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 FLAT LICK, KY., ON FEBRUARY 18, 1925.

May 4, 1925.

To the Commission

On February 18, 1925, there was a rear-end collision between a work extra and a freight train on the Louisville & Nashville Railroad near Flat Lick, Ky., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of two employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Cumberland Valley Division which extends between Corbin, Ky., and Norton, Va., a distance of 118.2 miles, which in the vicinity of the point of the accident is a double-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 about 1 1/2 miles north of Flat Lick; approaching from the south there is a 5° 30' curve to the left having a total length including spirals of 1,217 feet, and then a tangent extending some distance beyond the point of accident. The accident occurred on this tangent, 697 feet from the north end of the curve. The grade is slightly ascending for northbound trains for a distance of several thousand feet and then slightly descending from a point 1,000 feet south of the point of accident and for a considerable distance beyond.

The weather was foggy at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 6.55 a.m.

Description

Northbound freight train extra 1538 consisted of 50 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1538, and was in charge of Conductor Watkins and Engineman Goins. It left Pineville, the last open office, 6.85 miles south of Flat Lick, at 4.45 a.m., and at Wallsend, about 1 mile from Pineville, was delayed by northbound freight train second No. 82. It finally departed from Wallsend

at 6.10 a.m. and was stopped a second time by the flagman of train second No. 82 at about 6.40 a.m. at a point about 1 1/2 miles north of Flat Lick, and it was still standing at this point when its rear end was struck by work extra 458.

Work extra 458 consisted of engine 458, an extra engine tender, two dump cars, one ditcher, one spreader, and a caboose, in the order named, and was in charge of Conductor Lusk and Engineman Pennington. The train was being operated backing up, with the caboose in the lead. It left Pineville at 6.15 a.m., stopped at Wallsend, and also at Four Mile, the last-mentioned point being about 3.35 miles south of Flat Lick, and then proceeded northward, colliding with the rear end of extra 1538 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 10 or 12 miles an hour.

The caboose of extra 1538, which was of steel-underframe construction, telescoped the caboose of work extra 458, which was of wooden construction, demolishing the superstructure of the last-mentioned caboose. With the exception of these cabooses and the spreader located next to the caboose of the work extra, none of the equipment was derailed or damaged. The employee killed was the conductor of the work extra, who was riding in the cupola of the caboose.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Goins, of extra 1538, said he was flagged by the flagman of train second No. 82 when the latter was about 50 car lengths from the rear end of that train, that he stopped to pick up the flagman and then proceeded, finally stopping behind the caboose at about 6.40 a.m. He thought his train had been standing about 10 minutes before train second No. 82 proceeded, and after sounding the whistle signal for his own flagman to return he waited a few minutes to give him an opportunity to do so. In the meantime Conductor Watkins had reached the engine and after waiting until they thought the flagman had returned to the train Engineman Goins reached for the throttle and was about to start the train when the air brakes were applied in emergency as a result of the collision. Engineman Goins said that when his train stopped behind the caboose of train second No. 82 he did not sound the whistle signal for the flagman to protect the train for the reason that it was not customary, since with long trains it was difficult for whistle signals to be heard by

the flagman, and also for the reason that Flagman Rogers was an experienced man and he did not think it necessary to signal him to protect the train. The statements of Fireman Davis and head Brakeman McFarland, both of whom were on the engine, brought out no additional facts of importance.

Conductor Watkins said he left the caboose when the train stopped and had gone forward and was on the engine when the accident occurred. On leaving the caboose he thought the flagman was preparing to go back to flag and therefore did not give him any instructions about the matter. On returning to the rear of the train after the accident Flagman Rogers told him he had thought that there would not be any following train for several minutes and had become engrossed in working on the mileage report.

Flagman Rogers, of extra 1538, said that when recalled from flagging after the stop at Wallsend he had noted that the markers on the rear of the caboose were burning properly. Southbound passenger train No. 21 had passed his train at Wallsend and shortly afterwards he had heard it enter the manual-block territory which begins at Pineville and therefore thought there would not be any northbound train until after train No. 21 had cleared the block. As soon as his train passed Flat Lick the speed was reduced and he said he was going to put down some torpedoes but did not do so as the speed was then increased. When the train finally stopped at the point where the accident afterwards occurred the conductor started for the head end and Flagman Rogers said that as he had figured that there would not be any following train out of Pineville until after 7.15 a.m. he began to work on the mileage report instead of going back to protect his train by flag. He heard the enginemen of his train sound the whistle signal recalling him and in two or three minutes heard the exhaust of an engine which he thought was on the southbound track but almost immediately afterwards he realized that it was a following train, the collision occurring before he had time to jump from the caboose.

Flagman Chamley, of work extra 458, was riding on the leading end of the caboose in charge of the back-up hose. He said he was keeping a careful watch of the track ahead and that suddenly he saw a dark object which at the moment seemed to be an approaching engine and he said that he at once opened the valve wide, called to the men in the caboose to jump, tried to give some stop signals with his hat from the fireman's side of the caboose platform, and then got off at a point about half a car

length south of where the accident occurred. He estimated the speed of his train approaching the point of accident to have been about 15 miles an hour.

Head Brakeman Sewell, of work extra 458, had gone to the door of the caboose to ascertain the location of the train and his attention was first directed to the preceding train by the sound of air escaping from the back-up hose. He did not notice the markers on the caboose of the preceding train and estimated that on account of the fog his range of vision was restricted to about three car lengths.

Engineman Pennington, of work extra 458, said he had shut off steam at the top of the grade and then allowed the train to drift, expecting one of the flagmen to get off in that vicinity. Very shortly afterwards the conductor's valve was opened and he at once placed the engineman's brake valve in lap position. Engineman Pennington thought his train ran an additional distance of two or three car lengths before he felt it strike something and saw part of the caboose fall over on the southbound track. Fireman Hoskins, who was on the fireman's seatbox looking ahead toward the caboose, saw two men jump from the caboose at about the time the brakes were applied. The speed was then about 10 or 12 miles an hour and he did not think there had been any material reduction in speed prior to the occurrence of the accident.

While the statements of the various employees differed considerably as to the extent of the range of vision they seemed clearly to establish the fact that there was a dense fog at the time of the accident. With the exception of the head brakeman of extra 1538, none of them estimated the range of vision to have been more than 10 car lengths.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by extra 1538 standing on the main track without proper flag protection, for which Flagman Rogers is primarily responsible.

Flagman Rogers had heard the southbound passenger train enter the manual-block territory at Pineville, and therefore assumed that there would not be any train closely following his own train for a considerable period of time, apparently overlooking the possibility of a train

originating at some intermediate point, which was the case in this instance. For this reason he did not give his train any protection but remained in the caboose doing some other work. The flagging rule of this railroad is very explicit in its requirements as to what the flagman shall do in case his train stops under circumstances in which it may be overtaken by a following train and there is no excuse for the failure of Flagman Rogers to comply with the rule, particularly in view of the unfavorable weather conditions existing at the time. Had he taken proper steps for the protection of his train it is probable that this accident would not have occurred. Conductor Watkins started for the head end of his train as soon as it came to a stop and did not know that the flagman was not protecting the train. In view of the dense fog, however, it is believed he is open to criticism for not warning the flagman to be unusually attentive to the proper performance of his duties and for not seeing to it that the flagman started back to protect the train before he himself started for the head end.

Not only did Engineman Goins fail to sound the whistle signal for his flagman to protect the train, but the statements of several of the employees indicated that for some time past it has been a custom not to obey the rule requiring the sounding of this signal. While there is no assurance that proper obedience to this rule on this occasion on the part of the engineman would have caused Flagman Rogers to act differently, yet the existence of such a condition of non-obedience to the rules is undesirable to say the least. Proper flag protection is one of the most important features connected with the operation of trains, especially in territory which is not protected by block signals, and there can be no excuse on the part of employees for failure strictly to obey all the requirements of the flagging rules.

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.

Flagman Chumley had been employed as a brakeman about 3 months, the head brakeman of extra 1538 about 4½ months, and the head brakeman of work extra 458 about 14 months, the other employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the accident the crew of work extra 458

had been on duty about 1½ hours, and the crew of extra 1538 about 8 hours, previous to which all of these employees had been off duty 8 hours or more.

Respectfully submitted,

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Director,
Bureau of Safety.