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INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE BALTIMORE & OHIO RAILROAD AT MITCHELL, IND., ON AUGUST 21, 1924.

September 26, 1924.

To the Commission:

On August 21, 1924, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad at Mitchell, Ind., which resulted in the death of two employees and injury of two persons carried under contract.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Washington subdivision of the St. Louis Division which extends between Washington and North Vernon, Ind., a distance of 97.4 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident it is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. The derailment occurred on the north passing track, at a Hayes derail, at a point 7,900 feet east of the station at Mitchell; approaching this point from the west, beginning at the station, the north passing track is tangent for approximately 6,300 feet, there is then a 1° 30' curve to the right 575 feet in length, and a tangent extending to the point of accident, 1,100 feet distant. The grade for 2,900 feet is practically level, it is then slightly ascending for 2,900 feet, and is then 0.30 to 0.86 per cent descending, being 0.36 per cent at the point of accident.

The north passing track at Mitchell extends from a point 3,600 feet west of the station to a point 8,000 feet east thereof. About 900 feet east of the passenger station, proceeding eastward, is the facing-point switch of a crossover leading from the main track to the left to the north passing track, 250 feet west of the west switch of this crossover is a switch leading to the right from the main line to the south passing track.

Automatic block signals E127-09 and E126-03, located 4,000 feet west, and 1,900 feet east of the station, respectively, govern eastbound train movements through Mitchell. The tracks of the Chicago, Indianapolis

& Louisville Railroad cross the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad tracks at a point approximately 100 feet west of the passenger station, movements over this crossing being governed by a manually-operated semaphore signal. Under the rules, when an automatic signal in single-track territory is displaying a stop indication, the train should stop and proceed only under flag protection.

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred at 3.51 a.m.

Description

At about 3.05 a.m. on the day of the accident, yard engine 2316, in charge of Engineman Marsh and Conductor Mitchell, set out some cars at the freight house, and after instructing the crew to move to the cinder pit track and tie up, Conductor Mitchell proceeded to the station to make out his time-slips and yard report, and engine 2316 backed down the north passing track to the crossover leading to the main line, headed westward through the crossover, proceeded westward on the main line to a switch leading to the south passing track, and then backed eastward through that switch to the south passing track and then through another switch to the cinder pit track, where the engine tied up at 3.10 a.m. All of the switches used in making this movement were restored to their proper position except the main-line switch of the crossover, which was left open while the switch lamp was not burning.

Eastbound passenger train No. 12 consisted of two mail cars, one baggage car, two coaches, and seven Pullman sleeping cars, in the order named, hauled by engine 5129, and was in charge of Conductor McEvilly and Engineman Donnells. It passed Huron, Ind., 11.6 miles west of Mitchell, at 3.27 a.m., five minutes late, did not stop at automatic block-signal E127-09, which supposedly was displaying a stop indication, occasioned by the open crossover switch in the yard, came to a stop at the Chicago, Indianapolis & Louisville crossing, and stopped at the station at Mitchell at 3.44 a.m. Water was taken and after the usual station work was performed the train departed at 3.49 a.m., four minutes late, proceeded about 130 feet on the main line, entered the open switch, ran through the east switch of the crossover and proceeded eastward on the north passing track a distance of 1½ miles, and at 3.51 a.m., while traveling at an estimated speed of about 30 miles an hour, ran off the derail near the east end of the passing track.

Engine 5129 and the tender were derailed to the left, the engine coming to rest on its left side at a point about 250 feet beyond the initial point of derailment, the tender came to rest at right angles to the track behind the engine The first three cars were also derailed to the left but remained upright, the forward truck of the fourth car was derailed. The employees killed were the engineman and fireman.

Summary of evidence

Conductor Mitchell of the switching crew stated that after setting several cars on the house track he instructed the two switchmen to take the engine to the cinder pit track, after he had closed the house track switch to the north passing track he walked to the telegraph office to ascertain the time of a scheduled train and then make out his time-slips and reports. Several minutes later the switchmen returned to the station and upon looking eastward and seeing all of the switch lights were green he assumed that everything was in order and gave no further thought to the matter.

Engineman Marsh, of engine 2910, said the switches were handled by the switchmen in making the movement from the north passing track to the cinder pit track, but he was unable to say which switchman handled the various switches and did not know if all the switches were properly closed after the engine had passed through them. He also said he knew the light of the west switch of the crossover from the north passing track to the main line was out and that he did not move through the crossover until he had received a signal from the switchman. After the engine had been put away on the cinder pit track he was walking westward toward the station about the time train No. 12 was leaving and noticed that it headed down the north passing track, not understanding why it should do this and suspecting something was wrong he walked to the west switch, saw that it was open, and then examined the east switch and observed that it had been run through.

Switchman Murray said the conductor, after closing the house track switch, directed them to take the engine to the cinder pit track and tie up, after which the conductor proceeded toward the station. Switchman Murray said he then instructed Switchman Ricketts to attend to the east crossover switch and he, Murray, would let the engine out on the main track at the west switch of the crossover, flag a street

crossing, and then handle the south passing-track switch, and for Switchman Ricketts, after closing the east crossover switch, to cross the tracks and let the engine in on the cinder pit track, and to close the west crossover switch on his way back. Accordingly, he opened the west crossover switch, gave the engineman a signal to proceed, went westward to flag the crossing, and then opened the south passing-track switch and closed it after the engine had entered it. Shortly afterwards he saw Switchman Ricketts approaching from the east on his way to the station, assumed that he would close the west switch of the crossover, as he would pass near it, and went home without knowing definitely that the switch was closed. He knew Switchman Ricketts was an extra man, and was unable to explain why he did not see that he closed the switch or else close it himself.

Switchman Ricketts said he opened and closed the east switch of the crossover, crossed over and opened the cinder-pit switch, opened the derail and after the engine had passed and stopped two or three car lengths away he walked down and put his lantern away on the engine. The fireman returned with him and closed the cinder-pit switch while he relined the derail and they walked toward the station together. The switches just mentioned were those Switchman Murray told him to handle. Switchman Ricketts had previously noticed that the light on the west crossover switch was out and on his return to the station passed near it and failed to note the position of the switch target, his reason for this failure being that he was engaged in conversation with the fireman at that time and failed to give the switch the careful attention he otherwise would have given it had he not understood Switchman Murray to say that he, Murray, would attend to both the opening and closing of the two main-track switches.

The statements of the train crew of train No. 12 were substantially similar in their character, to the effect that no stop was made at the automatic signal, that they did not notice the movement of the train through the crossover to the north passing track after leaving the station, that they did not notice any uneven riding of the cars which might suggest that they were not on the main track, and that there was no application of the air brakes prior to the occurrence of the accident, which occurred while the train was traveling at a speed of about 30 miles an hour. None of the employees was able to say whether or not the dwarf signal indicating the position of the

derail was burning, the lamp on the switch which was run through, at the east end of the crossover, was said to have been burning after the accident.

There was a discrepancy in the statements of the members of the switch crew as to the usual method of handling the switches when making a movement similar to that made on the night of the accident. The prevailing opinion seemed to be that the man opening the west crossover switch would leave it open, and then open and close the switch leading to the south passing track, while the man opening the east crossover switch would also close it, handle the cinder pit switch and derail, and then close the west crossover switch on his way back to the station, this being the arrangement Switchman Murray apparently intended should be followed on the night of the accident. Yardmaster Cole said this was the practice, although he also said the way it should be done would be for the man opening the west switch to close it.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of the switch crew to close the west switch of the crossover, and by the failure of the engineman of train No. 12 to be governed by signal indications and to note that his train had been diverted from the main track.

Rule 104 of the Rules and Regulations of the Operating Department reads in part as follows:

> "Switches will be left in proper position after having been used. Conductors are responsible for the position of switches used by them or their trainmen * * *."

Conductor Mitchell exhibited extremely poor judgment in entrusting the duty of putting the engine away, involving the use of two main track switches and three other switches, to two inexperienced switchmen, one of whom had had but 5½ months' railroad experience while the other was a new man in the yard, with but two years' experience in road service.

Switchman Murray, the senior switchman in the absence of the conductor, should have taken upon himself the duty of seeing that all switches used were restored to their proper position. He not only failed to do this but imposed the duty of handling the majority of the switches on the new man, and neglected to observe that the switch he had left open was closed by that man, he was

unable to explain why he did not make certain that this switch was closed before going off duty.

The light on the west crossover switch was out at the time this switch was used by the switch crew. It was not determined just how long this light had been out, but the investigation disclosed the fact that the members of the switch crew knew it was not burning, yet none of them took sufficient interest in the matter to see that it was lighted and burning properly. Had this switch light been burning, it is possible that its red indication, showing the position of the switch, would have been observed by the engineman of train No. 12 and this accident averted.

Tests made after the accident showed that automatic signal F127-09 was working properly, and it is believed that it was displaying a stop indication at the time train No. 12 passed it. Under the rules, Engineman Donnells should have brought his train to a stop, and then have proceeded under flag protection until he reached the next automatic signal displaying a clear indication, which was signal E126-03, located about 1,000 feet beyond the open switch. The testimony indicates, however, that he did not stop his train, and apparently did not reduce speed to any extent, but it could not be determined why he failed to comply with the rule. The open switch was only 130 feet in front of his engine as the train was standing at the station, but apparently he failed to note that the switch lamp was not burning, did not notice his engine pass through the crossover and run through the switch at the leaving end, or note that his train was on the passing track, although it ran for a mile or more on that track before being derailed at the derail at the eastern end of the passing track, any attempt to explain these various errors resolves itself into a matter of mere conjecture.

None of the employees involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W P. BORLAND

Director.