

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON  
THE LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE RAILROAD NEAR CURTIS,  
GA., ON JULY 8, 1928.

August 8, 1928.

To the Commission:

On July 8, 1928, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Louisville & Nashville Railroad near Curtis, Ga., which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 14 passengers, 6 employees on duty and 4 employees off duty.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Atlanta Division which extends between Copperhill, Tenn., and Marietta, Ga., a distance of 95.8 miles, this being a single-track line over which trains are operated by timetable and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred at a point about 1 mile south of Curtis, approaching this point from the north there is a short 6° curve to the left and then 804 feet of tangent, followed by a 6° curve to the right 683 feet in length, the point of accident being about 25 feet beyond the leaving end of the last-mentioned curve; approaching from the south there is a short 2° curve to the left, followed by 71 feet of tangent, a 5° curve to the right 500 feet in length and then 457 feet of tangent extending to the point of accident. The grade is level. The point of accident could be seen by a southbound engineer a distance of 432 feet and by a northbound engineer a distance of 800 feet. Southbound trains of the same class are superior by direction.

It was dark and partly cloudy at the time of the accident which occurred at 8.51 p.m.

Description

Northbound passenger train No. 6 consisted of one combination mail and baggage car and two coaches, all of wooden construction, hauled by engine 139, and was in

charge of Conductor Fleming and Engineman Miller. At Blue Ridge, Ga., 5.5 miles from Curtis, the crew in charge received a copy of train order No. 62, Form 19, which provided that train No. 7 would wait at Curtis for train No. 6 until 8.55 p.m. Train No. 6 departed from Blue Ridge, which is the last open office, at 8.40 p.m., on time, stopped at Murphy Junction, 1.6 miles distant, to leave a register card, and was approaching Curtis when it collided with train No. 7 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been from 15 to 30 miles per hour.

Southbound passenger train No. 7 consisted of one combination baggage and passenger car and one coach, both of wooden construction, hauled by engine 137, and was in charge of Conductor Shaft and Engineman Lyon. This train departed from Copperhill, the last open office, 7.9 miles from Curtis, at 8.32 p.m., 12 minutes late, with a clearance card stating that there were no orders for delivery to the crew. A stop was made at Galloway, 1.4 miles from Curtis, and the train then proceeded, passed Curtis, and collided with train No. 6 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been 20 or 25 miles per hour.

The two engines locked together but remained upright; they were badly damaged, and the first car in each train was telescoped for a short distance. The employee killed was the engineman of train No. 6.

#### Summary of evidence

Dispatcher Forrester, who was on duty at the time of the accident, stated that he addressed train order No. 62 to train No. 6 at Blue Ridge on Form 19 and to train No. 7 at Copperhill on Form 31. The orders were sent simultaneously, and after having been repeated by the operators at the two stations he gave "O. K." to the operator at Copperhill and made the order complete to the operator at Blue Ridge at 8.10 p.m. At 8.30 p.m. he was called by Operator Newman, located at Copperhill, who told him that the conductor of train No. 7 wanted him to annul the order, saying that his train would be almost on time. Dispatcher Forrester, after a second's consideration, decided to annul the order and did so by issuing train order No. 64, but addressed it only to the operator at Copperhill, this order being made complete at 8.31 p.m. After this had been done he issued the clearance card previously mentioned, stating that there were no orders for train No. 7, and then busied himself with the movement of other trains, the result being that train order No. 62 was still outstanding at Blue Ridge for the crew of train No. 6, and it was not until 9.10 p.m., when the operator at Blue Ridge asked for information concerning

train No. 7, that he realized his mistake. Dispatcher Forrester acknowledged his responsibility for the occurrence of the accident saying that in his desire to keep train No. 7 moving he forgot the order at Blue Ridge.

Dispatcher Forrester had jurisdiction over the subdivision on which this accident occurred as well as over two other sub-divisions, and he stated that this work formerly was handled by two dispatchers, the number of trains, however, had decreased to some extent since that time. According to his statements, about 40 train orders constituted an average day's work. Examination of the train-order book showed that between 4 p.m., the time at which Dispatcher Forrester came on duty, and 8.31 p.m., the time at which the annulment order was issued to the operator at Copperhill, the dispatcher had issued 10 train orders, including the annulment order, and 4 clearance cards. The wait order, No. 62, was issued at 8.10 p.m., another order was issued at 8.12 p.m., and this was followed by the annulment order at 8.31 p.m.; there was then the clearance card at 8.32 p.m. to the crew of train No. 7 at Copperhill and no other train order or clearance card until 8.58 p.m. In other words, the annulment order and the clearance card involved in this accident were the only orders or cards handled by Dispatcher Forrester during the 46-minute interval between 8.12 p.m. and 8.58 p.m. A total of 21 train orders and clearance cards were issued between 4 p.m. and 11.22 p.m., the order sent at the latter time being the last one issued by Dispatcher Forrester before going off duty.

Clerk-Operator Elsie Baugh, on duty at Blue Ridge, said she received train order No. 62 on Form 19 and that when train No. 6 arrived and had registered she delivered the order to the crew and the train departed at 8.40 p.m., on time. According to her further statements it was not customary for the dispatcher to have her report the arrival of trains unless he particularly desired such information, while "OS" reports were bunched and reported at a later time.

Clerk-Operator Newman, on duty at Copperhill, said that when train No. 7 arrived at his station the conductor came in and registered, and after reading train order No. 62 the conductor handed it back without signing it and told him to ask the dispatcher to annul the order, saying his train would delay train No. 6 only a few minutes and probably would be about on time. The annulment

order was then issued by the dispatcher, followed by the issuance of the clearance card, the train departing immediately afterwards. Operator Newman said he did not notice anything wrong with the handling of the orders, saying that it was possible for the dispatcher to have annulled the wait order at Blue Ridge without his having noticed it, as there were other duties which he had to perform.

The statements of Fireman Miller, of train No. 6, were to the effect that he read train order No. 62 before leaving Blue Ridge and that after leaving that point he again asked the engineman, who was his father, if train No. 7 was to wait at Curtis until 8.55 p.m., receiving an affirmative reply. On returning to his own seat box the fireman looked ahead and saw a dim reflection which seemed to resemble a headlight but apparently it was too dim to be very close, he watched it for a few seconds in order to make sure, saw it gradually growing brighter, and then spoke about it to the engineman. At that instant the headlight came into full view and he called to the engineman to jump, at the same time getting down on the steps preparatory to getting off. Fireman Miller said the engineman applied the air brakes in emergency as soon as he had been warned. The statements of the train crew brought out no additional facts of importance. No statements were obtained from the members of the engine crew of train No. 7, while those obtained from Conductor Shaft practically corroborated the statements made by the operator at Copperhill as to the conversation which took place prior to the annulment of train order No. 62.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by failure to annul a train order to one of the trains involved, for which Dispatcher Forrester was responsible.

Dispatcher Forrester had issued train order No. 62 directing train No. 7 to wait at Curtis until 8.55 p.m. for train No. 6, this order being put out to the crew of train No. 7 at Copperhill and to the crew of train No. 6 at Blue Ridge. The conductor of train No. 7, however, on his arrival at Copperhill asked the dispatcher to annul the order, saying that his train would be nearly on time, and the dispatcher then issued an annulment order addressed only to the operator at Copperhill, no copy being sent to Blue Ridge. The result was that the order at the latter point was delivered to the crew of train

No. 6 and they supposed therefore that train No. 7 would wait for them at Curtis until 8.55 p.m. Apparently it was simply a case of forgetfulness on the part of the dispatcher. Had he complied with the rules and sent the annulment order simultaneously to each of the offices involved, or had he sent it first to the train which had been made superior by the wait order, which in this instance was train No. 6, the accident would not have occurred.

Under the rules operators are required to report promptly to the dispatcher the time of arrival and departure of all trains. The time-table in effect at the time of the accident shows an arriving time and a departing time for train No. 6 at Blue Ridge and had the operator at that point complied with the rule it is possible it might have caused the dispatcher to remember that the annulment order had not been sent to the crew of train No. 6. In failing to report the arrival of this train promptly, however, the operator was only following what appears to have been the custom, which in this particular case was to wait until after the arrival of train No. 7 at Blue Ridge, the end of its run, and then to make the "OS" reports for both trains Nos. 6 and 7.

The record indicates that there are 6 passenger and 14 freight trains scheduled on this line, and with but two exceptions all scheduled trains are due to reach their termini before 9 p.m. Traffic of this density would appear to warrant the use of some form of block system, and had such a system been in use this accident probably would not have occurred.

Dispatcher Forrester was employed as an operator in 1909 and promoted to dispatcher in 1914; all of the others involved were experienced employees, 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.