

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 NEAR BOND'S MILL, FLA., ON APRIL 5, 1923.

May 1, 1923.

To the Commission:

On April 5, 1923, there was a head-end collision between an express train and a freight train on the Atlantic Coast Line near Bond's Mill, Fla., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on that part of the Jacksonville District, Third Division, extending between Jacksonville and Sanford, Fla., a distance of 124.3 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is 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 2,500 feet north of Bond's Mill station, proceeding northward from Bond's Mill station toward the point of accident, the track is tangent for 370 feet, then a curve of 1° to the right 888 feet in length, and is then tangent to the point of accident, a distance of 1,265 feet, approaching the point of accident from the north, the track is tangent for over a mile, the grade in this vicinity is practically level. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 2.22 a.m.

Description.

Southbound express train second No. 83 consisted of 13 express cars, 4 deadhead Pullman cars and 1 passenger coach used as a caboose, in the order named, hauled by engine 435, and was in charge of Conductor Monger and Engineman Wells. This train left Jacksonville, April 4, at 11 p.m., one hour late, and arrived at Seville, 17 miles north of the point of accident, at 1.53 a.m., where train orders No. 9, on Form 19, and No. 10, on Form 31, were received, train order No. 10 reading as follows:

"2nd No.83 wait at DeLeon Springs until
2.30 a.m. for Extra 430 north."

Train second No. 83 left Seville at 2.02 a.m., one hour and one minute late, passed the south switch of the passing track at DeLeon Springs at 2.21 a.m., and collided with northbound extra 430 at a point 4,997 feet beyond the south switch, while traveling at a speed of about 10 miles an hour.

Northbound freight train extra 430, consisting of 44 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 430, in charge of Conductor Christy and Engineman Tyre, left Rands Yard, Sanford, according to train sheet, at 12.35 a.m., and arrived at Delana, 8.2 miles south of DeLeon Springs, at 1.44 a.m. where train order No. 10, previously quoted, written on Form 19, was received; extra 430 departed from this point at 1.58 a.m., according to the train sheet, and collided with train second No. 83 at a point about 1/2 mile north of Bond's Mill, while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 30 and 40 miles an hour.

Both engines remained upright, with only the forward pony truck wheels of engine 425 derailed. The first car in train second No. 83 was destroyed, while the first 12 cars of extra 430 were derailed and thrown to both sides of the track, being practically demolished. The employee killed was the fireman of extra 430.

Summary of evidence.

Engineman Wells, of train second No. 83, stated that at Seville the head brakeman delivered train orders Nos. 9 and 10, which he read, but for some reason, which he could not explain, misread train order No. 10 as 2.20 a.m. instead of 2.30 a.m., making the same mistake each of the two times he read this order between Seville and DeLeon Springs. He said that he did not show or read the orders either to the head brakeman or to the fireman, explaining that he had discovered the fireman to be somewhat illiterate, not appearing to understand other orders he had handed him to read, he had, therefore, adopted the plan of only telling the fireman the meaning of orders received, but on this occasion he said he failed to acquaint either the fireman or head brakeman with the contents of the orders received at Seville, and could advance no reason for this omission. He stated that after having passed DeLeon Springs a distance of about one-fourth mile, while traveling at a speed of about 50 miles an hour, he saw the reflection of a light on the rails on a curve ahead, and immediately applied the air brakes in emergency. He remained on the engine until within two car lengths of the approaching train, at which time speed had been reduced to about 8 or 10 miles an hour, and pumped just before the collision occurred. He further stated he did not feel the air brakes applied on the train prior to the time he applied them himself.

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Fireman Mayo said the engineman told him they were to meet train first No. 83 at Orange City Junction, but did not mention any other orders, and the first he knew of anything wrong was when the engineman applied the air brakes in emergency, at which time he was on the deck of the engine. His other statements practically corroborated those of the engineman, and the same is true of the statements of Head Brakeman Scott, who was riding on the engine. The head brakeman also said the conductor did not tell him the contents of the train orders, also that he did not know anything about the brakes being applied from the rear of the train.

Conductor Monger, of train second No. 83, stated that at Seville, in order to save time, he delegated the head brakeman to deliver the train orders to the engineman. When the train departed, he rode in the head Pullman car, which was the fourth car from the caboose, but later returned to the Pullman car next to the caboose, and was in that car approaching DeLeon Springs. As the train was passing the station he went to the rear platform and opened the left vestibule door, on which side the passing track at this station is located, to ascertain whether extra 430 had arrived at DeLeon Springs for his train. When within four or five car lengths of the leaving end of this passing track he discovered extra 430 had not arrived and that his train was leaving ahead of the time specified in train order No. 10, and said he immediately went inside of the Pullman car and applied the air brakes by opening the conductor's emergency valve, he estimated the speed to have been 50 miles an hour while passing DeLeon Springs. He further said it had not been his practice to have the head brakeman deliver orders to the engineman, and advanced no reason for his failure to show the flagman the orders received at Seville.

Flagman Gillon, of train second No. 83, stated that the conductor had shown him all orders received at Jacksonville and other points on the trip, but did not show him the orders received at Seville, as the conductor did not return to the caboose after leaving that station.

Engineman Tyre, of extra 430, stated that upon arriving at DeLand, the train was pulled in on the siding to meet train first No. 83. Train Order No. 10, on Form 19, was received, the head brakeman delivering the order, and as soon as train first No. 83 arrived, the train again entered the main track, departing from DeLand, according to his statement, at 2 a.m. Although DeLeon Springs is 8.2 miles distant, he considered he had ample time to be into clear at that point at 2.20 a.m. for second No. 83, extra trains being required to clear the time of regular trains 10 minutes. He stated that upon passing Glenwood, 3.2 miles from DeLeon Springs, on a descending grade, he had attained a speed of about 35 or 40 miles an hour, he noted that it was 2.16 a.m., and realizing the time

would be short in clearing train second No. 83 by 10 minutes at DeLeon Springs, he instructed the head brakeman to have flagging equipment ready and to be prepared to go forward and flag that train as soon as he had opened the switch. When approaching the curve just north of Bond's Mill station he observed the reflection of a headlight on the track ahead, thought it was the headlight of train second No. 83, awaiting their arrival at DeLeon Springs, and made a light application of the air brakes. He estimated that train second No. 83 was only five car lengths distant when he realized it was approaching and had passed DeLeon Springs, and at once applied the air brakes in emergency. He estimated the speed at the time of the accident to have been 20 or 30 miles an hour.

The statements of Head Brakeman Thursby agreed with those of Engineman Tyre, while those of Conductor Christy and Flagman Shoemaker added nothing of importance.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of train second No. 83 to wait at DeLeon Springs until 2.30 a.m. for extra 430, for which Conductor Monger and Engineman Wells are responsible. A contributing cause was the operation of extra 430 on short time against train second No. 83, for which Conductor Christy and Engineman Tyre are responsible.

Engineman Wells misread the train order he had received, and was of the impression his train was to wait for extra 430 until 2.20 a.m., instead of 2.30 a.m., he acknowledged his responsibility and was unable to offer any explanation as to how he happened to make the mistake. The evidence clearly indicates that Conductor Monger was not giving proper attention to his duties, and if he applied the air brakes at all it must have been done at about the time the engineman applied them, at which time the train was some distance beyond the point at which it should have stopped and waited for extra 430.

The crew of extra 430 were of the opinion when leaving Deland that their train would have time to reach DeLeon Springs and be into clear 10 minutes before train second No. 83 was due to leave that point on its wait order. But when passing Glenwood, the engineman, at least, realized that he did not have sufficient time and told the head brakeman to be ready with flagging equipment as soon as the train reached DeLeon Springs. When it was found that extra 430 did not have time to reach DeLeon Springs, the train should not have proceeded except under flag protection.

The testimony of the various employees is to the effect that it is not the practice for brakemen to deliver train orders to enginemen, yet in this case train orders were delivered to the engineman of each train by a brakeman, including an order on Form 31, the error in reading which primarily resulted in the occurrence of this accident. The majority of the employees also said it is not the practice to use the 10 minutes clearance time unless under flag protection. One of them, however, stated that the full time was usually used, and in this particular case the requirements of the rules were not observed by the crew of extra 430 in their attempt to reach DeLeon Springs, and a check of the train sheet also shows that extra 430 arrived at Deland at 1.44 a.m., only seven minutes before train first No. 83 was due to leave that point, as a matter of fact train first No. 83 arrived at Deland at 1.51 a.m. and departed at 1.55 a.m. In connection with this use of the 10 minutes clearance time, attention is also called to the fact that a bulletin was issued by Trainmaster Hansell on February 18, 1943, reading as follows:

"ALL CONDUCTORS AND ENGINEERS:

It has been brought to my attention that close runs are being made by inferior trains against superior trains. In other words, "SMOKING IN." This is dangerous and the company does not expect such chances to be taken. You are liable to kill your very best friend and destroy a lot of valuable property as well as lose your job that you have worked for, for years.

Stop making these close runs before you are sorry."

In response to questions, however, Trainmaster Hansell said he had issued this bulletin merely as a safety measure, and that he had not observed any infractions of the clearance rule prior to the issuance of the bulletin.

From the facts developed as a result of this investigation, it is not believed that the rules referred to above are rigidly observed and obeyed by the employees or properly enforced by the officials, and prompt and efficient measures should be taken by the supervising officials of this railroad to see that these and all other rules affecting the safe operation of trains be observed and obeyed by all concerned.

Had an adequate block system been in use on this line this accident would undoubtedly have been prevented.

The employees involved were experienced men, 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.