

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 NEAR SOUTH SCHENECTADY, N. Y., ON MARCH 17, 1925.

July 28, 1925.

To the Commission;

On March 17, 1925, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the New York Central Railroad near South Schenectady, N.Y., which resulted in the death of one employee and the injury of five employees.

Location and method of operation

The Mohawk Division consists of two parallel lines of main tracks, one extending between Albany and Minoa, N.Y., a distance of 139.9 miles, and the other between Ravena and signal station WX, near Syracuse, N.Y., a distance of 144.5 miles. There are connections between these two systems of main tracks at five different points, one of these being what is known as the Schenectady Detour Branch, on which the accident occurred. This branch is a double-track line extending between signal station 7, at Carmen, N.Y., and South Schenectady, a distance of 4.54 miles. Trains are operated over this branch by time-table, train orders, and a manual block-signal system, trains running on the left-hand track when moving with the current of traffic,

The trains involved were westbound from Carmen to South Schenectady, and the point of accident was near where the tracks connect with the main line at South Schenectady, 1,510 feet inside of the east yard-limit board. Approaching from the east, beginning at signal station 7, there is a curve to the left, a long tangent, and then a compound curve to the right 5,879 feet in length with a maximum curvature of 2° . The accident occurred on this curve about 675 feet from its leaving end, where the curvature is at its maximum.

The only manual block signal encountered by westbound movements is located on the left side of the westbound track at a point about 3,100 feet west of signal station 7. It is a one-arm, three-position, upper quadrant signal, normally displaying a stop indication. Under the rules, before allowing a train to enter the block the signalman/must examine the block record, and, if the block is occupied, communicate with the signalman at the next station in advance, which in this case is at South Schenectady, he must then display the proper indication, which is a caution indication in the case of following freight-train movements in an occupied block.

The weather was cloudy at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 8 a.m.

Description

Westbound freight train extra 2504 consisted of 57 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 2504, and was in charge of Conductor Dell and Engineman Crogan. It passed signal station 7 at 6.12 a.m., and first came to a stop near South Schenectady at about 6.25 a.m. At about 7.15 a.m. the train pulled ahead a distance of 70 or 75 car lengths and again stopped at about 7.20 a.m., no further movement was made prior to the time it was struck by train ZV-2.

Westbound freight train ZV-2 consisted of engine 2603, 31 cars, a caboose, and engine 3726, in the order named, and was in charge of Conductor Fay and Enginemen Hall and Coates. It left signal station 7 at 7.52 a.m., moving backward, thus placing engine 3726 in charge of Engineman Coates, in the lead. A clear indication was received at the manual block signal west of signal station 7 and the train proceeded over the branch at a speed of about 25 miles an hour until it approached the east yard-limit board at South Schenectady, at which point the speed was reduced to some extent and the train continued until the rear of extra 2504 was observed by the fireman, who was on the inside of the curve. The speed had been reduced to about 10 or 15 miles an hour when the collision occurred.

The caboose and rear car of extra 2504 were derailed. Engine 3726 was not derailed, although its tender was derailed and badly damaged. The caboose

of train ZV-2 was derailed and its superstructure torn from the underframe, while the two cars immediately adjoining the caboose were also derailed, one being demolished and the other badly damaged. Fire broke out in the wreckage and consumed the superstructure of each caboose. The employee killed was the flagman of extra 2504.

Summary of evidence

Fireman Passmore, of engine 3726, said he had not had any occasion to do any firing while moving over the branch and that after receiving a clear indication at the manual block signal near signal station 7 he was maintaining a careful lookout ahead. When the train was rounding the curve approaching South Schenectady and had reached a point within about 10 car lengths of the east Yard-limit board, moving at a speed he estimated to have been about 15 miles an hour, he saw the rear end of extra 2504 about 50 car lengths distant and at once notified the engineman, at the same time saying that he did not know on what track the train was standing, there being other trains in the immediate vicinity. At this time the engineman was working a light throttle and Fireman Passmore said he at once shut off steam and applied the straight air brake, reducing the speed to 10 miles an hour when passing the yard limit board. The two trains were within 5 or 10 car lengths of each other before Fireman Passmore realized that extra 2504 was on the same track, and he at once called to the engineman to apply the air brakes in emergency, which was done, but it was then too late to avert the accident.

Engineman Coates, of engine 3726, said the speed was about 25 miles an hour until he applied the straight air brake when approaching the yard limit board, as was his custom in order to bunch the cars and also to reduce the speed, which he estimated to have been about 20 miles an hour when passing the yard limit board. After the engine was four or five car lengths beyond this board Fireman Passmore called to him that he thought there was a train on the track ahead, at which time he made a light application of the automatic brake. Almost immediately afterwards the fireman told him to apply the air brakes in emergency and Engineman Coates estimated that the speed had been reduced to about 15 miles an hour

when the collision occurred. Engineman Coates admitted that in a way he had violated rule 93, adding that after receiving a clear signal indication he was not expecting to find a train in that locality. Both the engineman and fireman said they did not encounter any torpedoes or observe any flagman protecting the rear end of extra 2504.

Conductor Bell, of extra 2504, said Flagman Swartz went back to protect the train when it stopped for the first time, the flagman was recalled before the train started to move ahead. When the train stopped for the second time Conductor Bell told Flagman Swartz to take a pail of water and accompany him to the ninth car ahead of the caboose, where the conductor intended to pack a hot box. In the meantime he had reminded Flagman Swartz that train No. 137, a first-class train, was soon due, and he said that after the hot box had been packed he told Flagman Swartz to go back to protect the train while he himself went ahead to pack another hot box nearer the head end of the train. He said it was then 7.28 or 7.30 a.m., while train No. 137 is scheduled to leave Carmen at 7.43 a.m. Conductor Bell said Flagman Swartz started back toward the rear of the train and he supposed the flagman was providing the proper flag protection against train No. 137. As a matter of fact, however, train No. 137 was being moved via another route and the next train to approach was train ZV-2, and when Conductor Bell heard the crash of the collision he went to the scene and found the body of the flagman in the wreckage of the caboose.

Signalman Murphy, on duty at signal station 7, from 11.30 p.m. until 7.30 a.m., said he was relieved at 7.42 a.m., at which time train ZV-2 was ready to depart, while extra 2504 was shown on the transfer which he had ready to deliver to Signalman Barhydt, who relieved him, and he also stated that he called this to Signalman Barhydt's attention. Signalman Barhydt said he did not look at the transfer when he came on duty but did look at the block sheet and noticed that on the second line from the top a westbound extra was shown as being clear at South Schenectady at 7.17 a.m., overlooking the fact that the extra shown on the preceding line, extra 2504, was not clear at South Schenectady, and he therefore gave train ZV-2 a clear signal indication instead of a caution indication.

Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Signalman Barhydt, on duty at signal station 7, to display a caution signal indication for the movement of train ZV 2, and by the failure of Flagman Swartz properly to protect his train.

Signalman Barhydt acknowledged overlooking the fact that extra 2504 had not been reported as being clear of the block at South Schenectady. No reason is known for the failure of Flagman Swartz to protect his train against first-class train No. 137, already due, as undoubtedly he was not in possession of information that it was being moved via another route. Had he provided proper protection against this train the engine crew of train ZV-2 would have been warned in ample time to enable them to bring their train to a stop.

While Engineman Coates received a clear signal indication when leaving signal station 7, this did not relieve him of the duty of fully observing the requirements of rule 93, under which second-class and extra trains must move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear. Engineman Coates was on the outside of the curve when entering the yard limits, yet while he was not in position to observe the track ahead it is believed that a stricter compliance with the requirements of the rules would have enabled him to stop his train in time to avert the accident, and it is to be noted in this connection that when the fireman first spoke about the possibility of there being a train ahead the engineman did not promptly bring his train under full control. It can not be stated definitely that Fireman Passmore was not maintaining a proper lookout, but if he could not tell whether or not the track was occupied until his own train was within five or ten car lengths of the train ahead, then he failed entirely to give Engineman Coates sufficient warning of impending danger.

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

The employees involved were experienced men; 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. DORLAND,

Director.