

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
ATLANTIC COAST LINE RAILROAD AT BAIN-
BRIDGE, GA., ON JUNE 14, 1918.

July 14, 1918.

On June 14, 1918, there was a head-end collision on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad at Bainbridge, Ga., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of four employees. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety submits the following report:

The Montgomery District of the Second Division, on which this accident occurred, is a single track line. Trains are operated by time table and train orders, no block signal system being in use. The accident occurred within the yard limits at Bainbridge, these limits extending from a point about a mile east to a point about one and one-quarter miles west of the station. Approaching the point of collision from the west there is about 4,000 feet of tangent, a 6-degree curve to the right about 700 feet in length, followed by about 1,000 feet of tangent and a curve to the left of 8 degrees for a distance of about 500 feet, then diminishing in curvature to 4 degrees 30 minutes for a distance of 325 feet. The accident occurred on the 8-degree portion of the curve at a point about 375 feet east of its western end. This curve extends through an 8-foot cut, on an ascending grade for eastbound trains of .61 per cent. A house and several trees are located on the inside of the curve on the top of the cut, restricting the range of vision to about 300 feet. The weather was clear.

Yard engine 1252, in charge of Foreman Kelly and Engineer Vincent, had gone from Bainbridge to West Bainbridge, a distance of about one and one-quarter miles, for the purpose of doing some work. After this had been finished the engine proceeded back toward Bainbridge, being operated backing up, pushing three box cars and hauling four box cars. It left West Bainbridge at about 9.10 a.m., according to Foreman Kelly, and at about 9.20 a.m. collided with westbound freight train extra 823 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 10 miles an hour.

Westbound freight train extra 823 was a supply train consisting of nine cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 823, and was in charge of Conductor Robinson and Engineer Heaven. It arrived at Bainbridge at 9.13 a.m., and after stopping at the freight house and at the station, departed at about 9.18 a.m., and had proceeded a distance of about 400 feet when it collided with the cars being pushed by yard engine 1252.

The frame of the tender of engine 1252 was demolished, the cistern being forced forward against the boiler head, resulting in the complete destruction of the engine cab. The leading car of those being pushed by engine 1252 was telescoped about one-third of its length by engine 823, while the second car in the train of extra 823, a flat car, was broken in two. The damage to the balance of the equipment in either train was slight. The employee killed was the engineer of engine 1252.

Operator Barfield, who sells tickets and checks and delivers baggage in addition to his duties as operator, stated that when ready to return from West Bainbridge, Foreman Kelly always called him up on the telephone and asked him to hold all trains until he arrived, but that this time he did not do so. He accounted for his movements between 8.55 a.m. and the time of the accident by saying that between 8.55 a.m. and 9.10 a.m., he was working on the wire handling messages with Dothan, Ala., and Savannah, Ga. After this he was called to the baggage room to locate a trunk for a woman, this taking considerable time on account of its having been improperly checked. While in the baggage room he also searched for a master meter to exchange with the storekeeper of the supply train, and on account of not finding the meter immediately had to spend several minutes looking for it. He did not state what time he returned to the office, but this was fixed by Conductor Robinson of the supply train as about 9.15 a.m. Operator Barfield also said that he answered the telephone three times between 8.30 a.m. and 9.20 a.m., the last time being between 9.00 a.m. and 9.05 a.m. At this time, the person calling had hung up the receiver before he answered the call.

Foreman Kelly said that in accordance with his custom, he went into a store at West Bainbridge and called up the operator at Bainbridge by telephone, using the line of the Bell Telephone Company, this was at 9.10 a.m. After getting the connection he recognized the voice of Operator Barfield, told him who was calling, and then said to "hold everything,"

"I am coming over." He claimed Operator Barfield said, "I got them; come ahead." He then went out of the store and boarded the rear car, giving to Engineer Vincent and the other members of the crew the usual signal, meaning that they were going to go all the way to Bainbridge. He rode at the rear of the train and did not know anything about the collision until it occurred. He estimated the speed of his train at the time to have been about five or six miles an hour. Foreman Kelly stated that it had always been his practice to call up the operator at Bainbridge before starting from West Bainbridge, and he said that during the ten years he had been in charge of Bainbridge yard this had been the usual method of protecting such a movement. He said that the officials had never authorized him to use the telephone, but that they knew it was being done and had never criticized the practice.

C. O. Jones, clerk in the store where the telephone was located, said he heard Foreman Kelly ask for No. 26, which is the number of the station telephone, and heard him say, "Look out for me; I am coming over." A colored porter in the store was also present at the time, and corroborated the statements of Mr. Jones.

Colored Switchman Washington stated that while the work at West Bainbridge was being finished Foreman Kelly went into the store to telephone to the operator; that he then came out, boarded the rear car, and gave the usual signal that they were to go to Bainbridge. After starting, Switchman Washington was riding on the top of the leading car, but did not see

extra 803 approaching until it was about five car lengths distant, both trains moving at the time at a speed of about five miles an hour. He said the air brakes were coupled on the cars being hauled by the switch engine, but he did not think any application of the air brakes was made by Engineer Vincent. He also stated that just before the collision occurred his attention was attracted to an acquaintance who was walking alongside the train.

Car Inspector Copeland said he was riding on the middle car of the three being pushed by the yard engine, while Switchman Washington was on the car next to the engine. He did not see extra 803 until the two trains were within a car length of each other, as he was not looking in the direction in which his train was moving until he heard Switchman Washington call out, saying he was looking at a man going fishing and also at a Miss Griswell, who was waving her hand. He estimated the speed of the switch engine to have been 8 or 10 miles an hour. He did not know whether or not Engineer Vincent saw the switchman's signal. Inspector Copeland also said that in the past when Foreman Kelly had not been able to get in touch with the operator at Bainbridge they had always made the movement to that station under flag protection.

Colored Fireman Williams, of engine 1384, said that just before the collision occurred he was putting in a fire, and that he did not know anything about the approach of extra 803 until the collision occurred. He did not know whether or not Engineer Vincent had seen any signals, or made any effort to stop.

Miss Leona Griswall, an eye-witness, said she saw the yard train approaching, with Switchman Washington and Inspector Cepelani riding on the leading car, looking back at some men who were going fishing. She also saw extra 873 approaching and began to wave in an effort to attract the attention of the two men riding on the leading car of the yard train, but they were within 100 feet of her before they turned and looked in her direction.

Engineer Reeves stated that he first saw the yard train when it was about three car lengths distant, at which time his own train was moving at a speed of about 8 miles an hour. He at once applied the air brake in emergency, and had brought his train practically to a stop when the collision occurred. He said he was looking for the yard engine, but did not know where it was and supposed it was at West Bainbridge, as the operator always told him if the yard engine was on its way back to Bainbridge.

Conductor Robinson, of extra 632, stated that his train arrived at the freight house at Bainbridge at 7.13 a.m., and that he went to the office in the passenger station and registered at 7.15 a.m. Operator Barfield was not in the office when he reached there, but came in while he was registering. The two of them left the office immediately afterwards, the operator not using the telephone while he was there. Conductor Robinson said his train started at 7.18 a.m., and that the collision occurred at 7.40 a.m. The speed was not over 8 miles an hour when the brakes were applied.

The fireman and flagman of extra 613 corroborated the statements of the conductor in regard to the speed, while Roadmaster Jordan, who was riding on the supply train, and a colored brakeman estimated the speed to have been about 10 miles an hour.

Division Superintendent Bowdoin stated that he was familiar with the method of protecting the movements of the yard engine from West Bainbridge to Bainbridge; that the practice had prevailed for 14 years; that no accidents had occurred during that time; that the practice had always been considered safe, and that so long as there was a complete understanding between the operator and the engine foreman he thought it would be a safe method to follow in the future.

The statement of Foreman Kelly that he telephoned to the station at Bainbridge is corroborated by two witnesses, while the movements of Operator Barfield between 9.05 a.m. and 9.22 a.m. seem to be accounted for. No record of calls is kept by the telephone company, so that it was impossible to find out anything from that source, but in view of all the circumstances it is entirely possible that a wrong connection was given to Foreman Kelly and that when he said he was "coming over" he was told to come ahead. Regardless of this, however, rule No. 14 of the current time-table requires protection against extra trains, and the use of the telephone simply served as a means of avoiding the delay which would have been occasioned by making the movement under flag protection as required by rule. This rule reads in part as follows:

"Within yard limits the main track may be used, protecting against Third and Fourth Class and Extra trains.

"Third and Fourth Class and Extra trains must move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main line is seen or known to be clear.

"Engines working within yard limits must clear the time of First Class trains five minutes."

In the absence of adequate protection the movement should not have been made except under the authority of a train order.

This accident was caused by the failure of the crew of yard engine 1252 to protect against extra 823, for which Foreman Kelly and Engineman Vincent are responsible. Equal responsibility for the movement of the switch engine under such conditions also rests with the operating officials of this division, for the violation of the rule in the manner outlined was a custom of several years standing, of which they were fully cognizant. Switchman Washington is also responsible for his failure to maintain a proper lookout while rounding the curve at a point where he knew the view was very much restricted. Had he maintained a proper lookout, the results of this accident undoubtedly would have been much less severe, and it is possible that it would not have occurred.

Foreman Kelly was employed as a flagman in 1903, and in 1907 was promoted to conductor and placed at Bainbridge as yard foreman. His record was good. Engineman Vincent was employed in February, 1919, and had a good record. Switchman

Washington was employed as a switchman in 1898 and had a good record. Operator Barfield was employed as an operator in 1907, and in 1914 was suspended for 10 days for irregularity in handling train order. He resigned in 1916, being reemployed in January, 1918. His record since that time was clear. Fireman Kelly, Engineer Vincent and Switchman Washington went on duty at 6.00 a.m., after 18 hours of more off duty. Operator Barfield went on duty at 6.00 a.m., after a period off duty of 18 hours.

Attention is directed to the statement of Supt. Bowdoin that he thought the practice in vogue was a safe one, and that if there was a definite understanding with the operator, such a practice could be safe for future operation. This is true where there is a safe method of arriving at such an understanding, and where the use of the telephone is surrounded by the proper safeguards. This was not the case in this instance, however, and the foreman thought he had a definite understanding, when as a matter of fact he did not, and an accident resulted.

G.V.L.