

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 PINE BLUFF, ARK.,
ON JUNE 9, 1928

August 10, 1928.

To the Commission:

On June 9, 1928, there was a collision between a passenger train and a cut of cars on the Missouri Pacific Railroad at Pine Bluff, Ark., which resulted in the death of 1 employee, and the injury of 43 passengers, 4 mail clerks and 10 employees.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on the Pine Bluff District of the Little Rock Division, extending between McGehee and Little Rock, Ark., a distance of 101.55 miles, in the immediate vicinity of the point of accident 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 the yard limits at Pine Bluff at a point 105 feet south of the south switch leading to the ladder track; approaching this point from the south the track is tangent for a distance of nearly 3 miles, while the grade at the point of accident is level. The yard tracks parallel the main track on the east and are numbered from west to east 1, 2, and 3. South of this yard there is a siding known as "B" siding, 4,853 feet in length, which also parallels the main track on the east, the north switch of this siding being 1,421 feet south of the point of accident.

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 1.13 a.m.

Description

Northbound freight train No. 160 consisted of 61 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 1278, and was in charge of Conductor Carey and Engineman Harris. This train left McGehee, 58.35 miles south of Pine Bluff Yard, at 10.50 p.m., June 8, 7 hours and 50 minutes late, with an order to meet extra 1231 at Pine Bluff Yard. On the arrival of train No. 160 at Pine Bluff Yard at 12.55 a.m., June 9, extra 1231 was found to be standing on "B" siding near the south switch. Train No. 160 pulled by and backed the rear of the train in

on this siding, where a portion of it was cut off, and an attempt was then made to pull the head end of the train into clear on track 3 but due to the fact that there were some cars occupying this track the head end was brought to a stop with the rear cars in this part of the train still occupying the main track, and before they could be moved into clear they were struck by train No. 102.

Northbound passenger train No. 102 consisted of one refrigerator car, two baggage cars, one combination mail and baggage car, one coach, one chair car, one dining car and four Pullman sleeping cars, hauled by engine 6411, and was in charge of Conductor Graham and Engineman Quinney. All the cars were of steel construction except the refrigerator car, which was of steel-underframe construction. This train departed from McGehee at 12.05 a.m., six minutes late, and collided with the rear cars of the forward portion of train No. 160 in Pine Bluff Yard while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 40 and 55 miles per hour.

Engine 6411 was derailed to the right and came to rest on its right side 175 feet north of the point of collision with its forward end 43 feet from the main track, the tender also came to rest on its right side, diagonally across the main track and still coupled to the engine. The first car in train No. 102 was derailed to the left but remained in an upright position; none of the other cars in this train was derailed or badly damaged. The rear car of the cut of freight cars came to rest on its right side on top of the second car from the rear which was derailed but not overturned; both cars were badly damaged. The 3rd, 4th and 5th cars from the rear remained on the track, the 6th car had its forward truck derailed, the 7th car was derailed but remained upright, and the 8th to the 10th cars, inclusive, were overturned, the 8th car being demolished while the 9th and 10th cars were badly damaged. The employee killed was the fireman of train No. 102.

Summary of evidence

Engineman Harris, of train No. 160, stated that as his train was coming to a stop preparatory to making the back-up movement into the north end of "B" siding he sounded a whistle signal for flag protection but did not see any one leave the caboose for that purpose. After his train started the back-up movement he observed a lighted fusee on the caboose as it entered the siding and this led him to believe that flag protection was being afforded. He also saw some one giving back-up signals from the rear of the train, which were followed by a slow and then a stop signal. When the train came to a stop his engine had not

cleared the main track, being about 20 car-lengths north of the switch, and at about the same time noticed the conductor standing on the ground opposite the engine and called the conductor's attention to the fact that it would be necessary to head in at some point in order to clear the main track, to which the conductor replied in the affirmative. Engineman Harris said he did not see the conductor again until he received a proceed signal from the rear, and upon looking ahead he noticed that the ladder-track switch was open while the conductor, who was standing near that point, also gave him a proceed signal. The conductor did not board the engine as it passed the switch but informed him that the train would be headed in on track 3. While pulling into this track Engineman Harris noticed some cars about 25 car-lengths from the switch, closed up and coupled to them, and then waited for the head brakeman, who had been riding on the train about eight car-lengths from the engine, to proceed to the forward end of the cars ahead of the engine, the accident occurred, however, before this could be accomplished. Engineman Harris further stated that while pulling down the main track before backing the rear of his train into "B" siding he noticed the light on the ladder-track switch displaying a green indication, and after the conductor opened this switch he saw a red indication, although it did not appear to be very bright. The statements of Fireman Brown and Head Brakeman Clark practically corroborated those of Engineman Harris.

Conductor Carey, of train No. 160, stated that he heard the engineman signal for flag protection before his train started to back in on "B" siding and he instructed his flagman to flag train No. 102, the flagman acknowledging these instructions. Conductor Carey then opened the switch and as soon as the train started the back-up movement the conductor went forward with the intention of going to the yard office, but on account of the fact that it was impossible for his entire train to enter "B" siding he proceeded to the ladder-track switch and after observing that track 3 was clear at that particular time he opened the switch, on which the switch lamp was burning, and gave his engineman a signal to come ahead. The conductor remained near the switch, and at about the time the forward portion of his train came to a stop, with two cars still occupying the main track, he noticed the middle brakeman, who was then standing on the main track some distance south of where the train came to a stop, giving stop signals with a white lamp, and on noticing train No. 102 approaching he also started giving stop signals, which were acknowledged by the engineman of train No. 102. Conductor Carey further stated that at the time he instructed his flagman to flag train No. 102 the flagman was located on top of the caboose, and as the flagman had always been reliable and had acknow-

ledged his instructions he had expected they would be complied with, otherwise he would have provided flag protection himself; after the train had backed past him he looked back to see if the flagman was protecting, but smoke from the engine obscured his vision. He also said that at the time he looked down track 3 it was clear, but that a yard engine placed some cars on the track from the north end before his train could get into clear.

Middle Brakeman Taylor, of train No. 160, stated that he heard the engineman whistle out a flag just before his train first came to a stop. After the rear of the train was backed into "B" siding he cut the train in two and as the head end of the train started forward he rode on the rear car, getting off at the switch, which he closed, and then he looked back and saw the headlight of train No. 102, that train then being in the vicinity of the south end of "B" siding. As he did not see any one flagging that train he realized his own train was not being protected and he immediately started running southward giving stop signals, continuing to give such signals until the train passed him.

Flagman Williams, of train No. 160, stated that he was riding in the caboose at the time the train arrived at Pine Bluff. As soon as his train started to back into clear he placed a lighted fusee on top of the caboose and held another on the rear platform, in compliance with instructions from the conductor, who also had instructed him to look out for train No. 102. Flagman Williams said he did not hear the engineman whistle for flag protection but did hear what he thought was a stop signal just before the rear of the train came to a stop on the siding. As soon as the train had stopped he turned the markers and the cupola light on the caboose to display green to the rear, extinguished one of the fusees but permitted the other to burn out, got off the caboose onto the main track, looked forward, and as he could see all of the switch lamps in that locality displaying green and had not heard the exhaust of the engine as the head end of the train started northward he was of the impression that his train had gotten entirely into clear on "B" siding, consequently he made no effort to flag train No. 102 at the time it approached the train passing him while traveling at a speed of about 40 or 50 miles per hour.

Engineman Quinney, of train No. 102, stated that the air brakes functioned efficiently in making the station stop at McGehee and as the engine was not detached from the train no air-brake test was made after departing from that point, nor were the brakes again applied until just prior to the accident, at which time they worked properly. His train was traveling at a speed of about 50 miles per hour, which speed was not reduced while entering the yard as there

were no speed restrictions in that territory. He noticed the headlight of a southbound train standing on "B" siding and also the rear end of a northbound train on this siding, the lights on the caboose displaying green. He had sounded a road-crossing and a station whistle signal and when his train reached a point approximately 200 feet north of the north end of "B" siding he received what he termed was a "hard slow sign" which was immediately followed by a stop signal, these signals being given with a white light by some one standing near the switch leading to the yard tracks; he then saw the cars obstructing the main track. Engineman Quinney said that when he received the slow signal he closed the throttle, started a service application of the brakes, and then continued to move the brake valve handle until he obtained an emergency application, but his train was then too close to the standing cars to enable him to bring it to a stop. Engineman Quinney further stated that prior to the accident the headlight on his engine was burning brightly and there was nothing to obstruct the view other than electric lights in the vicinity, which were more or less blinding but not to such an extent that they would interfere with observing signals and switch lamp indications. He said, however, he did not see the lamp on the switch leading to the yard tracks as his train approached it, but noticed the target displaying a red indication at about the time he saw the cars on the main track. He was not positive whether the lamp was burning, as it could have been burning dimly without his having noticed it. He was familiar with the rules which require that the absence of a signal where a signal is usually shown must be regarded as the most restrictive indication that can be displayed by that signal, but said he did not reduce speed when he did not observe this switch lamp as there were several men with white lanterns in that vicinity and he depended on them to have the route properly lined, as had always been the case on similar occasions.

The statements of Conductor Graham, Brakeman Tinker and Pullman Porter Newsome, of train No. 102, brought out no additional facts of importance as they were unaware of anything out of the ordinary until the brakes were applied in emergency just prior to the accident.

Engine Foreman Clark, who was in charge of a switch engine at the north end of Pine Bluff Yard at the time of the accident, stated that at about 1.05 a.m. 19 cars were shoved in on track 3 through the north switch, and that that track had not been clear while he was working in the vicinity at any time prior to the accident. Switchman

Thorpe stated that he saw a southbound train depart from track 3 a short time before the yard engine shoved a cut of cars in at the north switch and he thought the track was clear for about 10 or 12 minutes prior to the placing of these cars although he was not certain of it.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Flagman Williams, of train No. 160, properly to protect his train.

The rules provide that within yard limits the main track may be used protecting against first class trains. They also provide that it is the especial duty of flagmen to protect the rear of their train in accordance with the rules, and they must allow nothing to interfere with the prompt and efficient discharge of that duty. In addition to the requirements of the rules, Flagman Williams had been instructed by the conductor to flag train No. 102. Instead of complying with the rules and with these instructions, however, he remained on the caboose until it came to a stop on "B" siding and then occupied himself in performing other duties. His reason for not flagging train No. 102 as it approached was the fact that he thought his own train had entirely cleared the main track, saying that at the time he got off the caboose after it came to a stop on the siding he had looked ahead and thought all of the switch lamps were displaying green indications. No whistle signal recalling him from the duty of protecting his train had been sounded, nor had the conductor's instructions been canceled, or modified in any way. Had Flagman Williams given proper attention to his most important duty, that of protecting his train, this accident might have been prevented.

The employees involved were experienced men and at the time of the accident 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.