

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 SALINE, ILL., ON
DECEMBER 20, 1931

February 6, 1932.

To the Commission.

On December 20, 1931, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the Illinois Central Railroad near Saline, Ill., which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 4 employees and 1 person carried under contract. The investigation of this accident was made in conjunction with a representative of the Illinois Commerce Commission.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Bluford District of the St. Louis Division which extends between New Yard, Fulton, Ky., and Bluford, Ill., a distance of 126.3 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 at a point 3,524 feet south of the telegraph office at Saline, approaching this point from the south, the track is tangent for a distance of more than 2 miles, this tangent extending for a considerable distance beyond the office. The grade for northbound trains is 0.3 per cent descending for a distance of approximately 4,000 feet approaching the point of accident and continues for some distance beyond that point. A station board is located at a point 1,354 feet south of the point of accident. Local freight, dispatch and banana trains, and freight engines running light or with caboose, are restricted by time-table instructions to a speed of 40 miles per hour.

Beginning at a point 4,000 feet south of the point of accident, there is a deep cut 1,200 feet in length with a maximum height of 55 feet, followed by a 15-foot fill about 525 feet in length and then a smaller cut about 175 feet in length, followed by a fill having a maximum depth of 30 feet, and it was on this latter fill, at a point about 1,700 feet from its southern end, that the collision occurred.

It was foggy, particularly in the deep cut, at the time the accident occurred at 5.02 a.m.

Water Tank



Telegraph Office Saline

3524 ft.



Point of accident

345 ft.

Torpedo burn

1219 ft

1354 ft.

1851 ft

Fusee drippings

Station board

Cut

Fusee drippings

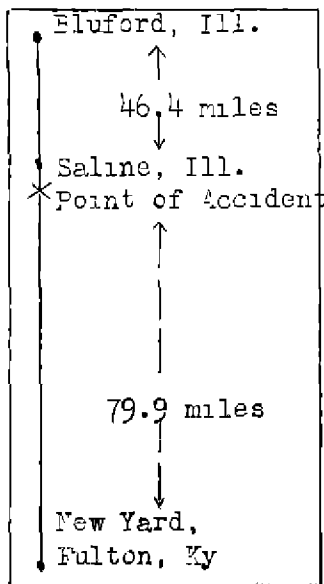
3824 ft.

4451 ft.

Cut

Fusee drippings

Stonefort



Inv. No. 1745
Illinois Central R. R.
Saline, Ill.
December 20, 1931.

Description

Northbound freight train extra 1814 consisted of 63 loaded cars, 4 empty cars, and a caboose, hauled by engine 1814, and was in charge of Conductor McNew and Engineman Vance. This train departed from Reevesville, 21.6 miles south of Saline, at 3.24 a.m., arrived at Saline at 4.50 a.m., and was standing at that point when its rear end was struck by extra 1838.

Northbound freight train extra 1838 consisted of 45 loaded cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1838, and was in charge of Conductor Camp and Engineman Stinde. This train departed from Reevesville, at 4.25 a.m., and on approaching Saline it collided with the rear end of extra 1814 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been 25 miles per hour.

Engine 1838 stopped on its left side, headed diagonally down the embankment on the left side of the track, the tender also was headed down the embankment but remained upright and practically at right angles to the track. The first two cars in extra 1838 were derailed but remained upright, and the twenty-fifth, twenty-sixth, and twenty-seventh cars were derailed due to buckling. The superstructure of the caboose of extra 1814 was demolished and the understructure lay parallel to the engine and about 10 feet from it, with the next car from the rear resting on it, the second car from the rear in extra 1814 was derailed but remained upright. The employee killed was the fireman of extra 1838, and those injured were the engineman, head brakeman, and a stock attendant, of extra 1838, an engineman who was riding on engine 1838 to learn the road, and a fireman who was off duty and riding in the caboose of extra 1814.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Vance, of extra 1814, stated that after stopping his train about six or eight car-lengths south of the water tank at Saline at 4.50 a.m., he whistled out a flag, cut off his engine and took water, and just as he was ready to depart, at 5.02 a.m., the collision occurred. He recalled the flagman about 5 a.m., and intended to proceed without him, as he was in receipt of information that extra 1838 was due to pass Saline at 5.05 a.m., and since the siding at that point was blocked with bad-order cars at its northern end he wanted to reach Allenby, 5.2 miles north of Saline, where he could pull in on the siding to allow this train to pass, it being a more important train. Engineman Vance stated that south of Saline they ran into some heavy banks of fog, the fog being especially dense at Stonefort, 4,451 feet south of the point of the accident, and also in the long cut south of the point of accident. While the fog was

not so dense in the vicinity of the head end of his train at the point where it stopped, and while he could see his head brakeman when the latter was about at the center of the train, yet he was unable to see the markers on the rear of his train. Engineman Vance stated that he had always found that the flagman he had on this day, with whom he worked regularly, went back farther than required and frequently it had been necessary to call him in a second time. The statements of Fireman Jones brought out nothing additional of importance.

Conductor McNew, of extra 1814, stated that as soon as their train came to a stop the flagman went back to flag and he and the head brakeman started toward the head end of the train making an inspection. He inspected 20 or 25 cars on the east or right side and then crossed over to the other side and started back toward the rear of his train and when about 6 or 7 car-lengths from the rear he crossed back over to the east side, as there was no place to walk on the west side of a bridge on which a portion of his train was standing, and as he crossed over he looked back to see if he could see the flagman and saw him giving stop signals to extra 1838 with a lighted fusee. He thought that the train was then about 30 or 35 car-lengths from his caboose, he then heard some torpedoes explode, at which time he was 4 car-lengths from his caboose and also heard extra 1838 answer the flag, and he had time to run to the caboose, get on the caboose platform, open the door and warn the fireman who was dead-heading, and then get off and reach the right of way fence before the collision occurred. He stated that there was a light fog at the time, and that he had thrown off a lighted fusee at a point about 70 or 75 car-lengths south of the point where the rear of his train stopped, this being the usual practice on approaching Saline. Conductor McNew lost his lantern at the time of the accident, started back to obtain the flagman's lantern, and found a burning fusee lying on the west side of the track at a point about 30 or 35 car-lengths from the point of accident. He considered his flagman to be reliable and thought he had done all in his power to prevent an accident, although he admitted that the flagman could have gone back farther in the time at his disposal.

Brakeman Absher, of extra 1814, stated that at Reevesville he got off the engine, looked over the train, and then boarded the caboose upon leaving there. When the train came to a stop at Saline he started ahead, and while it was foggy yet he could see the lights on his engine a distance of about 60 car-lengths. The statements of Fireman Batson, who was deadheading on extra 1814, and was asleep in the caboose just prior to the occurrence of the accident, added nothing of importance.

Flagman Morgan, of extra 1814, stated that as soon as his train came to a stop he went back to flag, going a distance of about 30 car-lengths, or to the station board, which is located 1,354 feet south of the point of accident; he put down two torpedoes and had been standing there about five minutes when he heard extra 1838 approaching, he then walked toward the approaching train and he believed that he walked past the torpedoes, and about three minutes later extra 1838 came into view at which time he thought it was at Stonefort. By that time he had lighted a fusee and started to flag, and the engineman answered his flag just as the train passed him, at a speed he estimated to have been 25 or 30 miles per hour. Flagman Morgan stated that the fusee that Conductor McNew threw off approaching Saline was still burning when he went back to flag and he thought it was about 60 car-lengths south of him, he saw it go out about the time he put down the torpedoes. After flagging extra 1838 he started back toward his train and carried the fusee a short distance before he stumbled and let it drop. Flagman Morgan stated that he had noticed some fog after his own train passed Stonefort, but it was not a real heavy fog, and as he could see a distance of 50 or 60 car-lengths he thought he went back far enough, and he did not feel that Engineman Stinde had observed and acted on his signals as soon as should have been the case. Flagman Morgan further stated that he was aware of the fact that extra 1838 was due at Saline at 5.05 a.m.

Engineman Stinde, of extra 1838, stated that they encountered very little fog south of Stonefort but when he entered the cut north thereof the fog was quite dense and continued to be so to the point of accident. He was operating his train at a speed of about 40 miles per hour when he saw the flagman with a lighted fusee giving stop signals from a point he estimated was about 15 car-lengths distant; he immediately applied the air brakes in emergency, opened the sand valve and answered the flag, and he then saw the caboose ahead and called to the others on the engine to jump off, at the same time jumping off himself. He thought that his train traveled a distance of about 30 car-lengths from the time he applied the air brakes until the time of the collision and he estimated the speed at the time of the accident to have been about 25 miles per hour. Engineman Stinde stated that he did not hear torpedoes explode at any time, and that he had not received any information relative to the schedule of extra 1814. A test of the air brakes on his train was made by the car inspectors from the caboose before his departure from Fulton, and the brakes functioned properly en route, but on account of the descending grade in the vicinity of the point of accident he thought that a distance of more than 60 car-lengths would be required to stop a train such as he was handling at the time of the accident.

Head Brakeman Parham, of extra 1838, was riding on the fireman's seat box, in front of the fireman, when approaching Saline, and the first indication he had of anything wrong was when the engineman applied the air brakes in emergency and answered the flag, he immediately looked ahead and saw the markers on the caboose, but did not see the flagman with the fusee. He was unable to state whether or not his train exploded any torpedoes. Brakeman Parham further stated that approaching Saline the fog was so dense that he made a remark to that effect to the fireman, to which the fireman replied that if it did not get any worse it would be all right. He estimated the speed of their train at the time the brakes were applied in emergency to have been 40 miles per hour.

Engineman West, who was riding on engine 1838 in order to learn the road, stated that the weather was foggy in places during the trip, and approaching Saline the train was being operated at a speed of 40 or 45 miles per hour when Engineman Stinde placed the brake valve in the emergency position and called to them to get off. He looked ahead and saw a flagman giving stop signals with a lighted fusee about 6 or 8 car-lengths ahead and he then saw the caboose, which he estimated was about 8 or 10 car-lengths beyond the flagman; he did not hear any torpedoes explode.

Conductor Camp, of extra 1838, estimated the speed of his train at the time of the accident to have been 40 miles per hour and said that the fog approaching Saline was quite dense; after the occurrence of the accident as he was walking toward the head end of his train he could not see a distance of more than 4 or 5 car-lengths. The statements of Brakeman McAdoo brought out nothing additional of importance, except that the fog was dense in the vicinity of the point of accident.

Supervisor of Trains and Tracks Willingham stated that he arrived at the scene of the accident about four hours after its occurrence and made a careful inspection of the track to determine what protection had been afforded extra 1814. At a point 345 feet south of the point of accident he found two torpedo burns, about two rail-lengths apart, and the first indication of fusee drippings was in the middle of the track at a point 1,219 feet south of the point of collision; these drippings were in the center of the track and indicated that some one had been walking around with the fusee. Fusee drippings were also found at a point 1,851 feet south of the point of accident, which probably were left by some member of the crew of the light engine which came to pick up the rear end of extra 1838 after the accident, these drippings extended southward a distance of 80 feet. At a point 3,285 feet south of the point of accident a fusee cap

was found in the ditch alongside the track, and 539 feet south thereof a fusee was found lying about 18 inches inside of the rail, it had tipped over and burned the edge of the tie, and apparently was the one which was thrown off by Conductor McNew, of extra 1814, on approaching Saline. A half-burned fusee was found at Stonefort, 4,451 feet south of the point of accident, which had apparently been left by the flagman of extra 1838 when the light engine came along to get his train.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Flagman Morgan, of extra 1814, to provide adequate flag protection.

Rule 99 of the Transportation Rules provides that when a train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by another train, the flagman must go back immediately with flagman's signals a sufficient distance to insure full protection, placing two torpedoes, and when necessary, in addition, displaying lighted fusees. When recalled and safety to the train will permit, he may return

The evidence indicates that extra 1814 had been standing at Saline 12 minutes at the time of the accident, which was ample time for Flagman Morgan to have gone back a sufficient distance to provide proper protection for the rear of his train, and it also appeared that the flagman knew extra 1838 was expected to reach Saline by 5.05 a.m. Flagman Morgan said he went back a distance of about 30 car-lengths, placed two torpedoes, and had been standing there about five minutes when he first heard extra 1838 approaching and about three minutes later the train came into view. The marks of fusee drippings found on the track after the occurrence of the accident indicate that Flagman Morgan was as far back as 1,219 feet when he flagged extra 1838, but the torpedo burns were found at a point only 345 feet south of the point of accident, which would indicate that if Flagman Morgan had been standing at the point where he placed the torpedoes, as stated by him, he was only a short distance from the rear of his train, when he first heard extra 1838 approaching, and then went back and lighted a fusee. While there was a difference of opinion as to the density of the fog, it is apparent that there was considerable fog and that it obscured the view to some extent, which should have caused Flagman Morgan to have taken extra precautions.

Flagman Morgan said that when he put down the torpedoes he could see the fusee thrown off by his conductor as his train entered Saline, this was more than 3,000 feet from the torpedo burns found on the rail. On the other hand, the head brakeman of extra 1838 said that when Engineman Stinde

applied the brakes in emergency he at once looked ahead but did not see the flagman indicating that by that time the engine had already passed the flagman. These statements are not at all consistent with each other, and tend to make it appear either that the fog settled down very materially after the flagman put down the torpedoes or else the employees on engine 1838 were not maintaining a proper lookout. Under all the circumstances, however, it is not believed that there is sufficient evidence to justify placing responsibility on the engine crew of extra 1838, nor is it clear that responsibility can be attached to Conductor McNew for the apparent failure of Flagman Morgan to provide the degree of protection which the existing conditions demanded.

All of the employees involved were men with long experience 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.