

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE MINNEAPOLIS, ST. PAUL AND SAULT STE. MARIE RAILWAY AT THORPE, WIS., ON DECEMBER 14, 1922.

January 6, 1923.

To the Commission:

On December 14, 1922, there was a head-end collision between a passenger train and a freight train on the Minneapolis, St. Paul & Sault Ste. Marie Railway at Thorpe, Wis., which resulted in the death of 2 employees, and the injury of 10 passengers, 5 employees and 1 mail clerk.

Location and method of operation.

This accident occurred on that part of the Chicago Division extending between Wayne Street Yard, near Stevens Point, and Irvine, Wis., a distance of 103.6 miles, this being a single-track line over which trains are operated by time table and train orders. The point of accident was about  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles west of the station at Thorpe, approaching this point the track is tangent in either direction for 2 miles or more. The grade from the east is level or descending, followed by about 1,000 feet of 0.75 per cent ascending grade and 100 feet of level track, beyond which it is descending from 0.9 to 1.3 per cent to the point of accident, a distance of about 1,650 feet. Approaching from the west the grade is ascending for about 3,550 feet, varying from 0.6 to 1.3 per cent. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 5.17 a.m.

Description.

Westbound passenger train No. 3 consisted of one mail car, two baggage cars and two coaches, hauled by engine 2715, and was in charge of Conductor Tardiff and Engineman Hoppe. At Spencer, 30.7 miles east of Thorpe, the crew received a copy of train order No. 23, Form 31, reading as follows:

"No. 3 wait at Thorpe until five twenty seven 527 AM. Stanley five thirty five 535 AM for No. 23 and run one hour and ten mins. late Stanley to Chippewa Falls."

At Owen, 11.9 miles from Thorpe, the crew received a copy of train order No. 30, Form 19, reading as follows:

"Order No. 22 is annulled. No. 3 wait at Stanley until five thirty five 535 AM for No. 22 and run one 1 hour late Stanley to Chippewa Falls."

Train No. 3 departed from Owen at 5 a.m., one hour and six minutes late, passing Thorpe at about 5.15 a.m., and collided with train No. 22 while traveling at a speed believed to have been between 10 and 20 miles an hour.

Eastbound freight train No. 22 consisted of 42 cars and a caboose, hauled by engines 422 and 489, and was in charge of Conductor Lukasavitz and Enginemen Ellsworth and Koehler. At Irvine, 31.7 miles from Thorpe, the crew received a copy of train order No. 22, previously quoted, and the train departed from that point at 4.18 a.m., 1 hour and 48 minutes late, passed Stanley, the last open office, at 5.11 a.m., 47 minutes late, without having received a copy of train order No. 30, and collided with train No. 3 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 20 or 25 miles an hour.

All three engines were derailed, but remained upright with their front and rear ends badly damaged, while considerable damage was sustained by the first four cars of train No. 3. Thirteen cars of train No. 22 were derailed and damaged. The employees killed were the engineman of the leading engine and the fireman of the second engine of train No. 22.

#### Summary of evidence.

The only order held by the crew of train No. 22 which affected its movement against train No. 3 was train order No. 22, which directed train No. 3 to wait at Thorpe until 5.27 a.m. Under the rules inferior trains must clear superior trains five minutes and train No. 22, therefore, had until 5.22 a.m. to clear at Thorpe, and the train passed Stanley at 5.11 a.m., with the intention of proceeding to Thorpe for train No. 3. The crew of train No. 3, however, held a copy of train order No. 30, which annulled train order No. 22 and directed that train to wait at Stanley until 5.35 a.m., no wait being provided for at Thorpe. This order,

however, had not been issued to train No. 22 and Train Dispatcher Dagneau said that when the operator at Stanley reported train No. 22 as having passed that point he realized for the first time that the train order had not been properly issued. He said he had issued train order No. 30 to all concerned at Irvine but that train No. 22 had already left that point, and he overlooked issuing it to that train at some other station along the line. No excuse for his failure was offered by Dispatcher Dagneau.

Engineman Hoppe, of train No. 3, said he thought he saw a slight reflection of a light as his engine was ascending the 0.75 per cent grade about  $\frac{1}{2}$  mile east of the point of accident, and at about the time his engine reached the top of the grade and started down the descending grade approaching the point of accident he saw the headlight of train No. 22 and at once applied the air brakes in emergency. He thought the speed of his train at the time of the brake application was about 50 or 55 miles an hour.

Fireman Zuege, of the leading engine of train No. 22, said he thought he could see a light but he was not sure whether or not it was a street light and got down on the deck of the engine to put in a fire. At about this time the head brakeman said there was a train coming and on looking out he first thought the approaching train was at Thorpe, but the brakeman said to jump and he then saw it was close and got off. Head Brakeman Skalitzky said he had seen the reflection of a headlight and thought it was train No. 3 coming into Thorpe, but after continuing to watch it he told Engineman Ellsworth he thought the train was coming, and on looking again was positive and called to the engineman to jump. Brakeman Skalitzky said the engineman did not apply the air brakes at once, but stood up and looked out of the window, but as he jumped he heard the brakes being applied.

#### Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of Train Dispatcher Dagneau to issue train order No. 30 to the crew of train No. 22.

Dispatcher Dagneau was employed as an operator in 1905 and was promoted to dispatcher in May, 1920; he passed a written examination on the rules in October of the same year, and had been re-examined orally about six weeks prior to the occurrence of this accident. At the time of the accident he had been on duty about  $5\frac{1}{2}$  hours, after 16 hours off duty.

Respectfully submitted,

Director.