

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE MORGAN'S LOUISIANA & TEXAS RAILWAY & STEAMSHIP CO., SOUTHERN PACIFIC LINES NEAR NEW IBERIA, LA., ON OCTOBER 3, 1923

November 24, 1923

To the Commission.

On October 3, 1923, there was a derailment of a passenger train on the Morgan's Louisiana & Texas Railway & Steamship Co., Southern Pacific Lines, near New Iberia, La., resulting in the death of one employee and the injury of one employee.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the line extending between Algiers and Lafayette, La., a distance of 144.6 miles, in the vicinity of the point of accident this 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 about 1.37 miles east of the station at New Iberia, just east of the Iberia, St. Marys & Eastern Railroad crossing, within interlocking limits, at a derail located on the south rail of the eastbound main track, 192 feet east of the switch points of a crossover connecting the two main tracks. Approaching the derail from the east the track is tangent for more than 3 miles, the grade is practically level. The track is laid with 90-pound rails, 33 feet in length, with an average of 18 ties to the rail-length, and well ballasted, it is maintained in good condition.

The switches, signals, and derails in the vicinity of the point of accident are operated from a tower located on the north side of the main tracks and just west of the crossing, it contains a 24-lever Saxby & Farmer machine, route locking being used. Dwarf signal 20, the signal involved, governs movements on the eastbound track against the current of traffic and through the crossover, and is located between the main tracks 30 feet east of the derail at which the accident occurred. The westbound home and distant signals, governing movements only with the current of traffic on the westbound main track, are located 235 and 2,961 feet, respectively east of the dwarf signal. The annunciator bell only announces the approach of trains moving with the current of traffic, it also rings when the distant signal is cleared for an approaching train, but may be shut off by the towerman.

when desired. The weather was clear at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 8:45 p m

### Description

Westbound passenger train No 1 consisted of one mail car, one baggage car, one combination car, and five coaches, in the order named, hauled by engine 270, and was in charge of Conductor Johnson and Engineman Calhoun. At Bayou Sale, 29.9 miles from New Iberia, the crew received a copy of train order No. 95, Form 19, reading in part as follows:

"Eastward track will be used as single track between N. I. & N. crossing west of New Iberia and crossover at Gumbo Pit five one 5:01 p m until two one 2:01 a.m.\*\*\*"

The order was put out to permit westbound trains to run around a circus train which was being loaded on the westbound main track at New Iberia. Grain No 1 left Bayou Sale, the last open office, at 7.45 p m, 5 minutes late, crossed over from the westbound main track to the eastbound main track at Gumbo Pit, 2.66 miles east of the point of accident, passed dwarf signal 20, which was displaying a stop indication, and ran off the derail just west of this signal while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 18 miles an hour.

Engine 270 came to rest on its left side, south of the main track, about 110 feet beyond the initial point of derailment, and was considerably damaged. The first car and forward truck of the second car were derailed, there was practically no damage to the track. The employee killed was the fireman.

### Summary of evidence

When Towerman Koch saw the headlight of train No 1 in the vicinity of Olivier, 3.5 miles distant, he lined the route and cleared the signals for a movement on the westbound track, and then shut off the annunciator bell. Having no telephone or telegraph communication, and train No 1 being the first westbound train to approach moving against the current of traffic, Towerman Koch had no knowledge of the fact that a single-track zone had been established, and he said he was not able to tell on which track the train was moving owing to the blinding effect of the headlight, and that after passing the distant signal he heard the whistle signal sounded for a movement straight through the interlocking plant, one long blast being sounded for a movement of this nature when moving either with or against the current of traffic. The first knowledge he had of anything wrong was when the accident occurred. Towerman Koch further stated that the light on dwarf signal 20 was

burning at the time of, and after, the accident, and that immediately after the accident this signal was displaying a stop indication, due to the mechanism of the plant its position could not have been changed at this time. Owing to a curve west of the tower, the towerman could not see the circus train standing on the westbound main track at New Iberia.

Engineman Calhoun stated that after crossing over to the eastbound main track at Gumbo Pt. he operated the train at a speed of about 28 miles an hour, on approaching the interlocking plant he sounded one blast on the whistle, and after sounding this whistle signal he saw the distant and home signals, governing movements only on the westbound main track, display clear indications. When a short distance from dwarf signal 20 he saw it displaying a stop indication, and also saw the derail set against his train, and applied the air brakes in emergency. Engineman Calhoun stated that he was thoroughly familiar with the method of operation in the vicinity of the point of accident, both with and against the current of traffic, and with the location of the signals, that the headlight was burning brightly, that he had frequently operated trains through this crossover against the current of traffic, that no trouble was experienced with the air brakes en route, and that they were working properly at the time of the accident, at which time he estimated the speed to have been between 8 and 10 miles an hour. Engineman Calhoun further stated, however, that the red light on dwarf signal 20 was burning very dimly, and that he was misled to a large extent by the clear indications displayed by the westbound main track distant and home signals.

Other members of the crew, and Signal Supervisor Rosenzweig, who was riding on this train at the time of the accident, stated the first knowledge they had of anything wrong was when the accident occurred, they estimating the speed at this time not to have been in excess of 18 miles an hour, after the accident they found dwarf signal 20 displaying a stop indication and the signal lamp burning. The statements of the train crew also indicated that the air brakes were not applied until or after the train was derailed.

#### Conclusions.

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Calhoun properly to obey the stop indication displayed by dwarf signal 20.

There is a conflict in the evidence as to when the route through the interlocking plant was lined for a westbound movement, the engineman saying it was after he had whistled that he saw the westbound signals cleared, while the towerman said he cleared these signals when he saw the headlight

in the vicinity of Olivier, approximately 3.5 miles distant. Engineman Calhoun was fully acquainted with the location of the various switches and signals in the vicinity of the point of accident, and was familiar with the rule requiring trains to approach railroad crossings at grade with caution, but said he was misled by seeing the signals cleared after he had sounded the whistle, and apparently he permitted his train to approach the crossing at a speed high enough to prevent him from bringing it to a stop when he saw the stop indication displayed by the dwarf signal.

While Towerman Koch may not have been able to tell on what track train No. 1 was moving when he first saw the headlight several miles distant, undoubtedly he could have discovered that it was moving against the current of traffic had he been paying proper attention as it approached the tower, in which event he could have thrown the derail so as to permit the movement of the train through the interlocking plant in safety.

As previously stated, no telegraph or telephone communication is provided at this tower, undoubtedly greater safety at this point would be provided by installing means of communication, so that the towerman may know what movements are being made and be in better position to facilitate the handling of such movements.

This accident again directs attention to the necessity for the adoption of some form of automatic train control for the purpose of bringing a train to a stop when the engine-man for any reason fails properly to observe or obey signal indications.

The employees involved were experienced men, and at the time of the accident none of them had been on duty in violation of the provisions of the hours of service law.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director