COMMISSIONER

CIRCULATED

612.

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE LOUISVILLE & NASHVILLE RAILROAD NEAR FAXON, TENN., ON JUNE 25, 1919.

July 19, 1919.

On June 25, 1919, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the Louisville & Nashville Railroad near Faxon, Tenn., which resulted in the death of four employees and the injury of two employees. After investigation of this accident, the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred about 1¾ miles north of Faxon, Tenn., on the Paris-Memphis Junction Subdivision of the Memphis Division, a single-track line. Train movements are governed by time table and train orders, no block signal system being in use. Approaching the point of accident from the south, beginning at the station at Faxon, there is 2,400 feet of tangent, a 1-degree curve to the left 1,550 feet in length, then another tangent about 3,000 feet in length, followed by a curve to the left of 2 degrees about 900 feet in length. The accident occurred on this curve about 200 feet south of its northern end. The grade varies from ⅛ to 1⅛% descending for northbound trains from a point about 1¾ miles south of Faxon to a point just north of the point of collision, a distance of approximately 3½ miles. Approaching the point of accident from the north, there is 3,300 feet of tangent track, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The passing track at Faxon is immediately north of the station, on the right side going north. The weather was clear.

Southbound second-class freight train 3rd No. 115 consisted of 18 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 959, and was in charge of Conductor Clark and Engineman Askew, en route from Memphis Junction, Ky., to Paris, Ky. It left Guthrie, 83 miles from Paris, at 9.03 p.m., June 24, and at Clarksville Freight Depot, 69 miles from Paris, the crew in charge received a copy of train order No. 110, giving northbound train No. 124 rights over train 3rd No. 115 and requiring train No. 124 to wait at Stewart, 30 miles from Paris, until 12.25 a.m. At Stewart, a copy of train order No. 119 was received, saying that train No. 124 would wait at Faxon, 22 miles from Paris, until 12.30 a.m. Train 3rd No. 115 passed Stewart at 12.05 a.m., and at about 12.23 a.m., collided with train No. 124 at a point about 1½ miles north of Faxon.

Northbound second-class freight train No. 124 consisted of 17 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1156, and was in charge of Conductor Diggs and Engineman Stevens. It left Paris at 11.45 p.m., first having received copies of train orders Nos. 110 and 119, referred to above, passed Faxon without stopping, and collided with train 3rd No. 115 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 50 miles an hour.

The boiler of engine 1156 of train No. 124 was torn from its frame and came to rest on the right side of the track, while the frame landed a few feet north of it on the same side of the track. The first five cars of this train were destroyed. Engine 959 of train 3rd No. 115 came to rest on the same side of the track as engine 1156, and was badly damaged. The first two

cars in this train were practically destroyed, the next four cars remained intact, and the next six cars were destroyed. The employees killed were the engineman, fireman and head brakeman of train No. 124 and the engineman of train 3rd No. 115.

Fireman Hicks of train 3rd No. 115 stated that as his train came around the curve north of the point of accident, a distance of about 3600 feet, he observed the reflection of a headlight. The engineman began to work more steam, and he himself began working on the fire, but decided to take another look. He leaned out and saw the headlight of the approaching train apparently about three telegraph poles distant, called to the engineman and head brakeman to jump, at the same time doing so himself. At the time he jumped the two trains were apparently within a car length of each other. Fireman Hicks said the engineman applied the brakes just as he called to him, and estimated the speed at the time to have been about 30 miles an hour. Afterward he asked the conductor what time it was, and the conductor said it was 12.25 a.m.

Head Brakeman Fletcher, of train 3rd No. 115, said he was standing directly behind the engineman. Approaching Faxon, he saw a headlight which he supposed was that of train No. 124, waiting for them at that point. Engineman Askew also saw it at the same time and said, "There they are over there; let them out and try and go to Big Sandy for 104." Train No. 104 is a first-class train, due to pass Big Sandy, 5.21 miles from Faxon, at 1.02 a.m. Engineman Askew then looked at his

watch and as nearly as Brakeman Fletcher could remember, the time was 12.22 a.m. He saw the headlight flicker and Engineman Askew then remarked, "They were in the side track; what does that mean?" Brakeman Fletcher said that he then saw that the headlight was approaching and realized that train No. 124 had left Faxon, while at the same time the fireman called to them to jump, and Engineman Askew applied the brakes and reversed the engine. Brakeman Fletcher estimated the speed to have been from 20 to 25 miles an hour. Immediately after the accident, he heard the fireman ask the conductor about the time, and the conductor said it was 12.23.30.

Conductor Clark of train 3rd No. 115, who was riding in the cupola of the caboose, said that his train passed Danville, 5.9 miles from Faxon, at 12.14 a.m., at which time he and the flagman figured that they could reach Faxon by 12.25 a.m. When about ½ of a mile from the point where the collision occurred, he saw the reflection of a headlight and thought it was the engine of train No. 124 standing at Faxon. He then figured that his train would be able to go to Big Sandy for train No. 104. He then felt an emergency application of the air brakes and saw that the headlight of train No. 124 was approaching. He estimated the speed at the time the brakes were applied to have been about 30 miles an hour. He started ahead immediately after the collision and met the fireman on his way to the rear. The fireman asked him what time it was, and he looked at his watch and found it was then 12.25 a.m., and from this he concluded that the accident occurred between 12.22 and 12.23 a.m.

Flagman Jackson, who was riding in the body of the caboose, said that the brakes were applied just before the collision occurred, and estimated the speed at the time to have been from 25 to 30 miles an hour. He looked at his watch just after getting off and starting back to flag, and it was then 12.23 a.m.

Conductor Diggs of train No. 124 stated that he compared watches with Engineman Stevens before leaving Paris, and that the two of them also compared their watches with the standard clock and that the variations in time were slight. After leaving Paris, he was engaged in working on his reports and did not pay much attention to the movement of his train until the station whistle was sounded approaching Faxon. He realized that the speed was high, but had full confidence in the engineman's ability on account of his long service and good record. He did not know what time his train passed Big Sandy, where train 2nd No. 115 was met, and was unable to give any estimate as to the speed at any point between Paris and the point of collision, except to say that the engineman was making "good speed." He was questioned at length on this subject and finally said that it was in excess of the 30 miles an hour permitted by the time table instructions. On continued questioning in regard to the speed at the time of passing the station at Faxon, he said it was 60 miles an hour. He said that when approaching Faxon he heard the engineman sound one long blast, followed immediately by one short blast, and on looking at his watch saw that it was 12.23 a.m. Under the rules, he should have given

the engineman a stop signal as soon as the station whistle had been sounded, provided the train to be met was not at the station, and the engineman would then have answered by one short blast. If the train to be met was already at the station, he was required by the rules to give the engineman a proceed signal which the engineman would answer by two short blasts. This rule, No. 90-G, reads in part as follows:

> "Freight trains approaching passing sidings will sound the whistle (Rule 14-M). The engineman must then receive signal from the conductor. If signaled to stop, he will answer (Rule 14-A); if to proceed, he will answer (Rule 14-G)"

In this case, however, he did not give any signal as the engineman sounded the one short blast before he had time to do so. He stated that the sounding of the one short blast or stop signal by the engineman, coupled with the speed at which the train was moving, led him to believe that the engineman had seen train 3rd No. 115 on the siding and therefore that the wait order was fulfilled. Consequently, he took no immediate action toward stopping his train. He looked out and saw what he thought was an engine on the siding with its headlight dimmed, but which he soon discovered was the reflection of the headlight of his own engine on the window of the telephone booth located about 600 feet south of the north end of the passing track, or about 2700 feet beyond Faxon. He then realized that train 3rd No. 115 had not arrived and that his train was passing Faxon in violation of the wait order. He started to apply the air brakes by means of the conductor's valve, but by that time this had been done by the flagman.

The caboose was nearing the north passing track switch when he started for the brake valve and was at or beyond the switch by the time the brakes were actually applied. He said he did not feel the brakes become fully effective until just before the collision occurred. On looking at his watch after the collision, it was 12.25 a.m.

Flagman McAlister, of train No. 124, heard the engineman sound the station whistle, followed immediately by the stop signal or one short blast. He then left the cupola, where he had been riding, went to the rear of the caboose and climbed up on the top of it outside. By this time, the engineman had shut off steam and the smoke was so dense that he could not see anything. He then descended to the rear platform and looked ahead from the right side, but only saw the reflection of the headlight shining on a station window. He went back inside the caboose, went up into the cupola, and on looking out of the window, saw the reflection of the headlight shining on the window of the telephone booth. At first he thought this was the dimmed headlight of the engine of train 3rd No. 115, but almost immediately realized his error and applied the brakes by means of the conductor's valve. The brakes did not seem to apply properly; the indicator on the air gauge quivered for some time before going to zero, the slack seemed to stretch out, and then the speed increased for about a train length. He also stated that he thought the engineman began to work steam. Just before the collision occurred, the brakes seemed to apply fully. Immediately after the accident, he looked at

his watch and it was then 12.26 a.m. He said the speed had been at least 30 miles an hour, while according to his figures his train averaged from 50 to 55 miles an hour from Paris to Big Sandy, a distance of 16.55 miles.

Doctor Oliver, who reached the scene of the accident on the wreck train, stated that he heard Head Brakeman Trotter of train No. 124 make an ante mortem statement that the brakes were applied from the rear of the train and that the engineman worked steam after they had been applied. Engineman Easley, who accompanied Brakeman Trotter while en route to the hospital at Paris, said he heard Brakeman Trotter remark twice that he felt the brakes going on and that the engineman placed his brake valve in the full release position and opened the throttle. These statements were made by Brakeman Trotter voluntarily.

Car Inspectors Hampton and Edwards stated that they inspected the air brakes of train No. 124 prior to its departure from Paris and found them to be in good condition and in operation with one exception. The train line was in good condition.

This accident was caused by the failure of train No. 124 to wait at Faxon until 12.30 a.m. for train 3rd No. 115, as directed by train order No. 119, for which Conductor Diggs and Engineman Stevens are responsible. No positive reason can be given for the failure of the engineman to obey the wait order. That he was not asleep seems to be clear from the statements of Brakeman Trotter. From all available evidence it would appear that he entirely overlooked train order No. 119. The conductor had not forgotten the order, but allowed the engineman to oper-

ate the train at a rate of speed greatly in excess of that permitted by time-table rule, and was not giving the attention to the movement of his train which the circumstances demanded. He made no attempt to stop the train until it had passed Faxon and had practically reached the end of the passing track, nearly ½ of a mile beyond the station. Under train order No. 119, his train was required to wait until 12.30 a.m., while under Rule 90-A, which requires that at meeting points made by time orders for trains of the same class, the superior train must wait 3 minutes beyond its schedule leaving time if the train to be met has not arrived, it would have had to wait until 12.33 a.m. Nevertheless, train No. 124 passed Faxon at about 12.23 or 12.24 a.m., at least 9 minutes before the time at which it should have waited, if necessary, for train 3rd No. 115. For such negligence and inattention to duty, there can be no excuse.

Conductor Diggs was employed in 1902 and in August, 1903, was dismissed for drinking. He was reemployed in December of the same year and promoted to conductor in 1907. In 1918, he was suspended for 20 days for leaving Paris ahead of train No. 104 without orders. Engineman Stevens had been in service 12 years as a fireman and 23 years as an engineman. His record was excellent. Both of these employees had been on duty less than 2 hours after more than 20 hours off duty.

G.V.L.