, as the rear caboose was deadheading; he said that the caboose had been standing about two or three minutes prior to the accident, not having moved backward to his knowledge. The markers on the caboose were burning properly and he maintained that he did not have time to go back and afford protection, as a matter of fact, he had just started to get off the caboose when the accident occurred.

Switchman Ferguson, of yard engine 115, stated that at the time his train came to a stop at the Boulevard crossover, to permit train No. 44 to precede it on the westbound main track, he left his position at the head end of the leading car of the transfer cut, as the first three cars at this end were gondola cars, and took up a position

on top of a box car, the fourth car back from the leading end of the transfer, in order to be able to better transmit signals. The transfer then started westward and on reaching a point about 1 1/4 car lengths from the rear of train No. 44 he saw the markers on the caboose and began giving stop signals; these signals were not acknowledged and on looking back he found that on account of the smoke and fog he could not see Switchman Bailey, to whom he was transmitting signals and who was riding on top of the third car from the yard engine. He said he then climbed down the side ladder and ran toward the head end of the leading car in an endeavor to apply the air brakes in emergency from the head end, but the collision occurred as he reached the second car from the head end. He said it was smoky and foggy and that at the time of the accident he could not tell whether or not train No. 44 was moving backward, but he thought that it was, as the space between that train and his own closed up so rapidly. He estimated the speed of the transfer cut to have been about 3 or 4 miles an hour from the time it left the Boulevard crossover until the accident occurred. Switchman Ferguson admitted that had he been riding on the front end of the leading car, as required, he could have applied the air brakes and have stopped the transfer cut before the accident occurred.

Switchman Bailey, of yard engine 115, stated that he was riding on top of the third car from the engine, and every now and then he could see Switchman Ferguson's lantern, burning dimly through the smoke and fog. On this account he could not and did not see the stop signals given by Switchman Ferguson just prior to the accident, and the first he knew of anything wrong was when the collision occurred, at which time the speed of the transfer cut was about 4 miles an hour. None of the other members of the crew of yard engine 115 were aware of anything wrong until the accident occurred; when the yard transfer came to a stop at the Boulevard crossover, as is the custom, Foreman Stephens went over to the yard office to get the bills, and did not learn of the accident until shortly after its occurrence, he did not know that Switchman Ferguson had changed his position from the head end of the leading car.

Pilot Taylor, Engineman Osborn and Hostler's Helper Hall, who were switching L. & N. passenger train No. 18 at the Union Station, stated that train No. 44 had backed up about two or three car-lengths when it suddenly came to a stop on account of the fact that the brakes were applied in emergency, apparently as a result of the collision, with the engines still fouling the crossover. They also said the train had been standing about two minutes prior to starting the back-up movement.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by train No. 44 being backed against the current of traffic without proper flag protection, for which Conductor Chapman, Engineman Dorsey and Flagman Kincaid were responsible.

The members of the crew of train No. 44 made so many conflicting statements that it is questionable how much weight can be attached to them. After considering all the statements of the various employees involved, including the crew of the engine which was making up train No. 18, it is believed that the following represents the situation as it existed at the time of the accident with respect to the movements of train No. 44: When train No. 44 first stopped it was fouling the crossover which had to be used in making up train No. 18 and after a short delay Conductor Chapman started back toward the rear of his train while Engineman Dorsey began to back his train in accordance with a signal which was given him, this back-up movement being started about two or three minutes after the train first came to a stop; in the meantime Flagman Kincaid had been in the caboose talking with the employee who was killed, and was still in the caboose when the accident occurred; it further appeared that the back-up movement continued until the brakes were applied in emergency as a result of the damage caused by the accident. Conductor Chapman and Engineman Dorsey were in charge of the train and under no conditions should they have started to make the back-up movement until it was known that the proper protection had been provided, while Flagman Kincaid is considered equally at fault for his total failure to pay any attention whatever to the protection of his train.

Under the rules, when cars are being pushed ahead of an engine a member of the crew should station himself at the head end of the leading car, Switchman Ferguson had been so located, but afterwards he went back to the fourth car from the head end, a box car, in order to be able better to transmit signals. Had Switchman Ferguson remained at the head end of the leading car, it is probable that he would have been able to open the angle cock in time to bring his train to a stop, although there is no assurance that the accident would not have occurred in view of the fact that train No. 44 was backing up without protection.

Attention is called to the fact that it is the practice for an engine foreman to leave his train for the purpose of going to the yard office nearby to obtain the bills, leaving the handling of the cars to the other members of the crew; this practice resulted in a situation where engine 115 was pushing a cut of 50 cars through a congested territory, at night, in foggy weather, with only two switchmen to pass signals.

In view of the fact that the crossover at the end of double track, where the head end of train No. 44 first came to a stop, is often used for switching purposes in connection with the making up of passenger trains at the Union Station, bulletin instructions should be posted instructing crews to stop clear of the crossover unless they know the route is clear for the movement of their trains.

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.