

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 ROCKVILLE, MD., ON
OCTOBER 23, 1929.

February 15, 1930.

To the Commission

On October 23, 1929, there was a collision between a light engine and a gasoline motor car on the Baltimore & Ohio Railroad at Rockville, Md., which resulted in the death of four employees and the injury of three employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Metropolitan Sub-Division of the Baltimore Division, extending between Washington, D. C., and Point of Rocks, Md., a distance of 42.2 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by time-table, train orders, and an automatic block-signal system. A section tool-house is located on the north side of the main tracks and approximately 600 feet west of the station at Rockville, the accident occurring on the westbound main track at a point about 150 feet east of the tool-house. Approaching this point from the west, against the current of traffic, there is a $1^{\circ} 32'$ curve to the left 600 feet in length, from which point the track is tangent to the point of accident, a distance of about 475 feet, and for some distance beyond that point. The grade at the point of accident is 0.3 per cent descending for eastbound trains.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 3.30 a.m.

Description

Eastbound light engine 4485, headed west and backing up against the current of traffic, was in charge of Engineer Spurrier and Fireman Hoffmaster. The crew received instructions at Gaithersburg, 5.1 miles west of Rockville, to proceed to Garrett Park, 4.1 miles east of Rockville, with authority to use the westbound main track in making this movement, for the purpose of assisting westbound freight train extra 4490, which had a disabled engine. Engine 4485 left Gaithersburg at

3.15 a.m., and was approaching the station at Rockville when it collided with the motor car while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 15 and 20 miles per hour.

The motor car involved was a standard section motor car and was in charge of Section Foreman V. H. Coleman. The section crew had been called at about 3 a.m., to proceed eastward to the Georgetown Branch. Upon arrival at the toolhouse, Section Foreman Coleman instructed his crew to place the motor car on the westbound track, and after this had been done the crew started shoving it eastward but had only moved a short distance when it was struck by engine 4485.

The motor car was demolished and the debris carried ahead of the tender for a distance of 500 feet before the engine came to a stop, the engine was not derailed or damaged. All of the employees killed and injured were members of the section crew.

Summary of evidence.

Section Foreman Coleman stated that at about 3 a.m. he was called by a section laborer and informed that a car of sand had been dumped at Georgetown and that he was to proceed to that point with the section crew. When he arrived at the toolhouse he found other members of the crew there, among them being Section Foreman Selby, and he thought the latter had obtained a line-up as to trains on the westbound track. Section Foreman Coleman instructed the men to place the car on the westbound track, it being his intention to use that track as far as a highway crossing, located approximately 200 feet east of the station, where he would get permission to operate over the eastbound track by using the telephone in the watchman's shanty. After the car was placed on the track, two of his men started pushing it, without the motor running, but it was moved only a distance of about four rail-lengths when it was struck by the light engine. He said that he heard an engine approaching from the west but thought it was train No. 12 on the eastbound track and consequently did not look back to see if there was any danger, one of his laborers, who was killed in the accident, apparently was of the same opinion, as this laborer had been instructed to start the motor but replied that he could not do so until the train passed. Section Foreman Coleman further stated that in addition to a headlight, there were four lighted white lanterns on the motor car, but he did not know if there were any red lanterns. He also said that he had recently been examined on the operating rules and understood them, but did not arrange for flag protection covering

the movement on the westbound track for the reason that Section Foreman Selby had arrived at the toolhouse ahead of him and he was of the impression that that foreman had received the proper authority to make the movement.

Section Laborer R. L. Coleman stated that he accompanied Section Foreman Coleman to the toolhouse and about five minutes after their arrival he assisted in putting the motor car on the track and the car was started eastward with three or four men pushing it, and after the car had been moved a distance of about 30 yards, he and another laborer boarded it on the north side, Foreman Coleman was also riding on the same side of the car, these being the only employees riding on the car at the time of the accident. Laborer Coleman did not see or hear the light engine approaching and was not aware of any danger until the collision occurred. There were some lanterns on the car, but he did not think any of them were burning, and while there was one lighted electric light on the car, he did not know in which direction the rays were shining. After the accident, he noticed a light on the rear of the engine tender.

Section Laborer Poole stated that when he arrived at the toolhouse, the motor car was on the westbound track and that he boarded it while it was being shoved forward by other employees. He did not see the engine approaching, neither did he hear anyone mention it. He said the only light on the car was an electric hand lantern equipped with a reflector, but did not know in which direction it was shining.

Section Laborer Smith stated that while there were some lanterns on the car, he did not know whether they were burning. After the car was out on the track, he returned to the toolhouse to get two inspectors' lanterns and was still in the toolhouse when the engine passed it. He did not hear the engine whistle sounded nor the bell ringing, and his first knowledge that an accident had occurred was when he came out of the toolhouse.

Section Laborer Warfield stated that he approached the toolhouse from the south, and when about 300 feet from it he noticed an engine approaching from the west with two white lights on the tender but did not know on which track it was moving. He heard the engine whistle sounded when this engine was about 700 feet west of the toolhouse, but did not hear the bell ringing. He did not witness the accident as it occurred before he reached the toolhouse.

Supervisor Selby stated that at about 2 a.m., he was called by telephone and requested to send some men to the Georgetown Branch to unload a car of sand, due to the car having become disabled. Accompanied by Section Foreman Selby, a son who lived with him and was one of those killed in the accident, they proceeded to Rockville by automobile and then started calling the section men. After some of the men had been called, Foreman Selby stated that he would go to the tool-house and remove the tools from the motor car. Supervisor Selby went to call another laborer and had just returned to the vicinity of the station when he heard the crash caused by the accident. Shortly afterwards he saw some lanterns lying around, but they were not lighted and did not have the appearance of having been lighted prior to the accident. It also appeared from the supervisor's statements that he did not get a line-up of trains moving on the main line, as he never assumes the responsibility of getting orders for foremen to operate motor cars, and also because of the fact that by doing so it would create an unsafe practice and might lead foremen to believe, upon seeing him around a telephone booth or telegraph office, that it was all right for them to put their motor cars on the track, acting on the assumption that he would get the orders. Supervisor Selby further stated that he checks his foremen regularly on the rules, and discusses them at meetings, and that he had recently conducted a written examination covering the operation and protection of motor cars in which Foremen Coleman and Selby participated and at that time both of them fully understood the rules.

Engineman Spurrier, of engine 4485, stated that after assisting an eastbound train as far as Gaithersburg, he received instructions to turn his engine, and run it backwards on the westbound track to Garrett Park, east of Rockville, to help westbound extra 4490, which was at that point with a disabled engine. He communicated by telephone with the conductor of that train and arrangements were made for the conductor to hold all westbound trains at Garrett Park until his engine arrived. He said the headlight on the tender was burning and the engine bell was ringing continuously, and when the engine reached the whistle board, about 1,400 feet west of the highway crossing at Rockville, he sounded the regular crossing whistle signal. He was looking eastward approaching the point of accident, but did not see the motor car, or a light of any description in

the vicinity of the toolhouse. He felt no jar when the engine collided with the motor car and his first intimation that an accident had occurred was when Brakeman Stewart, who was riding on the foreman's side of the cab, informed him that something had been struck, he immediately applied the brakes in emergency, having just released them after reducing speed to 15 or 18 miles per hour for the highway crossing, and brought the engine to a stop within a distance of about 50 or 60 yards. He then got off the engine and discovered what had occurred, and at this time he noticed that the tender headlight was burning, in addition to a small flashlight on the rear of the tender, which was also burning. He said the rear headlight is located on the top of the tender and that its reflection does not shine on the track for some distance ahead of the engine. It also appeared from Engineman Spurrier's statements that he did not follow up the crossing signal with several short blasts on the whistle, as required when running against the current of traffic, because his attention was attracted by Brakeman Stewart before he had had an opportunity to do so.

Fireman Hoffmaster stated that the rear headlight was burning and the engine bell was ringing at all times between Gaithersburg and the point of accident, and the engine whistle was sounded while rounding the curve west of the station at Rockville. He was riding on his seatbox looking ahead but saw no lights in the vicinity of the toolhouse and did not know that his engine had encountered anything until he observed an object fall away from the rear of the tender. He estimated the speed of the engine at the time of the accident at between 15 and 18 miles per hour. Fireman Hoffmaster said the headlight on the tender was a standard portable headlight and was burning brightly, but its rays were reflected nearly parallel with the ground and did not shine on the track for a considerable distance ahead of the engine.

The statements of Brakeman Stewart corroborated those of Engineman Spurrier and Fireman Hoffmaster as to the rear headlight burning, properly and the crossing whistle signal being sounded when approaching the point of accident, but he was not certain as to whether the engine bell was ringing. He was also looking towards the east but noticed no construction on the track, his first knowledge of anything wrong being when he noticed something fall away from the rear of the tender; he called this to the attention of the engineman and the latter applied the brakes.

Operator Hill, on duty at DS Tower, 8 miles west of Gaithersburg, stated that the engineman of extra 4490 called him by telephone from Garrett Park and advised that his engine was disabled and it would be necessary to get another engine to handle the train. Operator Hill then communicated with the dispatcher and was instructed to authorize the crew of engine 4485, upon their arrival at Gaithersburg, to proceed to Garrett Park over the westbound main track to assist extra 4490. While arrangements were being made for the movement, he heard the conductor of that train inform the engineman of engine 4485 that he would protect the westbound track until the light engine arrived at Garrett Park. Operator Hill did not receive a request from anyone to operate a motor car from Rockville.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the operation of a motor on the main track without proper authority or protection, for which Section Foreman W. H. Coleman is responsible.

Rule 89-A, of the "Instructions Governing the Maintenance of Way Department," provides in part that "Cars must not be used at night *** except by permission of the superintendent, or if unable to communicate with the superintendent, except by proper flag protection." Section Foreman Coleman admitted that he was familiar with the rule but failed to obtain authority to operate the car on the westbound track, due, he said, to the fact that Section Foreman Selby, who was in charge of another section, had arrived at the toolhouse before he did, and he assumed that Foreman Selby had obtained a line-up of westbound trains, although Foreman Coleman apparently did not inquire for the purpose of finding out whether this had been done.

The rules also provide that when carrying two or more men, one must face the front and another face the rear, that a constant lockout must be maintained for trains moving against the current of traffic, and that cars must carry a white light in front and a red light on the rear when being operated at night. The evidence indicated that the first two of these provisions were practically ignored, while it is conflicting as to how many lights were on the motor car at the time of the accident. Foreman Coleman stated that there were four lighted white lanterns on the car

in addition to an electric lantern being used as a headlight, but some of the surviving laborers were of the opinion that the only light burning was the electric lantern, while the members of the crew of engine 4485 observed no lights and did not know the track was obstructed until after their engine had collided with the motor car. There was nothing to indicate that a red light was displayed at any time. The provisions of the rules mentioned above were adequate for the occasion and if they had been observed, this accident would not have occurred.

The employees involved were experienced men, and 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.