

Atchison

687.

CIRCULAR *June 22/20*

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED
ON THE ATLANTIC COAST LINE RAILROAD NEAR
JESUP, GA., ON APRIL 7, 1920.

June 11, 1920.

On April 7, 1920, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train and a passenger train on the Atlantic Coast Line railroad at Jesup, Ga., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and slight injury of 3 passengers. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred on the Savannah District, which extends between Savannah, Ga., and Jacksonville, Fla. Between Folkston and Jesup the district consists of two separate single-track routes, one of which is known as the "Jesup Short Line", the distance between Folkston and Jesup via this route being 54.5 miles. The other route is known as the "Waycross Line", and the distance between the two stations via this route is 73.2 miles. Trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block signal system being in use. Within the incorporated limits of Jesup the speed of all trains is restricted to 6 miles an hour by time-table instructions and also by slow boards reading "Reduce to 6 miles an hour", which boards are located about 2,000 feet inside the incorporated limits on both the Waycross Line and the Jesup Short Line.

The accident occurred within the yard limits of Jesup at a point about 1,700 feet south of the passenger station. There

are three crossovers in the yard by which northbound trains may cross from the Jesup Short Line to the Weyeross Line, the south crossover being about 2,400 feet south of the passenger station and just north of a coal chute; the second crossover is opposite the passenger station, and 900 feet north of the station the Jesup Short Line ends by a connection with the Weyeross Line, referred to as the "north switch". There are also two crossovers by which northbound trains on the Weyeross Line may cross to the Jesup Short Line, one of which is located just north of the south crossover mentioned above.

Approaching the point of accident from the south on the Jesup Short Line, the track is straight for several miles, followed by a 3-degree curve to the right 860 feet in length and then 682 feet of tangent track to the point of accident. The grade is practically level. On account of trees on the inside of the curve the view of an engineman approaching the point of accident on a northbound train is limited to about 1,300 feet and the south crossover is visible for about the same distance. The switch at this crossover is operated from a switchstand, the night switch indications being a white light for the Jesup Short Line and a red light for the crossover. The yardmaster at Jesup directs the movement of all trains through Jesup Yard, using both lines in either direction between the south crossover switch and the north switch as he deems advisable. The weather at the time of the accident was clear.

Northbound freight train No. 212, in charge of Conductor Jepson and Engineman Hurlburt, consisted of engine 205, 46 loaded

cars and a caboose. This train was being operated over the way-cross route and had a meet with southbound passenger train No. 57 at Jesup. Northbound passenger train No. 86, which is operated over the Jesup Short Line, was several hours late, and trains Nos. 212, 57 and 86 were due to arrive at Jesup at about the same time. Night Yard Foreman Bennett therefore instructed Switchman Murphy to go to the south end of the yard and in case train No. 212 arrived ahead of train No. 86, to have train No. 212 cross over to the Jesup Short Line in order to permit southbound train No. 57 to pass; also to hold train No. 86 at the south crossover switch until train No. 57 had passed and then to divert train No. 86 to the Waycross Line through the south crossover. Train No. 212 arrived at the south end of the Jesup yard at about 10.05 p. m. and Switchman Murphy, following the instructions of the night yard foreman, lined up the switch and train No. 212 headed through the crossover, the engineman bringing it to a stop with the rear end a short distance into clear on the Jesup Short Line. Train No. 212 had been standing in this position for a time variously estimated at from 1 to 5 minutes when its rear end was struck by northbound passenger train No. 86. According to the testimony of employees, the rear markers on the caboose were burning brightly and displaying red to the south at the time, and while Flagman Roberts of train No. 212 did not go back to flag, he used his white light in signalling the engineman of train No. 86 to stop, as did also Switchman Murphy, who was standing at the switch about 700 feet to the rear of train No. 212.

Northbound passenger train no. 86 was in charge of Conductor Ivey and Engineman Leske, and consisted of engine 1531, 1 express car, 1 baggage car, 2 coaches, 1 dining car and 8 Pullman sleeping cars. It left Jacksonville at 7.45 p. m., 4 hours and 10 minutes late, and passed Broadhurst, the last open telegraph office, 9.7 miles south of Jesup, at 10.04 p. m., 4 hours and 16 minutes late. Approaching Jesup, it passed the slow board at a speed variously estimated at between 25 and 35 miles an hour and was running about 15 or 20 miles an hour when the collision occurred. The engineman did not acknowledge the stop signals of Switchman Murphy and William Roberts, and while an application of the brakes was believed to have been made at about the time the train passed the south crossover switch, in view of the rate of speed of this train it was then too late to stop before the collision occurred.

The caboose and three rear cars of train no. 212 were totally demolished and the fourth car ahead of the caboose was derailed. The front end of the engine of train No. 86 was slightly damaged while the express car was raised up and forced the tender cistern forward into the cab of the engine. Debris from the wreckage came in contact with train no. 57, which was passing on the Waveross line at the time, and the two rear cars of that train were slightly damaged. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman of train no. 86.

This accident was caused by the failure of the engineman of train no. 86 to comply with the proscribed speed restriction

and to obey stop signals of a switchman and the flagman of the preceding train.

The investigation disclosed that the flagman of train No. 86, who was riding on the rear car of the train, noticed an application of the brakes on that car as the train approached Jesup, and the flagman of train No. 212 as well as the switchman saw fire flying from the wheels just before the accident occurred. So far as could be determined, the brakes on train No. 86 were in proper operative condition, and the evidence indicates that they were applied before the accident occurred. As Engineman Leake was killed in the accident, the reason for his failure to observe the 6-miles-an-hour speed restriction could not be determined. He was flagged by the switchman in ample time, if he had had his train under control as required by the rules and had observed the flagman's signals, to have brought his train to a stop without colliding with the preceding train.

The investigation also disclosed that it is not uncommon for passenger trains on the Jesup Short Line to disregard the 6-miles-an-hour speed restriction and to pass the coal chute at speeds of 20 to 25 miles an hour.

It was also developed that there was a misunderstanding on the part of conductors and enginemen as to where the Jesup Short Line terminates, some of these employees stating that they understood it to terminate at the south switch, and many others at the north switch.

The Superintendent and most of the employees involved in this accident stated that the Jesup Short Line ended at the

south crossover switch and that the continuation of the track north of that point is simply a yard track to be used for any purpose at the direction of the yard foreman and that trains occupying that track are not required to be protected in accordance with flagging rule No. 99.

There are no specific instructions designating the location of the junction of the Jesup Short Line and the Waycross Line, nor any specific instructions governing the movement of trains through the yard. If the junction of the two routes is at the north switch, as stated by a majority of experienced employees who were questioned regarding the matter, a train occupying the track where train No. 212 stood when struck would be occupying the main track and, under the rules, should be protected as required by rule 99. If, however, the junction of the two routes is at the south crossover, train No. 212 was not occupying the main track at the time of the accident. Special instructions in the current time-table applicable in this case read as follows:

"Trains must approach end of double track, junctions, railroad crossings at grade, prepared to stop, unless switches and signals are right and track is clear."

"All trains will reduce speed through incorporated limits of Jesup to six miles per hour."

The interests of safety require not only that the prescribed speed restriction be enforced, but also a definite understanding on the part of the employees as to the location of the junction point of the Jesup Short Line with the Waycross Line and definite instructions as to the method of handling trains

within the yard of Jessup.

Engineman Leake entered the service of the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad Company as engineman in 1899 and his record was good.

At the time of the accident the crew of train No. 212 had been on duty 11 hours and 15 minutes, while the crew of train No. 86 had been on duty 3 hours and 45 minutes, prior to which all of the employees had had sufficient off-duty periods to comply with the provisions of the Federal hours of service law.