

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE  
MISSOURI PACIFIC RAILROAD AT COLLINSTON, LA., ON  
OCTOBER 27, 1929.

February 18, 1930.

To the Commission:

On October 27, 1929, there was a rear-end collision between a freight train and a passenger train on the Missouri Pacific Railroad at Collinston, La., resulting in the injury of 68 passengers.

Location and method of operation

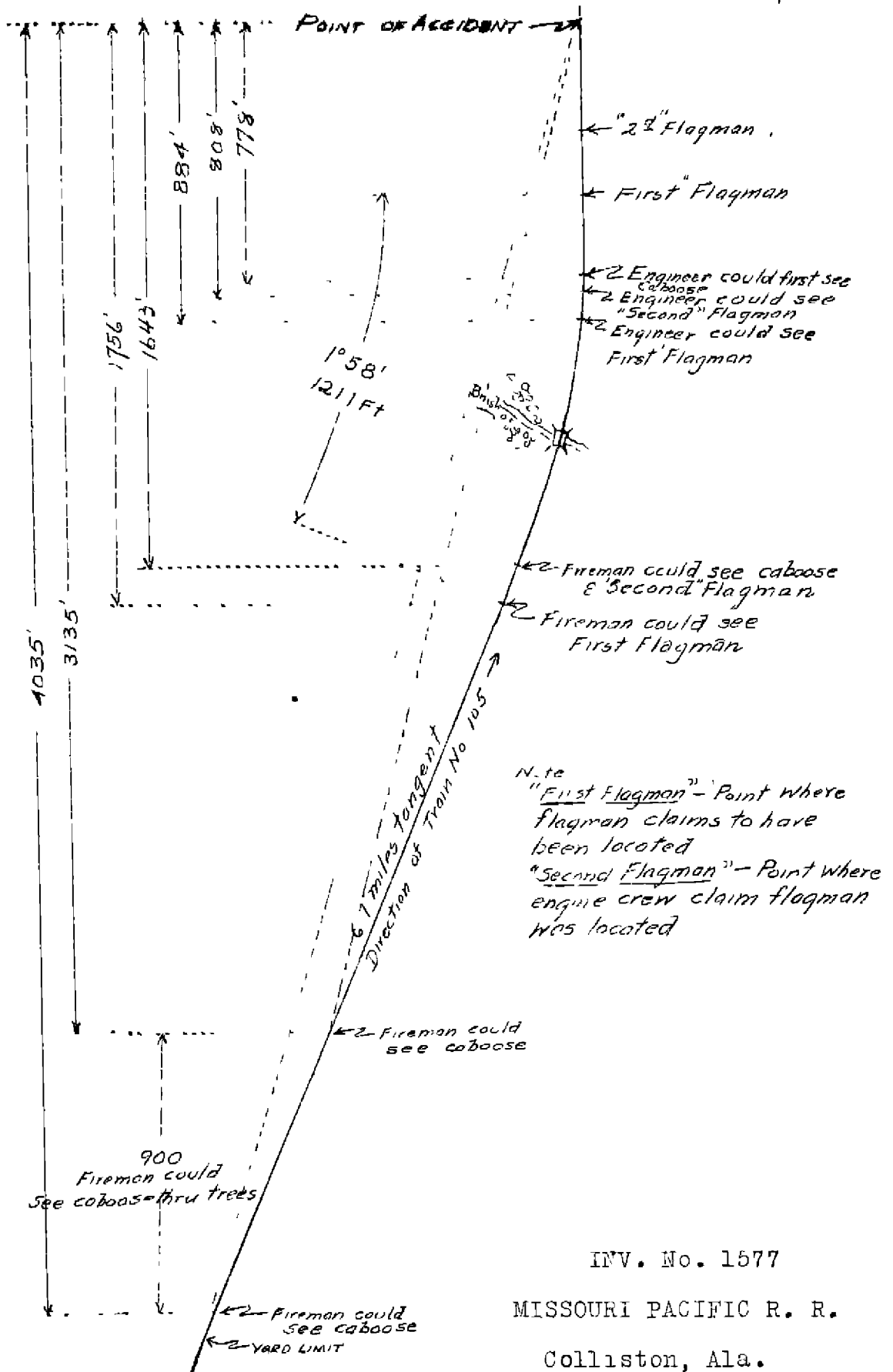
This accident occurred on the McGeehee District of the Little Rock Division, extending between McGeehee, Ark., and Collinston, La., a distance of 72.92 miles; this is a single-track line over which trains are operated by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. The accident occurred within yard limits, 4,128 feet south of the north yard-limit board, approaching this point from the north, the track is tangent for a distance of 6.1 miles, then there is a  $1^{\circ} 58'$  curve to the left 1,217 feet in length, followed by more than  $1\frac{1}{2}$  miles of tangent, the accident occurring on this latter tangent at a point 512 feet from its northern end. The grade is practically level.

A caboose standing at the point of accident first came into view across the inside of the curve, from the fireman's side of a southbound engine, at a point 4,055 feet distant, and remains in view for about 900 feet; on account of trees and brush located on the inside of the curve, the caboose can not be seen for the next 1,492 feet, following which it remains in continuous view, a distance of 1,243 feet, from the engineman's side, the view of the caboose around the outside of the curve is restricted to a distance of 778 feet.

The weather was cloudy and mazy at the time of the accident, which occurred about 2.45 or 2.46 p.m.

Description

Southbound second-class freight train No. 173 consisted of 75 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 5206, and was in charge of Conductor Roe and Engineman Lockhart. On arrival at Dermott, 55.35 miles north of Collinston, a copy of train order No. 52, Form 19, was received, reading in part as follows:



INV. No. 1577

MISSOURI PACIFIC R. R.

Colliston, Ala.

Oct. 27, 1929.

sda 2/14/30

"No. 173 Eng 5306 run ahead No. 105  
Eng 6518 Dermott to Collinston \*\*\*."

Train No. 173 departed from Dermott at 12.30 p.m., according to the train sheet, four hours late, and arrived at Wilmot, 31.69 miles north of Collinston, at 1.33 p.m. While at this point the following train, No. 105, was flagged, while the crew of train No. 173 received a copy of train order No. 59, Form 19, extending the "run-ahead" territory from Collinston to Monroe yard, as well as containing other instructions. Train No. 173 departed from Wilmot at 1.40 p.m., 3 hours and 45 minutes late, and was standing within the yard limits at Collinston when its rear end was struck by train No. 105.

Southbound first-class passenger train No. 105, at the time of the accident, consisted of one baggage car, two coaches, and two show cars, in the order named, hauled by engine 6518, and was in charge of Conductor Hart and Engineman Warren. The first three cars were of steel-underframe construction, while the remaining two were of wooden construction. The crew of this train also received copies of the train orders referred to above, at the same points designated, in addition to which their train was flagged at Wilmot, departing from that point at 1.45 p.m., seven minutes late and five minutes behind train No. 173. At Bonita, 20.22 miles north of Collinston, train No. 105 picked up the two show cars, listed above in its consist, and left that point at 2.18 p.m., 17 minutes late, it departed from Gallon, 13.81 miles north of Collinston and the last open office, at 2.29 p.m., still 17 minutes late, and collided with train No. 173 in the yard at Collinston while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 10 or 15 miles per hour.

The caboose of train No. 173 was demolished, while the car ahead of it was only slightly damaged, as was the front end of engine 6518. With the exception of the caboose, none of the equipment in either train was derailed.

#### Summary of evidence

Conductor Roe, of train No. 173, stated that on arrival at Collinston, his train first came to a stop, about 2.34 p.m., with the caboose about 25 or 30 car-lengths north of the curve, this stop being occasioned by another train performing switching in the yard. A flag was whistled out and Conductor Roe told Flagman

Gambino, who was not an experienced man, that he had to go to the head end of the train in order to supervise the work of setting off cars and for the flagman to get off, remain on the straight track, and protect against the following train, No. 105, and that in the event the flagman saw he was going to be left behind, he was to get aboard the engine of train No. 105 and ride it to Monroe. The flagman got off and the freight train started ahead, having stopped and then started again, while on top of about the first or second car ahead of the caboose, and after the train had moved forward about four or five car-lengths, the conductor looked back and saw the flagman in the act of placing torpedoes on the rail. The conductor then continued over the tops of the cars toward the head end of the train, which moved ahead about 40 or 50 car-lengths, where a second stop was made. About four or five minutes after the second stop was made, and while the work of setting out cars was in progress, Conductor Roe heard train No. 105 sound the whistle and also heard the explosion of torpedoes, this being four or five minutes after the second stop had been made. He looked at his watch when it was 2.46 p.m., and saw train No. 105 standing at the rear of his own train, but did not know how long it had been standing there and was unaware that there had been an accident until his engine was coupled to the rear portion of the train, ready to go. Conductor Roe further stated that he was thoroughly satisfied with the way Flagman Gambino had flagged train No. 105 at Wilnot, saying that after that train came to a stop at that point, his flagman rode in on the engine, and then the flagman told him that the engineman of train No. 105 had said not to get excited, as he knew that train No. 173 was ahead of him.

Flagman Gambino, of train No. 173, stated that at the time the first stop was made at Collinston, Conductor Roe told him that their train was going to pull down again for some distance and for the flagman to get off and put down torpedoes, also that in the event the flagman was left behind, he was to ride the engine of train No. 105 to Monroe, he denied that the conductor told him to remain at the point where the first stop was made and flag train No. 105, but on the other hand he admitted that that was the conductor's intention and that the conductor had no way of knowing that his instructions had not been obeyed. Flagman Gambino stated that his train just stopped and then started again, he put down two torpedoes on the west rail, about 3 or 4 car-lengths behind the caboose and

about 50 car-lengths north of the curve involved, then ran and caught the caboose, and rode the rear end of it to where the second stop was made. He then started back to flag, going only a few car-lengths before he heard the whistle of train No. 105 and also hearing the torpedoes explode. He lighted a fusee and got back an additional 15 car-lengths, or about the point of curve, giving stop signals with the lighted fusee and also with a flag, but said that his signals were not answered until train No. 105 was only one car-length distant, and that it passed him at a speed of about 30 miles per hour, which speed he thought had been reduced to about 12 miles per hour by the time the collision occurred. Flagman Gambino knew that his train was going to make a second stop at Collinston, but had assumed that it would stop with the caboose south of a railroad crossing, located about 4,000 feet south of the point of accident, as had been done on the only previous trip he had made on this district, and that by having the torpedoes down where they were on this occasion, he would have plenty of time within which to afford ample protection, he admitted, however, that it would have been a display of good judgment on his part to have remained on the straight track north of the curve, where he could have seen train No. 105 for a long distance. Flagman Gambino was fully aware that the run-ahead order held by his train did not relieve him from the duty of affording proper protection within yard limits against train No. 105, and that that train was closely following his own train, having flagged it at Wilnot. Statements of other members of the crew of train No. 173 developed nothing additional of importance.

Engineman Warren, of train No. 105, stated that the speed of his train was about 45 miles per hour approaching Collinston and that in the vicinity of the yard-limit board he shut off steam and made a brake-pipe reduction of from 7 to 10 pounds, reducing the speed of his train to about 30 miles per hour, and then placed the brake-valve handle in the lap position. While rounding the curve the fireman shouted that there was a caboose ahead, standing on the main track, and at about the same time the torpedoes were exploded, when about 8 or 8½ pole-lengths from the caboose, approximately 1,600 feet distant. The engineman at once moved the brake-valve handle to the emergency position, no release having been made from the service application and he estimated the speed to have been reduced to between 10 and 15 miles per hour when the collision occurred. Engineman Warren said that when he first saw the flagman, he was standing about five car-lengths behind the caboose, waving stop signals with a lighted fusee and a

red flag. The air brakes had been tested after the show cars were picked up at Bonita, and worked properly en route, he did not think, however, that an emergency effect was obtained just prior to the accident, owing to the previous service application. Engineman Warren further stated that at the time his train was brought to a stop at Wilnot, on being flagged by Flagman Gambino, he told the flagman that since both trains had a meet with an opposing train at Jones, located 23.79 miles north of Collinston, he would look out for the flagman on the reverse curves in that vicinity. Both he and his fireman were keeping a sharp lookout ahead for train No. 173, and the reason he made the service application where he did when approaching Collinston was that he expected to find train No. 173 occupying the main track at some point. Engineman Warren said that good judgment should have prompted him to have materially reduced speed a considerable distance north of the yard-limit board, and that he should have operated his train with respect to train No. 173 so that he could have brought his own train to a stop within the distance he could see the caboose of that train, until the train order had been fulfilled.

Fireman Burns, of train No. 105, stated that he was sitting on his seat box and that he saw the caboose of train No. 173 when about eight pole-lengths from it and shouted a warning of danger, about one pole-length further south the torpedoes were exploded, and he then noticed the flagman about five car-lengths behind the caboose. He said that the torpedoes were just at the north end of the curve and that the flagman lighted the fusee just about the time the torpedoes were exploded. In other respects his statements practically corroborated those of Engineman Warren.

Conductor Hart was riding in the second car in the train and estimated the speed to have been about 25 or 30 miles per hour at the time the air brakes were applied in emergency, on the curve, and said that when his train came to a stop as a result of the collision he stepped off and saw the flagman of train No. 173 at a point not more than five or six car-lengths behind the caboose. Flagman Benedict, of train No. 105, stated that on his way back to flag he found the remains of two torpedoes about eight pole-lengths behind the caboose.

Assistant Superintendent Stevenson stated that when a train holds a Form B type of train order, directing a train to pass or run ahead of another train, such as was the case in this instance, the instructions are that the following train shall govern its speed so as to be able to stop short of the train ahead.

With regard to the experience of Flagman Gambino, it appeared from the statements of Trainmaster McKnight that he employed Flagman Gambino on October 19, 1929, but that he did not give him the usual rules examination, because he had a "cut off" letter from another division of the system, a board that he had been employed on that division from December, 1928, to March 13, 1929, and had been cut off on account of a reduction in force, and after wiring that superintendent and being advised that it was all right to use Gambino, Trainmaster McKnight authorized the placing of his name on the brakemen's board. In addition, before taking this action, he had asked Flagman Gambino sufficient questions to satisfy himself that he was familiar with the duties of a brakeman. It also appeared from his statements, that brakemen are not permitted to perform duties on the Missouri Pacific System until they have been examined on the book of rules, and that the wire received from the superintendent who formerly had jurisdiction over Flagman Gambino indicated that the flagman had received the required rules examination. Conductor Roe said that from the information he obtained from Flagman Gambino, he considered him competent to do the flagging, but on the other hand, Flagman Gambino said he told Conductor Roe that he was not a real brakeman, and that anything told him in the way of instruction would be appreciated.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Flagman Gambino, of train No. 173, to provide proper flag protection; a contributory cause was the failure of Engineer Warren, of train No. 105, properly to control the speed of his train when holding an order authorizing a second-class train to run ahead of him.

Flagman Gambino was fully aware that there was a train closely following his own train, having flagged it at Wilmot, and he thoroughly understood that the run-ahead order held by his train did not relieve him of the duty of affording proper protection while his own train occupied the main track within yard limits. While there is a conflict in the testimony as to where the torpedoes were placed by Flagman Gambino, and also as to the location of the flagman just prior to the accident, there does not appear to be any question but that he was told to stay out, coming in on train No. 105 if necessary, he should have remained on the straight track north of the curve, at the time the first stop was made, where he could have seen train No. 105 for a long distance, and had he done so, the accident would not have occurred. There is also his own statement that after the second stop was made, he

went back only as far as the curve, a distance of not much more than 500 feet, although he must have had several minutes at his disposal and should have gone back a much greater distance. As it was, there was an interval of 11 or 12 minutes between the time of the first stop and the time of the accident, during which time adequate flag protection could and should have been provided.

Conductor Poe said that from the information he obtained from Flagman Gambino, he considered him competent to do the flagging, while Flagman Gambino said he told the conductor he was not a real brakeman and would appreciate any help given him. These statements can not be reconciled, if the flagman's statement is correct, there is no excuse for the failure of the conductor to notice the flagman when he was returning to the train after the first stop, although this in no way justifies the action of the flagman in disobeying instructions.

It is very questionable whether sufficient effort was made to ascertain Flagman Gambino's qualifications before assigning him to duty as a flagman. Certainly there is no reason why a more experienced man could not have been doing the flagging, in view of the fact that train No. 173 departed from McGehee with two other brakemen in the crew, each of whom had had about 13 years' experience with this railroad. A situation of this kind strongly suggests the need for more attention on the part of supervisory officials.

Engineman Warren knew that train No. 173 was only a short distance ahead of his own train, and that it was incumbent on him to operate his train so as to be able to stop short of the preceding train. Nevertheless, in view of the existing conditions, instead of operating under extreme caution, he approached and entered the yard limits of Collinston at a comparatively high rate of speed, rounded a curve to the left where his view was considerably restricted, and when he finally was apprised of the fact that there was a caboose ahead, he could not bring his train to a stop in time to avoid an accident.

It further appears that had Fireman Burns been maintaining a lookout ahead, when his train entered yard limits, he could have first seen the caboose across the inside of the curve when it was 4,000 feet distant, and had he then notified Engineman Warren of its presence, it is probable the engineman could have averted the accident.



Flagman Gambino made trips as a student brakeman on the I-GNRR, Missouri Pacific Lines, from December 16, to December 20, 1928, and was employed as a brakeman on December 22, 1928, being relieved from duty on March 13, 1929; he entered the service as brakeman on the Little Rock Division, MoPacRR, on October 19, 1929. Engineman Warren entered the service as fireman on January 18, 1906, and was promoted to engineman on November 15, 1912, at the time of the accident none of the employees involved had been on duty in violation of any of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.