

August 24, 1915.

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE CHICAGO, ROCK ISLAND & PACIFIC RAILWAY,  
NEAR PLATTE RIVER, MO., ON JUNE 27,  
1915.

On June 27, 1915, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway near Platte River, Mo., which resulted in the death of 3 employees and the injury of 3 employees. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Division of Safety submits the following report:

The district on which this accident occurred is a single track line and extends from Horton, Kans., to Altamont, Mo., a distance of 90 miles. Trains are operated by time-card, train orders and a manual block signal system, east-bound trains being superior by direction.

Westbound second class freight train 1st No. 93, en route from Trenton, Mo., to Horton, Kans., consisted of locomotive 1698, 29 loaded and 1 empty cars (1027 tons), and was in charge of Conductor Hol L. Swarth and Engineman Stuart. It left Trenton at 6.30 a.m., 6 hours and 29 minutes late, and at Altamont, about 41 miles east of the point of accident, the crew received Pink Bulletin No. 260, dated June 26, reading as follows:

"Reduce to 10 miles per hour over bridge 457 just west of Crisp stone. Passenger trains reduce to 25 and freight trains to 20 miles an hour from 4 miles east of Clarksdale to Stockbridge."

The train arrived at Clarksdale, about 11 miles east of the

point of accident, at 12.04 p.m. Water was taken, the train was given a clear block signal, and it departed at 12.05 p.m., 6 hours and 36 minutes late. The train passed Stockbridge, a non-telegraph station about 3.3 miles east of the point of accident, and while running at a speed of about 30 miles per hour collided with train 1st No. 98 east of Platte River station.

Eastbound freight extra 1665, consisting of locomotive 1665, 24 loaded cars and a caboose, en route from Horton to Trenton, in charge of Conductor Hackett and Engineman Askew, left Horton at 8.35 a.m. At St. Joseph, Mo., this train received an order to run from St. Joseph to Trenton as 1st No. 98. The train assumed that schedule and departed from St. Joseph at 12.05 p.m., on time. At Platte River, 7.5 miles east, the manual block signal was in the caution position and the operator delivered to the crew a form known as "Clearance Card form A and Block Restriction Card," which read as follows:

"Conductor and engineman 1st 98  
Orders for your train are none  
Train order signal is displayed for block  
Block restrictions: 1st 93 may be in block.  
(Signed) Oliver  
Operator."

Train 1st No. 98 received this form without stopping and passed the station at 12.30 p.m., on time, and had proceeded to a point about 4450 feet east and was running at a speed of about 25 miles per hour when it collided with train 1st No. 93 at approximately 12.31 p.m.

When the trains came to a stop the two locomotives were

locked together and had fallen down the embankment on the north, the tenders going on the opposite side of the track. Fourteen cars loaded with freight of various kinds were completely wrecked and piled on the tops of the locomotives.

Approaching the point of accident from Platte River the track is tangent for 4,100 feet, followed by a 3-degree curve to the left, 850 feet in length, which in turn is followed by a tangent of 3,100 feet. The point of the accident is 380 feet east of the west end of this curve. At this point the track is on a 12-foot fill, and is practically level. The engineman of the westbound train had a view of approximately 1,250 feet. The engineman of the eastbound train, being on the outside of the curve, could see but about 300 feet, while the fireman had a view of about 1,250 feet. The weather at the time of the accident was clear.

Conductor Hackett, of train 1st No. 98, stated that before leaving Horton on the day of the accident he compared his watch with the standard clock and found it to be about 10 seconds fast. He stated that approaching Platte River he was riding in the caboose, and seeing the block signal in the caution position he went to the rear caboose platform and received a "Clearance Card form A and Block Restriction Card" from the operator, reading "1st 93 may be in the block." This he understood to mean that his train might expect to find train 1st No. 93 at Stockbridge, or in the block under the protection of a flag. He stated that when his caboose was about

3 or 4 car lengths west of the station at Platte River he looked at his watch and it was then 12.30 p.m. He again looked at his watch immediately after the accident and it was 12.31 p.m. Conductor Hackett stated that his train started from St. Joseph at 12.05 p.m. and finally left the east end of the yard at 12.08 p.m. The usual running time of his train from St. Joseph to Platte River is from 35 to 40 minutes, and that between these two points his train was seldom able to make the schedule.

Brakeman Durrant, of train 1st No. 98, corroborated the statements of Conductor Hackett as to the time the train passed Platte River and the time the accident occurred.

Conductor Hollingsworth, of train 1st No. 93, stated that before leaving Trenton on the day of the accident he compared his watch with the standard clock and found it to be 1 or 2 seconds off. He also mentioned the time to his engine-man for the purpose of comparison and his engine-man replied "O. K." He stated that his train arrived at Clarksdale at 12.00 noon. While water was being taken he walked to the head end of the train looking for defective cars. He then went to the telegraph office and asked the operator how train No. 98 was, to which the operator replied "on time." He looked at his watch as his locomotive started from Clarksdale and it was 12.05 p.m. At that time he figured that his train would be able to reach Platte River by 12.30 p.m., but he knew that if it did so, the slow order could not be properly observed. He

stated that when his engineman whistled for the station at Stockbridge, the rear brakeman, who was riding in the caboose with him, asked if he wanted to go to Platte River for train No. 98. He replied, "Yes, high-ball him," meaning to give him a proceed signal. He does not recall hearing the brakeman make any remark about being on close time for train No. 98. The train passed Stockbridge between 12.19 p.m. and 12.20 p.m. by his watch. Conductor Helligsworth stated that he received a copy of Pink Bulletin No. 260 on this trip, but he was under the impression that the restriction was from a point 4 miles west of Clarksdale to Stockbridge instead of 4 miles east of Clarksdale. He stated that the usual running time between Clarksdale and Platte River is 25 minutes and that under ordinary conditions it would take about 3 minutes after arrival at Platte River to get into clear and protect the train. He estimated the maximum speed between Clarksdale and Stockbridge to have exceeded 30 miles per hour. He did not, however, make any effort to have the engineman reduce speed. Immediately after the accident he looked at his watch and it was 12.29 p.m.

Brakeman Varney, of train let No. 93, stated that when the engineman sounded the whistle approaching Stockbridge he asked the conductor where they were going for train No. 98. The conductor replied "Let him go if he wants to," whereupon he gave a proceed signal from the cupola of the caboose. He stated that the train passed Stockbridge about 12.20 p.m. and

shortly afterward he remarked to the conductor "Stuart is out on a limb for 1st 98," to which the conductor replied, "Somebody else is out on a limb." This he interpreted as meaning that the engineman was in a precarious position with regard to train 1st No. 98, to which the conductor replied that he himself occupied the same position. He estimated the speed of his train to have been between 30 and 40 miles per hour passing Stockbridge. At the time of the accident he was sitting in the cupola of the caboose and he saw train 1st No. 98 approaching about 15 car lengths distant. Immediately after the accident he looked at his watch and it was 12.29 p.m. He stated that he had read pink bulletin No. 250, but did not recall between what points it restricted the speed of trains.

Fireman Brown, of train 1st No. 93, stated that when his train was about three-quarters of a mile west of Clarksdale, he glanced at his watch and it was 12.08 p.m. He asked the engineman where he was going for train No. 98 and the engineman replied, "I don't know yet." He estimated the maximum speed between Clarksdale and Stockbridge to have been 30 or 35 miles per hour. He saw Train 1st No. 98 approaching when they were 20 or 25 car lengths distant. He stated that he seldom read the pink bulletins and did not know whether or not the rules required that he should read them.

The watch taken from the body of Engineman Askew, of train 1st No. 98, after the accident showed that it had stopped at 12.31 and 30 seconds. The watch of Fireman

Forrester of the same train, found near the boiler head, showed that it had stopped at 12.31 and 25 seconds. This evidence would seem to substantiate the statements of Conductor Hackett and his brakeman as to the time the accident occurred.

Under the block rules of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway Co., when trains are to meet at an intermediate siding, a train order establishing a meeting point, together with a Clearance Card, Form "A", and Block Restriction Card, on which must be stated the block restrictions, must be given to each train before entering the block within which the intermediate siding is located, and a copy of the train order issued to the operators at the entrances to the block. The rules also provide that if from any cause a signalman should be unable to communicate with the next block station in advance, the train must be stopped and if no cause is known for detaining the train, it may be permitted to proceed upon a caution card, Form D, which reads as follows:

**ROCK ISLAND LINES**

**CAUTION CARD--FORM D.**

Tiskilwa Block Station, Nov. 1, 1902, 10:05 a.m.  
To Conductor and Engineman, train No. 1 on Westward Track.  
The Circuit has failed. You may proceed at 10:15 a.m.  
with caution, expecting to find track obstructed.

John Doe, Signalman.

Conductors and Enginemen receiving this card properly filled out and signed may proceed with the train under control, prepared to stop short of any obstruction in the block.

Operator Price, at Clarksdale, stated that when train 1st No. 93 approached his station he called the operator

at Platte River in order to secure the block for it, but as the operator had been excused for dinner he did not receive any response, thereupon he applied to the train dispatcher for instructions and the train dispatcher authorized him to allow the train to enter the block. He then placed the block signal in the clear position. He stated that train let No. 93 arrived at his station at 12.04 p.m. and while water was being taken a brakeman came to the window and asked how train No. 93 was running, to which he replied, "On time." This information he obtained from the operator at St. Joseph. The train started to pull away from the water tank, located just east of his station, at 12.08 p.m., and he reported the time to the dispatcher at 12.10 p.m. and was then excused for dinner. He stated that he compared his watch with the time transmitted by telegraph at 11.00 a.m. on the day of the accident and at that time it was 10 seconds fast. This watch he used in taking the time of train let No. 93 and he is positive that it arrived and departed at the times stated.

Operator Oliver, at Platte River, stated that as train let No. 93 approached his station he called the operator at Clarksdale, but as no response was received and believing him to be at dinner, he called the dispatcher for instructions and, being unable to get any response from the dispatcher, filled out a Clearance Card form "A" and Block Restriction/<sup>Card</sup> (commonly called a caution card), reading "let 93 may be in the block," which information he obtained from the operator at St. Joseph. He then placed his block signal in the caution position and



started to go out on the platform to deliver the card. As he did this the locomotive of train let 98 was approaching the station, and at that time it was 12.30 p.m. by his watch. He stated that he did not stop train let No. 98 as required by the rules under such circumstances, as the instructions are not to delay 98, and it had been the custom, when he was unable to communicate with the next block station in advance, to call upon the dispatcher for instructions and in the event of being unable to raise the dispatcher to issue "Clearance Card form "A" and Block Restriction Card" and let the train proceed. Operator Oliver stated that the only examination he had been given while with the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway was the physical examination which he received in 1912 when entering the service of the company. He also stated that prior to the accident he did not understand that under the circumstances he should have stopped train let No. 98 and delivered caution card form B to the crew. Operator Oliver stated that on the day of the accident he compared his watch with telegraph time transmitted at 11.00 a.m. and found his watch to be correct.

Train Dispatcher Beacham stated that the operator at Clarkdale did not ask him for permission for train let No. 98 to enter the block and no permission was given by him, although he did tell the operator he had nothing for it. The operator at Clarkdale did not tell him that he was unable to communicate with Platte River. He did not expect that train

1st No. 93 was going to try to reach Platte River for train 1st No. 98. Dispatcher Beacham stated that he did not hear Platte River call him as claimed, and that during the period between 12.20 p.m. and 12.30 p.m. he was working on the wire with Weatherby. He stated that the rule requiring the dispatcher to provide a train order meeting point for trains that were to meet at intermediate sidings had been superseded by the verbal instructions of a former superintendent issued four or five years ago, and that under those instructions trains were permitted to enter the block under such circumstances on a clearance card.

This accident was caused by train 1st No. 93 attempting to reach Platte River to meet opposing superior train 1st No. 98 when it did not have sufficient time to make the run as required by rule. For this Conductor Hollingsworth and Engineman Stuart are responsible. General Rule 86 reads as follows:

"At meeting points between trains of the same class, the inferior train must clear the main track before the leaving time of the superior train."

Under this rule train 1st No. 93 should have been in on the siding, clear at Platte River, before 12.30 p.m. According to the statement of Conductor Hollingsworth himself, at 12.29 p.m. his train still had over .7 of a mile to run before reaching Platte River and it would have taken at least three minutes after arrival to get into clear or to provide protection. When the train left Clarkdale it had at the most but 35 minutes to

run a distance of 11.7 miles, which would require an average speed of 26 miles per hour. Out of this distance 7.6 miles were covered by a slow order restricting the speed of freight trains to 20 miles per hour. From the above it is apparent that the crew of train 1st No. 93 did not contemplate paying any attention to the slow order and were willing to take a risk on complying with rule No. 33.

A contributing cause of this accident was the failure of Operators Price and Oliver to comply with the manual block system rule No. 332, which is as follows:

"If, from any cause, a Signalman be unable to communicate with the next block station in advance, he must stop every train approaching in that direction. Should no cause for detaining the train be known, it may then be permitted to proceed, with a caution card (Form D), provided ten (10) minutes have elapsed since the passage of the last preceding train."

A compliance with this rule required that when an operator is unable to communicate with the block station in advance, the approaching train must be stopped and a caution card, form D, issued, which would require the train to proceed under control prepared to stop short of any obstruction in the block. In this instance, neither Operator Price nor Operator Oliver complied with this rule, and according to Dispatcher Beacham's statement it is the usual practice under conditions of this kind for the operator to call upon the train dispatcher and for him to authorize the train to proceed on Clearance Card form A and Block Restriction Card.

Manual Block rule No. 381 reads as follows:

"When trains are to meet at an intermediate siding, train orders to that effect must be given them. This must be done, whenever practicable, before they reach the block stations at the entrance to the block within which the intermediate siding is located. The signaller at those block stations must be given copies of the order addressed to them. They will deliver a copy of such orders to each Conductor and Engineer of the trains concerned, together with clearance card (Form A) on which will be stated the block restrictions." Having received these, the trains concerned may proceed and fulfill their train orders.

\*Example:

For meeting movement only:

Block restrictions: No. 7 meet No. 14 at C.

This rule also is not being observed, and it is claimed that it had been superseded by the verbal instructions of a former superintendent. In reply to the question as to whether he was aware that any such instructions were in effect, Superintendent Coughlin replied "Never saw them." If it was intended that this rule should be suspended or modified, a notice to that effect should have been issued in a proper manner. Any arbitrary verbal suspension or modification of printed rules or instructions by officials or others opens up an avenue for a misunderstanding and can not but fail to weaken the respect of employees for those rules and to invite loose methods.

The speed restrictions covering the use of track from a point four miles east of Clarksdale to Stockbridge had been in effect since June 2, and a check of the train sheets showed that the speed prescribed had, with one exception, been exceeded

daily.

A reasonable degree of supervision would have easily disclosed such unsafe and radical departures from the established rules and regulations as was exhibited in this case. The officials of a railroad company can not discharge their responsibility to the public by merely providing rules and regulations to govern the operation of trains; it is also their duty to take all reasonable measures to insure that rules and regulations are observed. Dereliction of duty on the part of officials charged with the enforcement of rules can not fail to be reflected in the attitude of subordinate employees.

Conductor Hollingsworth entered the employ of the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway as freight brakeman in July, 1907, and was promoted to conductor October 3, 1914.

Engineer Stuart was employed as a fireman in November, 1904, and was promoted to engineer in October, 1910.

Operator Price entered the service as Agent and Operator in October, 1907.

Operator Oliver entered the service as Agent and Operator in July, 1907, resigned in September, 1911, and was re-employed in January, 1912.

Dispatcher Beacham entered the service as a train dispatcher in May, 1913, and resigned in July the same year. He was re-employed in September, 1903, and dismissed in February, 1906, being again re-employed in December of the same year.

The investigation of this accident discloses that the