

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE ATLANTIC COAST LINE RAILROAD NEAR BLANTON, FLA., ON OCTOBER 28, 1926.

December 2, 1926.

To the Commission:

On October 28, 1926, there was a head-end collision between a ballast train and a work train on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad near Blanton, Fla., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of six employees.

#### Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Gainesville District which extends between Trilby and St. Petersburg, Fla., a distance of 75.3 miles, this being a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred at a point about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile north of Blanton, approaching this point from the south the track is tangent for a distance of more than 1 mile, followed by a 40° curve to the left 780 feet in length, the accident occurring on the curve about 95 feet from its southern end. Approaching from the north there is a 40° curve to the left 837.5 feet in length and then 309.5 feet of tangent track, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade in the vicinity of the point of accident is generally descending for southbound trains, being 1.25 per cent at the point of accident. The northern end of the curve on which the accident occurred extends through a cut varying from 10 to 14 feet in depth, while the southern end of the curve is located on a fill of about 8 feet. The view of the point of accident from the engineman's side of a southbound engine is restricted to about 500 feet due to trees and shrubbery on the inside of the curve through the cut.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident which occurred at about 11 or 11.05 a.m.

#### Description

Work extra 273 consisted of two cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 273, headed south, and was in charge of Conductor Cox and Engineman Coveney. The crew held among other orders a copy of train order No. 20, reading as follows:

"Eng 273 work 601 am to 601 pm between Trilby and Tarpon Springs protecting against extra 915 south after 830 am against extra 903 north after 1215 pm not against other extras and not pass extra 233 south."

Extra 273 worked between the points named until about 11 a.m., at which time it was decided to return to Trilby for the purpose of clearing a superior train and to receive further orders. This train then proceeded northward and shortly after passing Blanton, 4.9 miles south of Trilby, it collided with extra 815 while traveling at a speed estimated from 10 to 15 miles an hour.

Southbound ballast extra 815 consisted of 20 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 815, and was in charge of Conductor Byington and Engineman Hoover. It arrived at Trilby over the Lakeland District at about 9 a.m., and at that point the crew received, among others, a copy of train order No. 20, Form 31, previously quoted. Extra 815 departed from Trilby at 10.55 a.m., according to the train sheet, and had proceeded southward about four miles when it collided with work extra 273 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 25 and 30 miles an hour.

Engine 815, together with its tender, turned over to the right; the first three cars in this train were demolished, while the fourth car and the forward truck of the fifth car were derailed. The tender of engine 273 was destroyed, while the cab of the engine was badly damaged. The employee killed was the fireman of engine 273.

#### Summary of evidence

Engineman Hoover, of extra 815, stated that about the time train No. 40 departed from Trilby, which was at 10.50 a.m., Conductor Byington handed him six orders, together with a clearance card which agreed with the number of orders received. Conductor Byington told him they had nothing on train No. 93, an opposing train, but if they hurried they could reach Blanton in time to clear that train. Engineman Hoover said he then began pulling out of the siding and inquired of the conductor as to what trains were mentioned in the orders, the conductor replying there was nothing except a meet at Tarpon Springs and a work train protecting against them somewhere between Trilby and Tarpon Springs. He said he then began reading the orders aloud to the conductor, and was passing the wye-track switch south of Trilby when he remarked to the conductor that he had not as yet read the slow orders in his possession and thought his train should stay at that point for the purpose

of meeting train No. 96, but the conductor stated they had plenty of time and urged him to proceed to Blanton. Engineman Hoover stated that when his train reached a point about 2 miles north of Blanton he made a slight application of the brakes and placed the throttle in drifting position. Shortly afterwards he saw extra 273 approaching, applied the brakes in emergency and jumped from the engine, he estimated the speed of his train at the time of collision at 20 to 25 miles an hour. Engineman Hoover further stated that when the conductor handed him the orders the conductor said nothing about a message from the dispatcher relating to extra 273 and that when reading the orders to the conductor, who was standing behind him, he did not recall erroneously reading train order No. 20 as referring to extra 315 instead of to extra 915, although he said he must have misread the order and was under the impression that the work extra was to protect against his own train, the conductor did not call his attention to any error. He also admitted that he read the orders hurriedly when leaving Tilby and failed to show them to his fireman as he was anxious to reach Blanton to clear the time of train No. 96. He said that Conductor Byington had been urging him to hurry, and that on one occasion the conductor had criticised him for stopping for a burning fusee.

Fireman Lloyd, of extra 815, stated that he did not notice Engineman Hoover read his orders when leaving Tilby although he was in position to have seen him do so except for a brief interval when he went to the front of the engine to change signals, during which time the engineman could not have had time to read more than one order. When his train was about 2 miles south of Tilby he saw the engineman take the orders from his pocket and start reading them, occasionally making some remarks to the conductor who was riding behind the engineman. The engineman appeared to become excited, eased off on the throttle and applied the air brakes, and shortly afterwards called a warning of the approach of the opposing train. Fireman Lloyd further stated that Engineman Hoover had not shown him the orders at any time, and that he had overheard the conductor instruct the engineman, over the engineman's protest, to proceed to Blanton to meet train No. 96. He also said the conductor had been urging the engineman to hurry all during the trip, and that an argument had ensued between the conductor and engineman when the engineman stopped for a burning fusee. After the accident occurred Engineman Hoover told him that he had misread the order.

Conductor Byington, of extra 815, who was riding on the engine at the time of the collision, stated that before departing from Ivesness, the originating point of extra 815 on the Lakeland District, he notified the dispatcher of the Lakeland District that he was going straight through to Largo on the Gainesville District. Upon arrival at

Trilby at about 9 a.m. he immediately went to the telegraph office and requested orders, but was informed by the operator that the dispatcher could not issue orders for his train for some time as he had to communicate with other trains on the line. Finally the operator handed him several orders, but he was positive that he did not receive a message from the dispatcher addressed to him to the effect that his train would have to protect against extra 273. He said that when the orders were handed to him the operator informed him that the dispatcher wanted him to hurry so as not to delay northbound extra 906, which he was to meet at Tarpon Springs. Conductor Byington stated that he read the orders hurriedly, and read train order No. 20 as directing the work extra to protect against extra 315, he admitted, however, that he received the orders about 25 minutes before his train departed and had ample time in which to have read them carefully, but claimed his copy of the order was somewhat blurred. When he handed the orders to Engineman Hoover the train started immediately and the engineman began reading the orders aloud to him, and when the engineman read train order No. 20 he understood him to say extra 315 instead of extra 915. Conductor Byington also said that he had not shown the orders to his flagman, but had shown them to the head brakeman who looked them over and returned them to him. Upon reaching the south vye switch he about decided to have the train backed in at that point to clear northbound train No. 96, but upon inquiry from the engineman he told the engineman that as the train was then moving they had plenty of time to proceed to Blanton and get into clear.

Head Brakeman Monk, of extra 815, who was also riding on the engine at the time of the collision, stated that when the conductor returned to the engine from the telegraph office he handed the orders to the engineman and instructed him to proceed, the train starting immediately. He said he was riding on the fireman's side of the engine and did not hear any conversation after the train left Trilby, and he also said he was not shown the train orders. His first intimation of anything wrong was when he noticed extra 273 approaching, and he estimated the speed of his own train at the time of the collision to have been 25 or 30 miles an hour.

Flagman Morgan, of extra 915, had no knowledge of the orders received at Trilby. After the accident Engineman Hoover told him he had read the orders hurriedly when leaving Trilby, and did not know he had made a mistake until he read the orders again, just before he saw extra 273 approaching.

Engineman Coveney, of extra 273, stated that his train had orders to work between Trilby and Tarpon Springs, protecting against southbound extra 915 and northbound extra 906 and not protecting against other extra trains. After working south of Blanton his train moved to Blanton, where it met trains No. 40 and extra 915. His train then returned

to the point where it had been working, and in a short time it was decided to get into clear for train No. 96. After his train passed the switches at Blanton he assumed it was the intention to go to Trilby and shortly afterwards he noticed extra 815 approaching, about 12 to 14 car-lengths distant, and at once applied the air brakes in emergency and jumped from his engine.

The testimony of other members of the crew of extra 273 produced no facts of importance, as, with the exception of the fireman who was killed, they were riding in the caboose and were unaware of anything unusual until the accident occurred.

Dispatcher Parham, who was handling trains on the Gainesville District, stated that at 9.40 a.m. the operator at Trilby asked for orders for extra 815 to run from Trilby to Largo. As he was unaware of this train being on the line, it having arrived at Trilby from the Lakeland District, it was impossible to issue train orders until after he had communicated with other trains on the line. After several attempts to locate extra 273 he finally issued train orders to extra 815 and in addition, as a precaution, sent a message to the operator at Trilby addressed to Conductor Byington, calling his attention to the fact that his train would have to protect against extra 273, as well as two other trains mentioned in the orders issued at Trilby. Dispatcher Parham emphatically stated that he did not give Conductor Byington instructions to hurry so as not to delay extra 906, as that train was a local which had considerable work to do and he did not expect it to be in position to be delayed. He said it was customary for the dispatcher of the Lakeland District to advise him when trains were to use the Gainesville District, but in this instance such action was not taken. He also stated that the reason he issued the message to Conductor Byington, in addition to the train orders, was that the conductor frequently failed to report his train and its destination and he considered the conductor to be very careless.

Operator Luc, on duty at Trilby, stated that extra 815 arrived at Trilby about 8.55 a.m. and at about 9.35 a.m. the conductor came to the office and asked for orders to run to Largo. When he asked the dispatcher for orders the dispatcher informed him that as usual Conductor Byington had reported for orders without previous notice. He said that after some delay caused by the dispatcher trying to locate extra 273 the last of the orders was finally issued and made complete at 9.57 a.m. He then received two messages from the dispatcher addressed to Conductor Byington, one of which called the conductor's attention to the fact that he had to protect against extra 273. Operator Luc said he delivered the orders, together with a clearance card and the two messages, to Conductor Byington, who read the order aloud to

him, reading them correctly, and looked at the messages but did not read them aloud. He said the conductor separated the orders, put his own copies, together with the messages, in his pocket and left the office with another set of the orders in his hand presumably for the engineer. He further stated that Conductor Byington complained about being delayed at Trilby, but that he had no previous knowledge of the existence of extra 815 until it arrived at his station; the conductor appeared extremely nervous over the delay and inquired as to whether or not train No. 96 was on time, being informed that such was the case. Operator Luc said that it had been the practice for Fireman Johnson, the regular fireman on engine 815, who was off duty on this trip, to accompany Conductor Byington to the office and assist him in handling and analyzing his orders and that the conductor appeared to rely on him considerably for that purpose.

### Conclusions

This accident was caused by the misreading of a train order, for which Conductor Byington and Engineman Hoover, of extra 815, are responsible.

The statements of Conductor Byington and Engineman Hoover are to the effect that they read train order No. 20 as directing work extra 273 to protect against extra 815, whereas the order actually directed the work extra to protect against extra 915. Extra 915 was mentioned in one of the other orders received at Trilby, as well as in the message from the dispatcher which Conductor Byington claimed he did not receive, and yet the same mistake apparently was made by both men in the reading of both of the orders in which extra 915 was mentioned. The conductor said his copy of train order No. 20 was blurred, but examination indicated that this was not the fact, and it also appeared that the figure "9" was very legible and that in no way could the most casual observer have been justified in reading the order as applying to extra 815. The engineman said he read the orders hurriedly when departing from Trilby, but if the statement of the fireman is correct then the engineman did not read the orders at all until just before the accident occurred, but instead he relied on what the conductor had told him concerning the contents of the orders. Regardless of how the error occurred, however, both of these employees were experienced men, and there is no excuse for such a blunder.

The head brakeman, who had had only two weeks' experience, said the conductor did not show him the orders, which statement was denied by the conductor, neither the fireman nor the flagman had seen the orders. Had the engineman and conductor shown their orders to those other employees, as required by the rules, it is possible the error would have been detected in time to have prevented the accident.

Had an adequate block-signal system been in use on this line, this accident probably would not have occurred; an adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented it.

With the exception of the head brakeman of extra 815 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.