

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
CHICAGO, ROCK ISLAND & PACIFIC RAILWAY NEAR CLEAR LAKE
JUNCTION, IA , ON JULY 29, 1921

September 22, 1921

On July 29, 1921, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway near Clear Lake Junction, Iowa, which resulted in the death of 3 employees and the injury of 2 employees. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

Location and method of operation

Sub-Division 19 of the Des Moines Valley Division, on which this accident occurred, extends between Clear Lake Junction and Short Line Junction, Ia , a distance of 117.5 miles. 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 accident occurred at a point about 2,800 feet east of the western yard-limit board at Clear Lake Junction. Approaching this point from the east the track is tangent for approximately 4,000 feet, followed by a 3-degree curve to the left nearly 1,700 feet in length, the accident occurring on the curve about 300 feet from its western end, the grade is level for several thousand feet, followed by about 1,200 feet of 0.45% ascending grade. Approaching from the west the track is tangent for more than 1 mile; the grade is approximately level for about 3,000 feet, followed by about 1/2 mile of descending grade varying from 0.7 to 1 per cent. The weather was clear at the time of the accident,

which occurred at about 10 a m

Description

Eastbound second-class freight train No. 912 consisted of 49 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2306, and was in charge of Conductor Doyle and Engineman McLean. It passed Hurley, Ia , 8.8 miles from Clear Lake Junction and the last open telegraph office, at 9 44 a m , 9 hours and 4 minutes late, and collided with train No 83 inside of the yard limits at Clear Lake Junction while running at a speed estimated to have been about 12 miles an hour.

Westbound third-class freight train No. 83 consisted of 21 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1967, and was in charge of Conductor Parris and Engineman Moody. This train arrived at Clear Lake Junction over the tracks of the Chicago Great Western Railroad at 9 50 a m , and departed on the Rock Island track at 9 54 a m , 1 hour and 39 minutes late, without any orders relating to train No. 912 and collided with that train while running at a speed estimated to have been about 15 or 20 miles an hour.

Both engines were derailed and badly damaged, but remained in an upright position; 13 cars in the two trains were derailed, 8 being destroyed. The employees killed were the engineman, fireman and head brakeman of train No. 83.

Summary of evidence

Engineman McLean, of train No. 912, said he had shut

off steam some distance before reaching the yard-limit board, and had made an application of the air brakes. He saw train No 83 in the vicinity of Clear Lake Junction and thought it was heading in on the passing track, the east switch of which is nearly 1 mile east of the point of accident. As the two trains approached each other, he decided it was on the Chicago Great Western track, which at that point is parallel to and about 100 feet distant from the Rock Island track. He had made a 5-pound brake pipe reduction, and after traveling about 15 car-lengths, moving at a speed of about 15 miles an hour, realized that the approaching train was on the same track; it was then about 20 car-lengths distant. Engineman McLean said he at once applied the air brakes in emergency, called to the fireman and jumped. He thought the speed of his train had been reduced to 8 or 10 miles an hour when the accident occurred and that the engineman of train No 83 was still working steam. The statements of the other members of the crew of train No 912 practically agree that the air brakes on their train were first applied in the vicinity of the yard-limit board, and that there was an emergency application shortly before the accident occurred. Their other statements brought out no additional facts of importance.

Between Manly and Clear Lake Junction, a distance of 10.8 miles, Rock Island trains are operated over the track of the Chicago Great Western Railroad and are handled by a dispatcher of that railroad. Rock Island train registers are

located at Manly and Clear Lake Junction, while Chicago Great Western train registers are located at Manly, Mason City and Clear Lake Junction. The trains of both railroads register on the Chicago Great Western registers, while only Rock Island trains register on the Rock Island registers. On the day of the accident Rock Island engine 1523 was run light as an extra over the Rock Island track to Clear Lake Junction, and the Chicago Great Western dispatcher moved it from Clear Lake Junction to Manly as train No. 912 without signals, and it was so shown on the registers at Clear Lake Junction, Mason City and Manly. Train No. 83 had departed from Manly as Chicago Great Western train No. 935 and Conductor Parris checked the registers at Manly and the Chicago Great Western register at Mason City, noting in both cases that train No. 912 was registered, and he said he delivered to Engineman Moody a copy of the Mason City register check. When the train reached Clear Lake Junction it was delayed a few minutes by a train of another railroad which crosses at that point. Operator Brown, on duty at Clear Lake Junction, filled out a clearance card Form A, showing that there were no orders for the train, and gave the engineman's copy of the clearance to Head Brakeman Slater, at the same time asking the brakeman if he had any orders concerning train No. 914 and where they intended to go for train No. 912, to which he said the brakeman replied that he did not know. As the caboose passed the station Operator Brown delivered another copy of the clearance to

Conductor Parris returned to his office and was registering train No 83 when notified of the accident. Conductor Parris did not leave the caboose at Clear Lake Junction and did not register the arrival of his train on the Chicago Great Western register and its departure on the Rock Island register, as he should have done, neither did he check the Rock Island register to see that all overdue Rock Island trains had arrived, and, of course, he failed to deliver a register check to Engineman Moody. Conductor Parris said that on one or two previous occasions he had departed from Clear Lake Junction without checking the register, but on those occasions had ascertained from the dispatcher that everything was all right. Flagman Stahl, who was not an experienced man, said he had made only two previous trips over this part of the road and apparently he was not familiar with conditions existing upon it; he did not have a time-table.

Although Operator Brown said that train No 83 usually stopped and that the conductor registered in person, he also said that trains often receive clearances at Manly on the register at Clear Lake Junction and, therefore, there were times when they did not have to stop and check the register at Clear Lake Junction. This latter statement was verified by the dispatcher, who added that he had issued no orders to the crew of train No 83 regarding train No 912, as he expected both trains would arrive at Clear Lake Junction at about the same

time and that train No 83 would take the siding at that point for the superior train.

Conclusion.

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Parris and Engineman Moody, of train No. 83, to check the train register before departing from Clear Lake Junction, resulting in operating their train against an opposing superior train without authority

While engine 1523 had been operated as train No. 912 without signals from Clear Lake Junction to Manly and was so shown on the registers, it had been operated over the Rock Island track to Clear Lake Junction as an extra, and the rights of train No. 912 up to that point, therefore, were not in any way affected; it could not, however, have departed from Clear Lake Junction over the joint track without orders from the Chicago Great Western dispatcher. While Conductor Parris and Engineman Moody checked the registers at Manly and Mason City, and found that train No 912 had arrived at those points, they were in no way relieved of their duty of checking the Rock Island register at Clear Lake Junction in accordance with the requirements of rule 83a, and had they done so they would undoubtedly have discovered that no train representing the schedule of train No. 912 had arrived, in which event their train should have taken the siding and the accident would not have occurred. That part of rule 83a which applies particularly in this case reads as follows:

"Conductors and Enginemen of all trains must, unless otherwise provided, examine register books at such stations and obtain the information required by Rule 33. This information, except at Engineman's initial terminal station, will be furnished the Engineman by the Conductor on the Train Register Check."

This accident occurred within yard limits, and it is required under rule 93, that "unless the main track is seen or known to be clear, second and third class and extra trains must move within yard limits under control." It is possible that neither engineman was paying particular attention to the requirements of this rule, but in view of the circumstances it is impossible to say definitely that such was the case. It seems probable that had any one on the engine of train No 83 been maintaining a proper lookout on the inside of the curve they would have observed the approach of train No 912 in time to bring their own train to a stop, and in view of the fact that Engineman McLean was closely observing the approach of train No 83, it is probable that he would have been able either to stop his own train or to reduce its speed to such an extent as to materially minimize the consequences of the collision.

With the exception of Flagman Stahl, all the employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident the crew of train No. 83 had been on duty about 4 hours, after 8-1/2 or more off duty. The crew of train No 912 had been on duty about 8-1/2 hours, after about 42 hours off duty.