

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURED ON
THE CLEVELAND, CINCINNATI, CHICAGO & ST. LOUIS
RAILWAY AT ST. FRANCISVILLE, ILL., ON MAY 21,
1926.

June 22, 1926.

To the Commission

On May 21, 1926, there was a rear-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Cleveland, Cincinnati, Chicago & St. Louis Railway at St. Francisville, Ill., resulting in the death of one employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Cairo Division extending between Darville and Mt. Carmel, Ill., a distance of 125.5 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. The accident occurred on the main track, between the switches of the passing track at St. Francisville, at a point 1,254 feet south of the north switch, the passing track at this point is approximately 4,725 feet in length and parallels the main track on the east. There is a telephone booth located east of the track and opposite the north switch. Approaching the point of collision from the north the track is tangent for a considerable distance, extending to within 403.5 feet of the north switch, followed by a 2° curve to the right 2,603.5 feet in length, the accident occurring on this curve at a point 1,657.5 feet from its northern end. The grade for southbound trains is 0.259 per cent ascending at the point of accident.

Owing to a cut located a short distance north of the point of collision the view of the rear end of the standing freight train was restricted to about 1,200 feet from the enginemen's side of the engine of the southbound passenger train, it is also difficult to determine, until within a short distance, whether or not a train is standing on the main track or the passing track at St. Francisville. The speed of passenger trains is limited to 55 miles an hour.

The weather was clear and the sun was shining at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 5.34 a. m.

Description

Southbound freight train extra 6108, in charge of Conductor Morgan and Engineman Nelson, consisted of 72 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 6108, when departing from Lyons yard, 5.3 miles south of Danville, at 10.25 a. m., May 20. Cars were picked up and set out en route, the train leaving Lawrenceville Junction, the last open office, 9.4 miles north of St. Francisville, at 5.09 a.m., May 21, and being brought to a stop on the main track at St. Francisville at 5.27 a. m., in order to set out a car. It was while this work was being performed that the rear end of the train was struck by train No. 43.

Southbound passenger train No. 43 consisted of two baggage cars, two coaches, and one sleeping car, hauled by engine 6920, and was in charge of Conductor Woodling and Engineman Earl. This train passed Lawrenceville Junction at 5.23 a. m., two minutes late, and while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 40 miles an hour collided with the caboose of extra 6108.

The caboose of extra 6108 was demolished and five empty steel coal cars were derailed, four being overturned. Engine 6920 plowed through the wreckage of the freight cars a distance of 132 feet and then turned over to the right, bottom up, the front truck of the first baggage car was also derailed. The employee killed was the engineman of train No. 43.

Summary of Evidence

At Lawrenceville, Conductor Morgan, of extra 6108, instructed Head Brakeman Boyce to inform Engineman Nelson to proceed down the main track at St. Francisville, as there was a car to be set out at that point. On arrival at St. Francisville, Flagman Baird dropped off the caboose at the usual point, just north of the north switch of the passing track, having been instructed by Conductor Morgan to head train No. 43 through the passing track provided the work of setting out the car had not been completed, otherwise to have the passenger train continue down the main track; he expected to receive orders to run ahead of train No. 43. Not seeing or hearing train No. 43 approaching after getting off the caboose, Flagman Baird, after his train came to a stop on the main track, left the rear of his train entirely unprotected, although he had in his possession a red flag, fuses, and two torpedoes,

ard knew it was getting close to the time of train No. 43 went to the telephone booth and inquired of the operator at St. Francisville concerning train No. 43, being informed that it had passed Lawrenceville Junction two minutes late. Immediately after hanging up the telephone receiver following this conversation, which consumed several minutes, Flagman Baird stepped out of the booth and at this time train No. 43 was right at the booth, traveling at a speed of about 50 miles an hour, and Flagman Baird shouted a warning of danger to the fireman. Fireman Lawrence observed Flagman Baird beside the telephone booth, waving his arms, and he in turn shouted a warning of danger to Engineer Earl, who immediately made an emergency application of the air brakes and shut off steam, but at this time it was too late to bring the passenger train to a stop in time to avert the accident.

Flagman Baird further stated that while en route on this trip he had afforded rear-end protection to his train on numerous occasions and that at Lawrenceville Junction he had placed two torpedoes on the rail after being called in, and he said it was his understanding that on exploding two torpedoes a train should be moved under control to the next open office, and that in this instance, in view of the fact that two torpedoes had been exploded at Lawrenceville Junction by train No. 43, it should have been operated under control to St. Francisville, the next open office. The flagman expressed the opinion, however, that had he properly stationed himself in the vicinity of the north switch and flagged train No. 43, instead of going into the telephone booth, the accident would not have occurred.

None of the other members of the crew of extra 6108 was aware of anything wrong until just prior to the accident. Conductor Morgan stated that when his train came to a stop at St. Francisville he immediately proceeded from the caboose to the south switch of the storage track, a distance of about 40 car-lengths, in connection with the work to be performed. It was the understanding of Conductor Morgan, and also of Engineer Nelson, that a train should proceed under control to the next open office after exploding two torpedoes, while Conductor Morgan and Head Brakeman Boyce said that a flagman, stationed at the point where Flagman Baird got off the caboose, could have been seen by the engineer of the following train for a distance of about one-half mile.

Fireman Lawrence, of train No. 43, stated that after exploding the two torpedoes at Lawrenceville Junction, Engineer Earl sounded two blasts on the engine whistle and reduced speed on encountering sharp curves.

Fireman Lawrenz did not recall whether or not the whistle was sounded for the curve or which the accident occurred, but he said it had been sounded for the road crossing located about one-half mile north of the north passing-track switch. It was also the understanding of Fireman Lawrenz that on striking two torpedoes a train should be operated under control to the next open office, but he said that had Flagman Baird taken up a position in the middle of the track just north of the north passing track switch, from which point his train had been flagged on numerous occasions previously, he could have been seen in ample time to have averted the accident.

Conductor Woodling, of train No. 43, stated that he was unaware of anything wrong until the emergency application of the air brakes, made just prior to the accident. It was his opinion that Engineman Earl was laboring under the impression that the freight train was on the passing track, and he said that on numerous occasions while rounding the curve at this point the engineman of the following train would apply the air brakes in emergency only to find that the first train was clear of the main track. Conductor Woodling further stated that his train is flagged frequently at this point and headed in at the north switch of the passing track, and that had Flagman Baird been stationed at the usual point, just north of the north passing-track switch he could have been seen from the straight track approaching the curve in ample time to have prevented the accident. He had the same understanding as the other employees in respect to operating the train under control to the next open office after striking two torpedoes. The statements of Brakeman Hickman corroborated in substance those of Conductor Woodling.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Flagman Baird, of extra 6108, to afford proper flag protection for the rear end of his train.

Rule 99 of the current book of rules of this railroad requires the flagman to go back a sufficient distance and then to put down two torpedoes. Had Flagman Baird made any attempt to comply with the requirements of this rule, instead of going to the telephone booth to obtain information concerning train No. 43, which was being operated practically on time, the accident would have been averted. Flagman Baird admitted his responsibility for the occurrence of this accident.

It was generally understood by the employees

involved, and also by some of the officials, that a train should be operated under control to the next open office after exploding two torpedoes, but no rule or special instruction could be cited as authority for such an understanding, and in the absence of a specific rule to that effect it is not considered that Engineer Earl can be held responsible for a collision occurring more than 9 miles beyond the point where torpedoes were exploded.

Had an adequate block-signal system been in use on this line, this accident probably would not have occurred, an adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented it.

All of 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. Berland,

Director.