

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON
THE CHICAGO, BURLINGTON & QUINCY RAILROAD AT
MILLINGTON, ILL., ON JULY 6, 1929

November 4, 1929

To the Commission

On July 6, 1929, there was a side collision between two portions of the same train on the Chicago, Burlington & Quincy Railroad at Millington, Ill., which resulted in the death of one employee

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Montgomery and Streator Sub-division of the Aurora Division, extending between Montgomery and Streator, Ill., a distance of 57.53 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. At Millington there is a passing track 1,558 feet in length which parallels the main track on the west. There is also a track, known as the house track, located west of the passing track, and the north switch of the house track connects with the passing track at a point 106 feet south of the north passing-track switch. The accident occurred at the fouling point between the main track and the passing track at its northern end, approaching this point from the south there is a 1° curve to the left 1,615 feet in length, from which point the track is tangent to the point of accident, a distance of 901.3 feet, and for some distance beyond that point. The grade for northbound trains is 0.60 per cent descending at the point of accident.

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 2:45 p. m.

Description

Northbound freight train extra 5135 consisted of eight cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 5135, and was in charge of Conductor Kurns and Engineeran Otedian. This train arrived at Millington at 2:40 p. m. and was brought to a stop on the main track just south of the north passing-track switch. The engine then cut off, pulled ahead, and started a back-up movement into the passing track,

but before it could clear the main track it was struck by the cars, which had started moving northward.

The forward truck of the leading car was derailed to the right while the engine was derailed but was not derailed. The employee killed was the engineer.

Summary of evidence

Fireman Bailey stated that when his train first stopped at Millington there was not sufficient clearance for the engine to enter the passing track, which necessitated backing the train so that the leading car was possibly a car-length back of the clearance point. The engine was then cut off and moved forward beyond the north switch, and as soon as the switch was opened the engine started backing into the siding, but had only moved a short distance when the engineer set the brakes and reversed the engine, and just as it started to move forward the cars on the main track collided with the right side of the engine cab. The engineer did not tell him why a reverse movement was being attempted, and from his position on the left side of the cab it was impossible for him to see the moving cars prior to the accident.

Head Brakeman Chandlee stated that the crew had instructions to pick up a car on the house track at Millington, but when the train was brought to a stop he noticed the leading car was beyond the clearance point at the north passing-track switch. He decided to cut the train between the first and second cars and had just closed the angle cock on the rear end of the first car when the rear brakeman approached and said that it would be better only to cut off the engine, whereupon he opened the angle cock and the train was backed enough to clear the switch. He said that two attempts were made before the train moved backward which indicated that the air had been set on the balance of the train. When the engine was cut off he closed the angle cock on the tender and the rear brakeman closed the one on the leading car. He accompanied the engine as it moved northward, and after it started the back-up movement he was riding on the right side of the tender foot-board when he observed the cars on the main track moving towards the engine, he immediately gave a stop signal to the engineer, who stopped the engine and started it ahead, but the collision occurred before the engine could gain sufficient momentum to keep clear of the cars, which he estimated were moving at a speed of 2 or 3 miles per hour at the time of the accident. Brakeman Chandlee, who was

not an experienced man, said that he noticed the train was stopped on a descending grade and he knew the rules required that hand brakes must be set on cars left standing on a grade, but at the time he did not think the grade was sufficient for cars to start after they had once been brought to a stop.

Rear Brakeman Finck stated that after his train stopped at Millington he lined the derail and the house-track switch, and upon noticing that the head brakeman was preparing to cut the train behind the first car, he advised him that the train should be shoved back into clear. The first attempt to move the cars failed, as the angle cock between the first and second cars was closed and the air brakes on the rear of the train were set. After the train had been shoved back about two car-lengths the head brakeman closed the angle cock on the rear of the tender, while Rear Brakeman Finck closed the angle cock on the forward end of the leading car, and the parting of the engine uncoupled the air hose. As soon as the engine cleared the passing-track switch he opened it and signaled the engineer to back up. At that time the cars were not moving, but when the engine had backed up to a point about three car-lengths from the main-track switch, as it was entering the house track, he saw a stop signal given, this being when it was discovered that the cars had started to move, and they collided with the engine after it had been reversed and started in forward motion. Rear Brakeman Finck further stated that when the train stopped after the back-up movement was made in order to clear the switch, he did not know whether the stop was made by using the automatic brake or the independent brake, and when the engine was uncoupled he did not open the angle cock on the leading car to determine whether the air was set, as it is the usual practice to set the air brakes before the engine is cut off. He also said that during his experience, engines have been uncoupled from cars left standing on the main track without any hand brakes being set and that he had never known of any cars moving on the grade at Millington, although he was aware that the rules required hand brakes to be applied under such conditions.

Conductor Kurns stated that he was thoroughly familiar with the physical characteristics at Millington and that he had been in charge of this particular run on various occasions. Upon arriving at Millington he went into the station to get the waybill for the car that was to be picked up at that point and had just come out of the station when he noticed the cars collide with the side of the engine. He also noticed that the engine was moving in the same direction and at about the same speed as the cars,

which he estimated at 5 miles per hour. He said that it was not a practice to set hand brakes on cars at

Millington when the engine is only going to be away from them for a short period of time, but that he would see to it that the air brakes were applied or the cars blocked, while he usually cautioned his brakemen to block the cars, he did not do so on the day of the accident.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to set the brakes on cars left standing on a grade, for which Rear Brakeman Finck is primarily at fault.

Under special instructions contained in the timetable, it is provided that when necessary to leave a train or a portion of a train on a grade, air brakes must be applied, then hand brakes set tight and all brakes released before engine is uncoupled. According to the statements of the two brakemen, one of them closed the angle cock on the head end of the leading car and the other closed it on the rear of the tender, and then they both accompanied the engine as it prepared to enter the siding, without having set any hand brakes or definitely determining that the air brakes were left applied, resulting in the cars starting ahead and colliding with the engine. Rear Brakeman Finck had taken charge of the movement, instructing the head brakeman what to do, and therefore is primarily at fault for what took place.

The employees involved were experienced men and at the time of the accident they had not been on duty contrary to any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director