

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE  
NEW YORK CENTRAL RAILROAD AT MEIGS, OHIO, ON JUNE  
20, 1927.

July 25, 1927.

To the Commission:

On June 20, 1927, there was a head-end collision between two freight trains on the New York Central Railroad at Meigs, Ohio, resulting in the death of one employee, and the injury of three employees. This accident was investigated in conjunction with the Ohio Public Utilities Commission.

Location and method of operation

This accident occurred on that part of the Southern Division extending between Corning and Hobson Junction, Ohio, a distance of 56.7 miles; in the vicinity of the point of accident trains are operated by time-table; train orders and a manual block-signal system. From Hobson northward to Meigs, a distance of 6.2 miles, there are two main tracks, designated as the east main track and the west main track; these two tracks are a considerable distance apart between these two points and converge at the junction switch at Meigs. The west main track is used by northbound second-class trains and extra trains, except local freight trains, and the east main track is used by northbound passenger and local freight trains and all southbound trains; it is a single-track line north of Meigs. The telegraph office at Meigs is located on the east side of the tracks, only a few feet from the junction switch; at a point 18.1 feet north of the junction switch there is another switch, the south switch of a crossover which connects the main track with the passing track; the passing track parallels the main track on the west. The switches are hand operated and the switch-stands of the junction switch and the south crossover switch are on the east side of the main track. The normal position of the junction switch is for the east main track and it is the duty of the operator at Meigs to handle this switch. There is a two-arm manual block signal located at a point 200.5 feet north of the junction switch, and at a point 447.3

feet south of the junction switch there is a signal governing movements from the west main track to the single track line north of the junction switch. The accident occurred on the west main track at a point 494.6 feet south of the junction switch, or 47 3 feet south of the last-mentioned signal.

Approaching the junction switch from the north the single-track line is tangent for more than 2,000 feet; the west main track curves toward the west at the switch while the east main track is tangent for a distance of about 225 feet south of the switch and then it curves toward the east. The grade is practically level.

Owing to a heavy fog the view was materially restricted at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 4.25 a.m., about the break of day.

#### Description

Northbound second-class freight train third No. 81 consisted of 58 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 9694, and was in charge of Conductor Dillard and Engineman Hettesimer. It departed from Hobson at 3.50 a.m., according to the train sheet, en route to Corning, and on arrival at Meigs was brought to a stop on the west main track at a point 47.3 feet south of the signal at 4.17 a.m., according to the train sheet. While standing at this point it was struck by extra 9712.

Southbound freight train extra 9712 consisted of 21 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 9712, and was in charge of Conductor Motley and Engineman Bowen. This train left Dexter, 5.6 miles north of Meigs, at 4.11 a.m., according to the train sheet, it being intended to proceed from Meigs to Hobson over the east main track. A clear indication was displayed on the train order and manual block signal at Meigs and the train passed the office at this point at 4.25 a.m., according to the train sheet. The junction switch was improperly set, however, and the train entered upon the west main track and collided with train third No. 81 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been between 22 and 25 miles per hour.

Both engines remained upright but were considerably damaged. The first car in train third No. 81 and the second, third, fourth, and fifth cars in the train of extra 9712 were derailed and more or less damaged. The employee killed was the fireman of train third No. 81.

### Summary of evidence

Train second No. 81 passed the junction switch at Meigs at about 3.30 a.m., and as the caboose was going by the office, at a speed of about 10 miles per hour, train orders were handed on to Flagman Maddox by Operator Johnson; after receiving the orders the flagman watched the switch light until it disappeared from view and the last he saw of it a red indication was displayed, showing that the switch still was lined for the west main track. Train third No. 81 arrived at Meigs and was brought to a stop on the west main track south of the west main track signal, which was displaying a stop indication, according to Conductor Dillard, Head Brakeman Murray and Flagman Marcum, it was then 4.20 a.m. Just as the train stopped Engineman Hettessimer heard one long blast sounded on the engine whistle of the southbound train, extra 9712. In the meantime Head Brakeman Murray got off the engine and started toward the telegraph office, carrying his white lantern. On reaching a point about 250 feet south of the junction switch, he saw extra 9712 heading in on the west main track and realizing that a collision was imminent he immediately got out of the way. Conductor Dillard, who was in the caboose, and Head Brakeman Murray fixed the time of the collision at 4.23 a.m.

On account of the fog the position of the junction switch and also the block-signal at the office could not be seen from the cab of the engine of train third No. 81 as it stood on the west main track. After the accident, however, a car in the train of extra 9712 stood over the junction switch making it impossible for any one to have thrown the switch after the occurrence of the accident, and it was found that the switch was lined for the west main track and latched, but not locked, while the switch light was properly displaying a red indication and the manual block signal at the office was displaying a green or proceed indication. Engineman Hettessimer stated, however, that he did not think that Head Brakeman Murray had time to reach the junction switch between the time his train stopped south of the signal and the time the accident occurred.

Engineman Bowen, of extra 9712, stated that approaching Meigs he made a five to seven-pound brake-pipe reduction so as to be able to stop in the event the block signal was in the stop position. On account of the fog he turned off the headlight when about 300 feet from the signal to make sure he could see the signal; he saw that it was displaying a proceed indication, called it and Head Brakeman Taylor answered in the affirmative.

Engineman Bowen then released the air brakes and switched on the headlight again, and on seeing the white lantern carried by Head Brakeman Murray, at which time the engine reached a point about halfway between the office and the point of collision, Engineman Bowen realized that his train was on the west main track, instead of the east main track, he at once applied the air brakes in emergency, shouted a warning of danger and jumped. Engineman Bowen said that he did not notice the position of the junction switch; nor was he looking for it, after receiving a clear block signal indication. He estimated the speed of his train to have been about 25 miles per hour at the time of the accident, saying that in his opinion the air brakes had not had time to take hold between the time the emergency application was made and the time of the accident.

Fireman Thomas said that after Engineman Bowen called "clear block", he looked out and saw that it was clear, he then got down on the deck of the engine and started to put in a fire and the first he knew of anything wrong was when the engineman shouted a warning of danger. Head Brakeman Taylor stated that he was riding on his seat box approaching Meigs, there was a heavy fog and when the engine was about 10 or 15 car-lengths from the block signal he saw that it was clear and repeated its indication to the engineman.

Operator Johnson, stationed at Meigs, stated that he handed on orders as train second No. 81 passed the office and that he then closed the switch and went back into the office. He did not look at the switch again. Operator Johnson was positive that he closed the switch but said that he did not know definitely whether he latched it; he admitted however, that he did not lock it, and apparently this was in line with his usual custom, although the rules require that switches be locked and he had been instructed in this connection about a month prior to the accident. Operator Johnson said that the switch was only 15 or 20 feet from his office and that under normal conditions no one could tamper with the switch without his knowing it. On this occasion, however, he had a fire in the stove and had been working on this fire; in fact, it was while he was standing at the stove that extra 9712 passed the office. It also appeared from his statements that he had laid down once between the time train second No. 81 departed and the time train third No. 81 arrived.

A coal miner by the name of Reeves, who lives in the neighborhood, was seen in the vicinity at the time of the accident. He said that he had left his house in order to obtain a sack of coal and was walking southward along the track toward the telegraph office. As extra 9712 approached, he looked ahead and noted that all three signals were displaying green or proceed indications, these signals being the manual block signal and the signals at the south crossover and the junction switches; he stated, however, that after this time the indication of the junction switch might have been changed from green to red without his having noticed it. After extra 9712 had stopped, at the time of the collision, the caboose was about opposite where he was standing. With regard to the statements made by this witness, however, it might be noted that his general appearance and attitude led to the belief that he might not have been so positive concerning the indication displayed at the junction switch as his statements first indicated. Flagman Rollins, of extra 9712 corroborated Reeves' statements in part by saying that when he got off the caboose after the occurrence of the accident he saw the coal miner about four car-lengths back of the caboose. Operator Johnson was also questioned with a view to determining whether the coal miner had been in the vicinity of the telegraph office, but he said that the first he saw of him was at the scene of the accident shortly after its occurrence.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by an open switch, for which Operator Johnson is responsible.

Operator Johnson said he restored the switch to its normal position, for the east main track, as soon as train second No. 81 had passed and that so far as he knew the switch was not touched between that time and the time of the accident, although he did not pay any more attention to it after having closed it. There were three persons who might have had knowledge concerning this switch, the head brakeman of train third No. 81, who was an inexperienced employee, the coal miner, and the operator. The engineman of train third No. 81, said he did not think the head brakeman had had time to reach the switch before the accident occurred, while the engineman of extra 9712 said he saw his white lantern about half way between the telegraph office and the point of accident; these statements tend to corroborate the statements

made by the head brakeman himself, that he was still about 250 feet from the switch when he saw extra 9712 entering on the west main track. The coal miner said he was walking southward toward the telegraph office but was still far enough distant from it to be opposite the rear end of extra 9712 when that train stopped after the accident; apparently he had not been near the switch and there was no evidence to indicate that he knew anything about the accident. The operator, of course, may have been correct in his statement that he closed the switch, in which event some unknown person must have opened it again, but it is difficult to see how this could have been done within a few feet of the office without the operator having knowledge of it; in either event, however, Operator Johnson is responsible, for it was his duty not only to restore the switch to its normal position, but to lock it in that position and he admitted that he failed to do so.

The switches at this point were connected with the signals governing northbound movements but not with the signal governing southbound movements. Had an arrangement of this kind been in effect for the purpose of safeguarding southbound movements, the crew of extra 9712 would have received a signal indication in accordance with the route as it was lined up and the accident could have been prevented.

Has an adequate automatic block-signal system been in use, this accident probably would not have occurred; an adequate automatic train stop or train control device would have prevented it.

All the employees involved were experienced men, with the exception of the head brakeman of train third No. 81. The crew of train third No. 81 had been on duty about 3 hours, and the crew of extra 9712 about 13½ hours, prior to which they had been off duty periods ranging from about 10 hours to several days, the operator had been on duty at the time of the accident about 6½ hours, after 16 hours off duty.

Respectfully submitted,

W. P. BORLAND,

Director.