

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
ERIE RAILROAD NEAR RED HOUSE, N. Y.,
ON OCTOBER 4, 1918.

December 23, 1918.

On October 4, 1918, there was a rear-end collision between two extra freight trains on the Erie Railroad near Red House, N. Y., which resulted in the death of 2 employees and the injury of 2 employees. After investigation the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

The First District of the Meadville Division, on which this accident occurred, extends between Meadville, Pa. and Salamanca, N. Y. It is for the most part a double track line upon which train movements are governed by time table, train orders transmitted by telephone, and a manual block system which is positive for passenger trains and permissive for freight trains.

The trains involved in this accident were eastbound extra 1722 and eastbound extra 2533.

Extra 1722 consisted of engine 1722, 51 cars and a caboose, in charge of Conductor Harmon and Engineman Noblit. On October 3rd it left Meadville, Pa., at 3.40 p.m., en route to Salamanca, N. Y., passed R. H. Tower, the last open office before reaching the point of accident, and 6.3 miles west of Red House, at 1.27 a.m., October 4th, and had reached mile post No. 9, a short distance west of Red House, when its rear end was struck by extra 2533 at about 1.50 a.m. while running at a speed of about 6 or 8 miles an hour.

Extra 2533 consisted of engines 2533 and 1699, 65 cars and a caboose, in charge of Conductor Volkenburg and Enginemen Shelvey and Reynolds. It left Meadville at 5.05 p.m., October 3rd, passed R. H. Tower at 1.37 a.m., the block signal there being in the caution position, and collided with extra 1732 while running at a speed of about 15 miles an hour.

The caboose and 6 cars on the rear of extra 1732 were practically destroyed. Locomotive 2533 was derailed and the head car of extra 2533 was thrown off center at its forward truck.

Approaching the point of accident from the west the track is straight for about 1.5 miles, followed by a 3-degree curve to the left about 240 feet long, followed by straight track for a distance of about 1.5 miles to the point of collision. The accident occurred on a descending grade of .18%. The weather at the time was foggy.

Engineman Noblit of extra 1732 stated that when his train reached R. H. Tower the block signal was in the caution position and the train passed there at a speed of 8 or 10 miles an hour. Its speed was increased to 12 or 13 miles an hour, but as it neared Red House he reduced the speed to 6 or 7 miles an hour when he saw the flagman of extra 2046 about 6 or 7 car lengths away. He made an application of the air brakes for the purpose of slowing up and picking up the flagman when the rear end of his train was struck by extra 2533, which caused the air brakes on his train to be applied in emergency.

Conductor Harmon of extra 1732 stated that his train left Meadville at 3.40 p.m. and extra 2533 helped his train up

the hill at Corry, 41.6 miles east of Meadville. He said extra 2533 followed his train closely from Corry, and as his train made several stops between there and point of accident it was necessary for his flagman to flag that train several times, including Waterboro and Randolph, 15.5 and 9.9 miles, respectively, west of Red House. Upon arrival at R. H. Tower he saw the block signal in the caution position, passed there, and upon nearing Red House and proceeding at a speed of 12 or 15 miles an hour he was in the act of throwing off a fussee, when the flagman called to him that extra 2533 was about to collide with them; upon looking back he saw the headlight of that train about 5 or 6 car lengths away and jumped off. Conductor Harmon said Engineman Shelvey of extra 2533 called attention to the rear lights of their train at Corry, stating that they were not burning brightly and the bracket on the left hand side was bent so as to throw the rays of the light to one side, whereupon they were cleaned and two additional red lanterns were placed on the rear end of the caboose. He said it was very foggy and he saw the signal at R. H. Tower at a distance of 6 or 7 car lengths.

Flagman Beiter of extra 1722 stated that he flagged extra 2533 at Corry, Waterboro and Randolph, and in all three instances that train came up behind his train and stopped. He said it was foggy, but when he went back to flag he had no difficulty in seeing the lights on the rear of his train.

Engineman Shelvey of extra 2533 stated that he was on the leading locomotive of that train and helped extra 1722

into Corry; he did not see that train again until he arrived at Falconer, 22.6 miles west of Red House. His train caught up with extra 1723 at Waterboro where both trains waited for train No. 3, and upon the arrival of that train, extra 1723 departed and he followed it under a caution block. He stopped behind that train again at Randolph and after it left there he did not see it again until just before the collision, at which time its caboose was about four car lengths away. He said it was a little misty at Waterboro, but he could see the rear of extra 1723 a distance of 25 or 30 car lengths, but when he reached Randolph it was so foggy he could not see very far ahead, and when he arrived at R. H. Tower he could see the block signal light for a distance of 35 or 40 car lengths, but the fog got more dense after passing there. He thought the speed of his train between R. H. Tower and point of accident averaged 15 miles an hour, and it was running at that speed at the time of the collision, but said it may have reached 25 miles an hour part of the time. He admitted that he did not have his train under control and was operating it at a higher rate of speed than he should have in foggy weather after passing a block signal in the caution position. He said the lights on the caboose of extra 1723 were dim when he saw them at Corry, Waterboro and Randolph, and he spoke to the flagman of that train about them.

Fireman Sadler of extra 2533 stated that it was very foggy and he could not see very far ahead, and when his train passed R. H. Tower the block signal was in the caution position.

After passing R. H. Tower he told Engineman Shelvey that the block signal at Red House usually showed red at that time in the morning and he thought the train ahead would be standing west of the signal. The engineman then applied the independent air brakes. He thought the speed of his train was about 15 miles an hour at the time of the collision.

Dispatcher Hock stated that he went on duty at midnight and asked the operator at R. H. Tower regarding the condition of the weather and was told that it was very foggy there; he was not sure whether this was before or after extra 2533 passed there. He said extra 2038 passed R. H. Tower at 11.12 p.m. and stopped with its engine just east of Red House, and he instructed extra 2046, which was following that train, to push it to W. C. Tower, 8.8 miles beyond Red House. The operator at R. H. Tower asked him if he should let extra 1733 into the block under a caution signal and he authorized him to do so, that train passing there at 1.27 a.m., and about 5 minutes thereafter he authorized extra 2533 to enter the block at R.H. Tower under a caution signal upon request of the operator for authority to do so. He admitted that he should have given the crews of extra 1733 and 2533 messages advising them that two trains were ahead of them near Red House and said he had no excuse for failing to do so. He said he usually left the matter of proceeding under a caution block in foggy weather to the judgment of the enginemen as they knew the actual weather conditions better than he did. He said it had been the custom a few years ago to give the engineman and conductor a form B caution card before letting their train enter a block that was

occupied, but it was decided later that a caution card was not necessary in addition to the block signal, and in order to avoid congestion of traffic the caution card was finally done away with.

Operator Green stated that he went on duty at R. H. Tower at 11 p.m. on October 3rd and reported to Dispatcher Kingen, who was then on duty, that it was foggy. Dispatcher Hook came on duty at midnight and shortly thereafter asked him about the fog. Operator Green said he told him it was so foggy a train could not be seen at a distance of more than the length of a cross-over. He said extra 2046 passed R. H. Tower at 12.54 p.m., and as extra 1723 was about due he asked the dispatcher if he should let that train enter the block under a caution signal and the dispatcher authorized him to do so at 1.20 a.m. and that train passed there at 1.27 a.m. He then asked the operator at Red House for the block for extra 2533 and received a caution block and then asked the dispatcher if he desired him to let extra 2533 enter the block under a caution signal, and the dispatcher replied that he did, as it was necessary to get that train off the single track in order to let the westbound trains go. The dispatcher also told him that if he had opportunity he should tell the engineer of extra 2533 that extra 2046 was standing in front of the depot at Red House and extra 1723 was between R. H. Tower and Red House, but did not tell him to incorporate it in a message. Extra 2533 was then approaching and he went out to give the engineer the information concerning the trains in the block, but that train passed without his having an opportunity to do so.

The direct cause of this accident was the failure of Engineman Shelvey of extra 2533 to operate his train under control during foggy weather after passing a block signal in the caution position.

Rule 12 of the manual block signal rules provides that:

Trains entering a block with a Caution Card (Form B) are required to proceed at a safe speed prepared to stop before meeting any obstruction within the block.

Enginemen and conductors will be held equally responsible in case of collision with another train or obstruction.

Under this rule Engineman Shelvey was required to operate his train under control, after passing the block signal at R. H. Tower in the caution position, prepared to stop within his range of vision. Had he observed the requirements of this rule the accident undoubtedly would not have occurred. The fact that he was closely following extra 1722 in foggy weather should have caused him to exercise the greatest care in controlling the speed of his train. Under rule 12 Conductor Volkenburg is equally responsible for the occurrence of this accident.

Conductor Harmon of extra 1722 exercised poor judgment in failing to protect the rear of his train when it approached Red House. He knew that extra 2533 was following his train at no great distance, that the weather was foggy, and that the speed of his train was such that it was liable to be overtaken by another train, all of which should have prompted him at least to throw off lighted fuses. Had he done so it is probable that this accident would not have occurred.

In November, 1916, the Superintendent of the Headville Division issued the following bulletin:

There was recently an accident caused by a west-bound extra colliding with another westbound extra. Investigation develops that permissive blocks are being authorized in fog. This is strictly against instructions and I wish it understood that operators are to post train dispatcher when it is foggy and under no circumstances allow a train in a block occupied by another train when this condition prevails, unless they have a message signed by the train dispatcher's initials to allow the train to proceed.

This investigation disclosed that the bulletin above referred to was disregarded. It was customary to permit trains to enter an occupied block in foggy weather with the block signal in the caution position, without giving the crew a caution card, as was done in this instance, and it was left entirely to the judgment of the engineman whether or not he would proceed. Extra 2046 had not cleared the block between R. H. Tower and Red House when the dispatcher authorized extra 1722, and later extra 2533, to enter the block without furnishing them with caution cards. There is some question as to whether Dispatcher Mook was informed concerning the condition of the weather at R. H. Tower before he authorized extras 1722 and 2533 to enter the block, Operator Green claiming that he advised the dispatcher of the foggy condition of the weather before those trains arrived at R. H. Tower, and the dispatcher said he was uncertain as to what time he received that information.

A manual block system operated in the manner in which this system was operated fails to give the protection which a block system is designed to afford. Until the operating officers of this division of the Erie Railroad take steps to insure that the rules governing the operation of the manual block system are complied with, accidents such as this may be expected to occur.

8.

All of the employees involved in this accident were experienced men with good records. The crew of extra 1722 had been on duty about 12 hours and the crew of extra 2533 about 11 hours at the time of the accident. Dispatcher Hook had been on duty about 2 hours and Operator Green about 3 hours.

JOT