

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 NEWARK, GA., ON
SEPTEMBER 27, 1925.

October 24, 1925.

To the Commission:

On September 27, 1925, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad near Newark, Ga., which resulted in the death of 1 passenger and 4 employees, and the injury of 47 passengers, 5 persons carried under contract and 6 employees.

Location and Method of Operation

District of the Second

This accident occurred on the Waycross/Division, extending between Waycross and Thomasville, Ga., a distance of 104 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 collision occurred at a point about $1\frac{1}{4}$ miles east of Newark, a non-train-order office 5.1 miles east of Thomasville; approaching the point of accident from the west there is a 1° curve to the left 1,443 feet in length and then tangent track for a distance of 792 feet, the collision occurring on the tangent at a point 160 feet from its western end, approaching from the east there is a 1° curve to the left 2,980 feet in length, followed by the tangent on which the collision occurred. The grade for about 1 mile in both directions from the point of accident is descending for eastbound trains, varying from 0.37 to 1.34 per cent, being at the maximum at the point of accident. Due to the curves, and cuts beyond the curves preceding the point of collision in either direction, the range of vision of the enginemen of the opposing trains was limited to a distance of about 800 feet.

The weather was cloudy, with intermittent showers on the afternoon of the accident, which occurred at about 4.19 p.m.

Description

Eastbound passenger train No. 180 consisted of one combination mail and baggage car, two coaches, and one Pullman sleeping car, all of steel construction, hauled by engine 455, and was in charge of Conductor Tomberlin and

Engineman McGee. At Thomasville train order No. 45, Form 31, was received reading as follows:

"No 180 meet No 185 at Newark No 180 wait at Boston until 430 PM Pidcock until 435 PM Dixie until 440 PM Quitman until 450 PM Ousley until 5 PM Kinderlou until 505 pm"

This train left Thomasville at 4.08 p m., according to the train sheet, 43 minutes late, passed Newark and collided with train No. 185 about $1\frac{1}{2}$ miles east of that station while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been from 40 to 60 miles an hour.

Westbound passenger train No. 185 consisted of one combination mail and baggage car and two coaches hauled by engine 949, and was in charge of Conductor Ballard and Engineman Parker. The first two cars were of wooden construction while the other car was of all-steel construction. At Quitman, Ga., 21.2 miles from Newark, the crew received train order No. 45, Form 19, providing for the meet with train No. 180 at Newark, the train departing from Quitman, according to the train sheet, at 3.48 p.m., 13 minutes late. It left Boston, the last station east of and 7 miles from Newark, at 4.08 p.m., one minute late, and collided with train No. 180 while traveling at a speed variously estimated to have been from 25 to 45 miles an hour.

Both engines turned over to the south of the track and came to rest on their sides badly damaged, the two tenders were practically demolished. The wooden combination mail and baggage car in train No. 185 telescoped the first coach of that train about half its length, both cars being totally destroyed. The forward trucks of the rear coach in train No. 185, and the forward truck of the first car in train No. 180 were derailed. Owing to the all-steel construction of the cars in train No. 180 they sustained but little damage except to draft rigging and vestibule ends. The employees killed were the enginemen of the two trains and the baggageman and train porter of train No. 185.

Summary of Evidence

Conductor Tomberlin, of train No. 180, said he received train order No. 45 at Thomasville, read it aloud to the operator, and then went to the engine and delivered one copy of it to the engineman, who read it aloud to him and appeared to understand the meet provided therein with train No. 185. After comparing time with the engineman he went to the combination car and handed his own copy of the order to the baggagemaster who also read and appeared to understand the order. The signal was then given for the

train to depart and he boarded the front end of the first coach and commenced collecting transportation and was so engaged, having reached a position in about the middle of the second car, when the collision occurred. He did not think the brakes were applied prior to the collision, which occurred while his train was traveling at a speed of about 45 miles an hour. Conductor Tomberlin further stated that he did not tell the train porter or the flagman of the meet provided for in train order No. 45, saying that in this instance the train porter was not where he could conveniently tell him and that he usually told the flagman when he reached the rear of the train where the flagman was riding. His reason for overlooking the meeting point was the fact that he was so busily engaged in taking up transportation that he did not hear the whistle signal sounded as his train approached Newark and did not know when his train approached and passed that station.

Baggagemaster Wilkins, of train No. 180, stated that Conductor Tomberlin handed him some orders just before the train left Thomasville and told him that they would meet train No. 185 at Newark. He read the orders as the train was leaving, placed them in a pigeon-hole above his desk and then turned to his duties with the mail and baggage, being so engaged when he felt the brakes applied in emergency just before the impact of the collision. He estimated the speed of his train just prior to the collision to have been about 55 miles an hour. Baggagemaster Wilkins said he had been depending upon hearing the station whistle-signal sounded as his train approached Newark, but did not hear it and was unaware that his train passed that station.

Flagman Woodard, of train No. 180, said he boarded the train at the rear of the last car as it departed from Thomasville and was riding in the rear section of that car at the time of the collision. He had no knowledge of the meet order held by the conductor and had made no effort to ascertain what orders were held by Conductor Tomberlin before the train departed from Thomasville as he expected the conductor to tell him, as was his usual custom, when he reached the rear of the train, after he had completed taking up transportation. Flagman Woodard knew the rules required the conductor to show the flagman all orders received but said it was customary for the conductor only to inform him verbally of the orders received.

Train Porter Albritton, of train No. 180, said he saw Conductor Tomberlin hand some orders to Engineman McGee; he boarded the train immediately ahead of the conductor and intended to ask about the orders received after he had closed the vestibule door, but forgot to do so. He knew when his train passed Newark and estimated the speed of his train at the time of the collision to have been about 50 miles an hour.

Fireman Aiken, of train No. 130, stated that on leaving Thomasville Engineman McGee made a running test of the air brakes and later told him that they would adjust the lubricator at Boston, a station about 12 miles beyond, as the lubricator was not feeding properly. He said that Engineman McGee had some orders in his hand as he got on the engine at Thomasville but that he did not ask about the orders nor did the engineman volunteer any information concerning them. After leaving Thomasville the whistle was sounded at all the usual points, including the station signal when approaching Newark, and his first knowledge of anything wrong was when he saw train No. 185 approaching just before the collision occurred. He called a warning to the engineman and just before he jumped from the engine he saw Engineman McGee on his seat box with his hand on the brake valve, which had been placed in the emergency position, making every effort possible to stop the train. Fireman Aiken further stated that some time previously, when Engineman McGee first came on this run, he asked the engineman, as had been his custom, what orders had been received and had been rebuffed, the engineman replying that "when he had orders he would tell him," and not wishing to displease the engineman he had not since that time made any inquiries about orders, on some occasions the engineman told him of the orders received and at other times he did not give him this information. He said Engineman McGee apparently was in his usual health and appeared to be normal in every respect.

Conductor Ballard, of train No. 185, said he received train order No. 45, at Quitman, and after delivering one copy to the engineman, he gave his own copy to the baggage-man, verbally informing the flagman and train porter of the contents of the order. His first intimation of anything wrong was when he felt the air brakes applied in emergency, immediately after which the collision occurred. He estimated the speed of his train to have been about 40 or 45 miles an hour just prior to the brake application and at about 30 or 35 miles an hour at the time of the impact. Flagman Mays said he did not see the order received at Quitman but that the conductor had told him of the meet with train No. 180 at Newark. Fireman Smith said Engineman Parker read to him the order received at Quitman, which provided for the meet with train No. 180 at Newark. Their other statements brought out no additional facts of importance.

Superintendent Wall, of the Waycross District, stated that while the rules required that conductors show their orders to flagmen, this is not done on passenger trains, it being customary for conductors to leave their own copy of train orders with the baggagemaster and then verbally to

inform the flagman and other members of the train crew of the contents of the orders. He said he knew of this practice, and that it was contrary to the rules, but that no steps had been taken to stop it. The practice was due he said to the fact that the baggagemaster was the ranking trainman and also ^{to} the fact that the flagman is very often so far away due to the length of the train and the flagman's other duties, that the conductor often is not able to communicate with him for some considerable length of time.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of the crew of train No. 180 to obey a meet order, for which Engineman McGee, Conductor Tomberlin and Baggagemaster Wilkins are responsible.

No reason is known for the failure of Engineman McGee to obey the meet order, Conductor Tomberlin and Baggagemaster Wilkins were so engrossed in their work that neither of them knew when their train passed the meeting point. In view of the practice existing in this district under which the conductor of a passenger train informs the flagman verbally of orders received, when he reaches the rear of the train where the flagman is riding, which practice seems to have official sanction, no responsibility for the occurrence of this accident can be attached to the flagman for his failure to ascertain what orders had been received by the conductor.

This accident calls attention to the practice which exists with some enginemen, where they have colored firemen, of not showing such firemen the orders which they have received, or making them acquainted with the contents of such orders. A similar situation has been found to exist in previous accident investigations, and in those cases, as in the case here under discussion, it is possible that the accident would not have occurred had the fireman been in possession of the information which the rules require to be furnished to him.

The evidence indicates that of the six persons composing the crew of this train, including the train porter, only the engineman, conductor and baggagemaster knew of the order to meet train No. 185 at Newark. The rules require that "conductors must show their orders to flagmen and enginemen to firemen, who are required to read them"; had this rule been enforced by the officials and obeyed by the employees it is possible that the subordinate employees on this train might have paid sufficient attention to its operation to see that it did not pass the meeting point. There is no excuse for the occurrence of an accident of this

character, and it is incumbent on the operating officials to see that all the rules governing the handling of train orders are rigidly obeyed by all concerned.

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.

Engineman McGee had been employed as an engineman for a period of 43 years and had a clear record, while his fireman had had nearly 23 years' service as a fireman, also with a clear record; the other employees involved were also experienced men. At the time of the accident none of the employees had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.