

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE FLORIDA EAST COAST RAILWAY AT DUPONT, FLA., ON MAY 17, 1925.

September 21, 1925.

To the Commission:

On May 17, 1925, there was a derailment of a freight train on the Florida East Coast Railway at Dupont, Fla., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of four employees.

Location and Method of Operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Northern Division extending between Jacksonville and New Smyrna, Fla., a distance of 124.6 miles, which 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 the south passing-track switch located 2,341 feet south of the station at Dupont; approaching this point from the south there are 3,418 feet of tangent, a 30 curve to the left 972 feet in length, and then tangent track extending to and beyond the point of accident, 1,551 feet distant. The grade in this vicinity is practically level. The passing track parallels the main track on the west and is approximately 2,700 feet in length between switches. The station is located on the east side of the main track; between the station and the south switch of the passing track there are two spur tracks which lead off to the east from the main track.

The south passing-track switch is a facing-point switch for northbound trains and leads off to the west through a No. 10 turnout. The switch stand is located on the east side of the main track. It is of the Wier type, is 6 feet 6 inches high; at night a green indication is displayed when the switch is lined for the main track and a red indication when it is lined for the passing track.

The main track is laid with 90-pound rails, 33 feet in length, with about 20 ties to the rail-length, ballasted with stone, and maintained in good condition. The roadway is wide, with nothing to interfere with the view of the engineman of an approaching train.

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred at 10:30 p.m.

Description.

Northbound freight train extra 430 consisted of 74 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 430, and was in charge of Conductor S. P. Matthews and Engineman Hazelwood. It left New Smyrna at 6:15 p.m., and headed into the passing track at Dupont to meet southbound passenger train No. 37; on account of the length of extra 430 about seven cars remained on the main track south of the switch. After train No. 37 arrived, extra 430 headed out on the main track at the north switch, thus clearing the main track at the south switch, which apparently was not closed after this movement had been made. Shortly after train No. 37 departed extra 430 proceeded northward.

Southbound passenger train No. 37 consisted of engine 439 and 11 cars, in charge of Conductor Atkins and Engineman W. R. Matthews. It passed Bunnell, the last open office, 3.5 miles north of Dupont, at 9:10 p.m., 25 minutes late, and upon approaching Dupont was brought to a stop upon receiving a flag signal given by the brakeman of extra 430, who informed the engineman that extra 430 was not clear of the main track at the south passing-track switch; the train then proceeded to the station, where station work was performed, and departed, running through the south switch after the rear end of extra 430 had been moved into clear on the passing track.

Northbound freight train extra 132-136 consisted of 83 cars and a caboose, hauled by engines 132 and 136, coupled, and was in charge of Conductor Tanner and Engineman DeYampert and Shomate. This train left New Smyrna at 8:50 p.m., passed Daytona, the last open office, 19.6 miles from Dupont, at 9:25 p.m. and was derailed at the south passing-track switch at Dupont while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 25 or 30 miles an hour.

Extra 132-136 headed in on the passing track and after traveling a short distance both engines and the first 3 cars in the train were derailed and badly damaged, while 20 other cars in various portions of the train were also derailed, 3 of which were totally destroyed; the first engine turned over on its right side while the second turned over to the left. The employee killed was the engineman of engine 136.

Summary of evidence

Inspection made of the engines subsequent to the accident failed to disclose anything that might have caused or contributed to the cause of the derailment, while all the evidence clearly indicated that the south passing-track switch had been run through by train No. 37.

Engineman Hazelwood of extra 430 said Conductor Matthews opened the south switch of the passing track upon the arrival of their train at Dupont, and then rode on the engine to the north end of the passing track. Several minutes later the reflection of the headlight of train No. 37 came into view and Engineman Hazelwood said he sounded the whistle signal recalling the flagman at the rear of the train. After train No. 37 passed the north switch he moved his train ahead to get the rear end clear of the main track and then stopped and called for a signal from the rear end. After several minutes' delay he received a proceed signal from the conductor and departed.

Conductor Matthews said that after train No. 37 had cleared the north switch the engineman called a second time for the flagman to come in and then moved the train out on the main track and called for a signal from the rear end, but as no signal was received Conductor Matthews said he started toward the rear end. In the meantime train No. 37 had departed, and shortly thereafter before he had reached the rear end, Conductor Matthews saw the flagman returning and gave the engineman a proceed signal. He noted that the south switch light was showing green and later as the train was leaving he asked the flagman who had closed the switch, to which the flagman replied that he had not done so and that he supposed it had been done by some member of the crew of train No. 37.

Head Brakeman Howell, of extra 430, said he rode in the caboose from Daytona until the train stopped at Dupont, at which point the flagman started back to protect the train. Brakeman Howell then went to the head end of the train, and he said that ^{the} south passing-track switch light was showing red when he passed it, but later, after the departure of train No. 37, he noticed that it was showing green. Brakeman Howell also stated that while train No. 37 was at Dupont he saw a white light on the ground in what appeared to be the vicinity of the south switch and concluded that it was the light of some member of the crew of train No. 37 going forward to close the switch.

Flagman McCollum of extra 430 said he went back to protect his train after its arrival at Dupont. As far as he knew no signal recalling him was sounded by the engineman of his train and when train No. 37 passed him he assumed his own train was into clear and therefore returned to the caboose. He noted the green light of the south switch as he passed it on his way to the caboose and supposing that the switch had been lined for the main track by some member of the crew of train No. 37 he did not pay any further attention to it; when asked by Conductor Matthews if he had closed the switch he replied that he had not, but supposed that some one on train No. 37 had done so.

Engineman W. R. Matthews, of train No. 37, said he was flagged as his train approached Dupont and was told that extra 430 was not clear at the south end of the passing track. His train then moved ahead to the station, where station work was performed, and then moved up to within a short distance of the south switch of the passing track and again was brought to a stop. Engineman Matthews said that later he looked ahead, saw a green signal light, and shortly thereafter his train departed. Just before leaving Dupont he had been looking toward the rear of his own train for a signal from the flagman and he thought it was while he was thus engaged that the switch was closed.

Fireman Smith, of train No. 37, stated that during most of the time his train was at Dupont he was looking back for lantern signals incident to two switching movements his train made at that point; during the remainder of the time spent by his train at this point he was preparing a bucket of compound to put in the boiler on account of the fact that the engine was foaming. After extra 430 had cleared the main track, he noticed that a green light was displayed at the south passing-track switch.

Engineman DeYampert, of extra 132-136, said that while he could not positively state that the switch light on the south switch was green, yet he was looking ahead as his train approached Dupont and was sure that had it been otherwise he would have noticed it. He had no warning of any kind of the impending accident, his first knowledge of it being when he felt his engine swerve into the passing track and then leave the rails. Engineman DeYampert later examined the switch stand and found the lever in the latch, retained by the open switch lock, and the switch points set for the passing track, while the target and also the switch light showed clear for the main track. Conductor Tanner and Fireman Edwards, both of whom were on engine 132 with Engineman DeYampert, said they were looking ahead as their train approached Dupont and while they did not remember seeing this particular switch light, they thought it must have been green or they would have noticed it.

Section Foreman Dupuis arrived at the scene of the accident shortly after it occurred and made an examination of the switch. He found the lever in the latch, with the open lock in the keeper and the switch set for the passing track. He said it was clearly evident that the switch had been run through; the tie bars and throw rod were in normal condition, but the housing casting of the switch stand and the bottom guide bracket were broken, the broken housing permitting the sprocket which operates the signal light to become unmeshed with the gear of the vertical mast, thus allowing the switch to operate independently of the signal mast, this damaged condition of the switch stand accounted for the signal light showing green at the time extra 132-136 approached it while the switch points were open.

Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the damaged condition of a switch which had been run through by train No. 37, for which Engineman Matthews and Fireman Smith are primarily responsible.

The evidence clearly indicated that the switch was not closed after the rear end of extra 430 had been pulled in on the passing track, while its damaged condition showed that it had been run through by a southbound train. Engineman Matthews said that shortly before his train departed from Dupont he had looked ahead and had seen a green light, indicating that the switch was lined for the main track, but it seems more than probable that the green light seen by him was one of the spur-track switches located north of the south passing-track switch, and that when leaving Dupont, knowing extra 430 had pulled ahead, he assumed that the passing-track switch was lined for the main track and paid no further attention to the matter. The switch stand was on the fireman's side of the main track, but he was engaged in looking back for signals and at the same time was preparing some boiler compound on account of the fact that the engine was foaming, and it is not believed that he paid any attention whatever to the position of the switch when his train departed.

Flagman McCollum, of extra 430, was protecting the rear of his train and did not hear the whistle signals recalling him, but when train No. 37 passed him he assumed that the rear end of his own train was into clear and therefore returned; on his way in he noticed that a green indication was displayed at the switch and assumed that it had been closed by some member of the crew of train No. 37. While Flagman McCollum undoubtedly had some grounds for being misled, the fact remains that he knew the switch had been opened by a member of his own crew and it was incumbent on him to know that it was properly closed and locked before his train proceeded; this he did not do, and to this extent he is at fault.

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.

The employees involved were experienced men and none of them had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,
Director.