

INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR ~~OF THE~~ BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE
ILLINOIS CENTRAL RAILROAD NEAR NEWTON, ILL., ON
FEBRUARY 16, 1929.

May 22, 1929.

To the Commission.

On February 16, 1929, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Illinois Central Railroad near Newton, Ill., resulting in the injury of one employee and one caretaker in charge of a car of live poultry.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Mattoon District of the Indiana Division which extends between Mattoon, Ill., and Evansville, Ind., a distance of 127.8 miles, and intersects the Effingham District at Newton, which is located 40.9 miles south of Mattoon. 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 at a point 200 feet north of mile post B-158 or approximately 2 miles north of Newton. Approaching the point of accident from the south there is a $4^{\circ} 30'$ curve to the right 900 feet in length, followed by 380 feet of tangent, the accident occurring on this tangent at a point about 120 feet from its southern end. Approaching from the north there is a 4° curve to the right 1,113 feet in length, and then the tangent on which this accident occurred. Beginning at a point about 1,800 feet north of mile post B-159 the grade is 0.36 per cent ascending for northbound trains, reaching a maximum of 1.08 per cent at the point of accident and extending about 2,100 feet beyond.

The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at 4.10 p.m.

Description

Northbound freight train extra 1762 consisted of 30 loaded cars, 6 empty cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1762, and was in charge of Conductor Alsop and Engineman Storr. This train arrived at Newton at 3.20 p.m., where two cars were picked up and a check was made of the train register. A copy of a train order on Form 19 was received and the train then departed, at 4 p.m., and at a point about 2 miles north of Newton it collided with southbound freight train No. 281 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 15 miles per hour.

Southbound freight train No. 281 consisted of 40 loaded cars, 5 empty cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1861, and was in charge of Conductor Parsons and Engineman Nickerson. This train left Greenup, 17.9 miles from Newton, at 3.28 p.m., 3 hours and 30 minutes late, and collided with extra 1762 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 15 miles per hour.

The front ends of both engines were considerably damaged and the engine-truck wheels were driven back under the cylinders. The front and intermediate driving wheels of engine 1762 were derailed while the main and back driving wheels remained on the track but continued to revolve resulting in the rails being burned to a depth of about 1 3/4 inches. The first car in the train of extra 1762, which was a car of poultry, telescoped the tender of engine 1762, and the 25th car from the engine was also damaged and derailed. Engine 1810 was not derailed but the second to the seventh cars, inclusive, were derailed and damaged.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Storm, of extra 1762, stated that his train departed from Newton at 4 p.m., and was traveling at a speed of about 25 miles per hour when he commenced the ascent of the grade north of Newton and on rounding the curve he saw train No. 281 approaching. He immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, closed the throttle and shouted to the fireman and head brakeman to get off; he then gave one blast of the whistle and jumped off himself. Engineman Storm stated that before departing from Newton he received from the conductor a clearance card, a train order on Form 19, and a register check showing the arrival of seven trains, including the arrival of train No. 281 at 3.15 p.m., and he remarked to Conductor Alsop that they had a clear track to Mattoon and the conductor replied, "Yes, first No. 280 is right behind us; hurry up and get out of town." Engineman Storm then showed the orders to the fireman and the head brakeman. Although Engineman Storm closed the throttle before he jumped from the engine, he noticed that the engine was still working steam after the collision occurred and he thought the throttle must have been jarred open due to the collision. He further stated that the air brakes worked properly and he estimated the speed of his train to have been about 20 miles per hour when he made the emergency application.

The statements of Fireman Van Deren of extra 1762, practically corroborated those of Engineman Storm. He estimated the speed of their train to have been 15 miles per hour at the time of the accident. The testimony of Head Brakeman Owen brought out nothing additional of importance.

Conductor Alsop, of extra 1762, stated that on arriving at Newton he went to the telegraph office to register and while there he was interrupted several times, the operator gave him waybills for two cars to be picked up and he went out to give instructions to his crew. On returning to the office to resume his registering he heard train No. 231 approaching and again left the booth to see if his engine was clear and to inform the engineman of train No. 231 of their movements; train No. 231 is a first-class train. He then completed registering and had started to check the register when the conductor of train No. 231 came in and he allowed the conductor to register, at the same time checking train No. 231 on his own register slip and then left the office with the conductor of train No. 231. He later returned to the office and completed the register check, obtained his orders and gave the orders and the register check to Engineman Storm who read them and then gave them to the fireman. After the collision he made a check with the crew of train No. 281 and it then occurred to him that he had train No. 281 of February 15 on his register check; he could account for this error only by the fact that the wind caused by the opening and closing of the door had blown the page of the register over and apparently he had not noticed the date. Conductor Alsop estimated the speed to have been about 25 miles per hour at the time the air brakes were applied in emergency.

Flagman Thies, of extra 1762, stated that on leaving Newton he saw only the train order which had been received, but Conductor Alsop told him they had a clear track to Mattoon. His first intimation of anything wrong was when he felt the air brakes apply in emergency at which time the speed was about 20 miles per hour.

Engineman Nickerson, of train No. 281, stated that he was operating his train in the usual manner, he had made a 10-pound reduction of the air brakes and then made a heavy service reduction just before descending the grade, and was drifting down the grade when he saw an engine approaching around the curve about 30 car-lengths distant. He then moved the brake valve to the emergency position without having released the air, and told the men on the engine to get off. He estimated the speed of his train at the time of the accident to have been about 15 miles per hour. The air brakes worked properly en route.

Operator Richards, on duty at the time of the accident, stated that there was nothing unusual in the procedure of delivering the orders to extra 1762 before its

departure from Newton. There was no mention made of train No. 281 by the dispatcher at the time, and he himself did not know of its location on the division.

Upon comparing the register check obtained by Conductor Alsop with the train register for February 15 and 16, it developed that he obtained his entire check for the arrival of trains on the 15th instead of the 16th, with the exception of train No. 231 which he checked immediately upon its arrival at 3.29 p.m.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Conductor Alsop, of extra 1762, properly to check the train register.

The evidence clearly indicates that Conductor Alsop failed to obtain a correct register check, due to the fact that he checked the train register for the previous date by mistake, thus allowing his train to depart before the arrival of train No. 281, an overdue superior train.

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. Borland,

Director.