

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE ATLANTIC
COAST LINE RAILROAD AT WAYS, GA., ON DECEMBER 17, 1920.

January 15, 1921.

On December 17, 1920, there was a rear-end collision between two passenger trains on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad at Ways, Ga., which resulted in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 19 passengers, 4 other persons, and one employee. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred on that part of the Savannah District extending between Jesup, Ga., and Central Junction, near Savannah, Ga., a distance of 57.9 miles, and is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. A time interval of 10 minutes is maintained at open offices between trains in the same direction. Approaching the point of accident from the south the track is straight for a distance of about 33 miles, while the grade is practically level for several miles. At the time of the accident the weather was clear.

Northbound passenger train No. 86 consisted of 1 express car, 1 mail car, 1 baggage car, 2 coaches, 2 Pullman sleeping cars, 1 dining car, and 4 Pullman sleeping cars, in the order named, hauled by engine 1550, and was in charge of Conductor Jarrott and Engineman Floyd. All of the cars in this train were of all-steel construction, except the first coach, which was a steel-underframe car. Train No. 86 left Jesup at 8.49 p.m. and

just after passing Palmer, which is 22.5 miles north of Jesup, was brought to a stop on account of a blazing hot box on the dining car. After a delay of 47 minutes at this point, the train proceeded to Ways, 18.9 miles beyond Palmer, where it was again stopped on account of the hot box. This second stop was made at a point just north of the south switch of the passing track, which was occupied by a southbound freight train, and after a delay of about 4 minutes the train pulled ahead a distance of about 500 feet for the purpose of bringing the dining car opposite the caboose of the freight train so that the crew of the freight train could assist in replacing the brass bearing in the journal box. The train had been standing at the latter location about 3 minutes when its rear end was struck by train No. 22.

Northbound passenger train No. 22 consisted of 2 express cars, 1 baggage car, 2 coaches, and 1 Pullman sleeping car, hauled by engine 243, and was in charge of Conductor Adair and Engineman Crawford. All of the cars were of wooden construction except the first car, which had a steel underframe. Train No. 22 left Jesup at 8.⁵25 p.m., overtook train No. 86 at Palmer, and stopped behind it for approximately three-quarters of an hour. Train No. 22 passed Daniel, 4.1 miles from Ways, at 10.40 p.m., 10 minutes behind train No. 86, and collided with that train at Ways while travelling at a speed estimated to have been from 30 to 35 miles an hour.

The rear sleeping car of train No. 86 was penetrated by engine 243 a distance of about 8 feet and considerably damaged. The rear end of engine 243 was raised up and came to rest on the

middle of the tender frame, the cistern being pushed backward into the front end of the first car. The first car telescoped the second car its entire length, the first car along with the tender cistern, resting on the floor of the second car, both of these cars were practically destroyed. The employee killed was the engineman of train No. 22.

When train No. 86 was being brought to a stop at Ways, Engineman Floyd sounded the whistle signal for the flagman to protect the train, and after the train had stopped he and Conductor Jarrott saw the flagman going back to flag. Flagman Roberts had used all of his fuses except some which were in the baggage car, and on his way back to flag stopped at the engine of extra 467, which was on the passing track, and borrowed two fuses from the engine crew. Shortly afterwards Conductor Greenly, of extra 467, told Engineman Floyd to pull ahead for the purpose of bringing the dining car opposite the caboose of extra 467. When the proceed signal for this movement was given the fireman of train No. 86 sounded two short blasts on the whistle, Engineman Floyd being on the ground opposite the engine at this time. As the train started to pull ahead, Engineman Floyd looked back, but did not see anything of the flagman. Flagman Roberts, however, had heard the two short blasts of the whistle, thought the train was ready to proceed and ran in to overtake it, leaving the two fuses on the ground opposite engine 467 as he returned. Before his train came to a stop, however, Flagman Roberts realized that it was only going to move forward a short distance and started back a second time. According to his statement he started

back on the run and continued running until he was passed by the engine of train No. 22. Flagman Roberts did not use torpedoes and did not carry any with him on either occasion, it also appeared that he did not leave a lighted fusee when he returned to his train, because, according to his statement, he did not want to delay train No. 22. After the accident Flagman Roberts pointed out where he was located when he flagged train No. 22; this spot was 572 feet from the point of accident.

Conductor Jarrott paid no further attention to the flagman after seeing him go back when the train made the first stop at Ways, assuming that as the Flagman had not been recalled he would not return to the train. Fireman Hall and Train Porter Patterson, both of train No. 86, saw Flagman Roberts going back when the train made the first stop at Ways, while Baggage-master Smallbones saw the flagman running back to flag just before the accident occurred. The statements of Engineman Floyd and Baggage-master Smallbones indicated that the view was not obscured by smoke or steam from engine 467, which was verified by the statement of Engineman Dennison, who was in charge of that engine. Fireman Thomas, of engine 467, said that there was some steam escaping from the relief valves but that it did not interfere with his view of the approach of train No. 22. Engineman Dennison also said that the markers on the rear end of train No. 86, which had first stopped about 5 freight-car lengths north of his engine, were burning brightly.

Fireman James, of train No. 22, stated that when approaching Ways he was standing in the cab leaning against his

seat box and looking out of the side and front windows. He did not see the rear end of train No. 83 until after passing the engine of extra 467, at which time he called to Engineman Crawford, "Look out, there is 83's red lights". Fireman James said Engineman Crawford turned and looked at air and that he himself then jumped across to the Engineman's side of the cab and applied the air brakes in emergency, after which he jumped from the right side of the engine, he had not noticed the flagman. The statements of Fireman James, and also of Conductor Adair, of train No. 83, indicated that Engineman Crawford appeared to be in normal physical condition. Flagman Law, of train No. 82, said he noticed no smoke or steam around engine 467 when he went back to flag after the accident.

This accident was caused by the failure of Flagman Roberts, of train No. 86, properly to protect his train.

The failure of Flagman Roberts properly to protect his train was due principally to his returning to his train without having been recalled. Not only was he negligent in this respect, but the evidence indicates that he had at least 2 and probably 3 minutes in which to protect his train after the second stop at Wayside, and that he did not make full use of this time is evident from the fact that according to his own statement he reached a point less than 300 feet from the rear of his train, although he claimed that he ran the entire distance. Flagman Roberts is also open to severe censure for his failure to have with him proper equipment for the protection of his train. On neither occasion did he take any torpedoes with him, although their use is required

by the rules, neither did he take with him any fuses. While he may have thought that the conditions did not require the use of a fuse, the fact remains that had he provided himself with fuses he could have lighted one on his way back the second time and might in this way have attracted the attention of the engine crew of train No. 22 in time to avert the accident.

It is impossible to say definitely to what extent Engineman Crawford, of train No. 22, contributed to the cause of this accident. While such evidence as is available from the members of the crews of train No. 83 and extra 467 indicates that there was no unusual smoke or steam escaping from engine 467, the statement of Fireman James indicated that he was unable to see the markers of train No. 86 until after passing the head end of extra 467, as Engineman Crawford was killed in the accident, it is impossible to give any reason why he failed to see the markers of the train ahead and take proper action to avert the accident. Had he acted promptly and made an emergency application of the brakes when warned by his fireman of the standing train ahead, the accident might have been prevented or its severity greatly mitigated.

Flagman Roberts was employed in January, 1920, previous to which he had had 5 years' experience as a yard foreman and 22 years' experience as a fireman on other railroads, his record was clear.

None of the employees involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the Hours of Service Law.

The occurrence of this accident again directs attention

to the desirability of adopting some form of block-signal system as a means of preventing accidents of this character. Had such a system been in use it is probable that this accident would have been averted.