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U.S. Interstate Commerce Commission
Railroad accident investigation Inv-201
report CV 57 no. 201-250
July 24, 1914.

In re investigation of accident on the
Northern Alabama Railway near Hayes Mine,
Alabama, on May 19, 1914.

Dept. of Transportation

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On May 19, 1914, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the Northern Alabama Railway at Hayes Mine, Ala., resulting in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 5 employees.

After investigation of this accident, the Chief Inspector of Safety Appliances reports as follows:

Northbound extra 381 runs between Jasper and Parrish, Ala., a distance of 9.6 miles, switching at and between these points. It consisted of 11 loaded cars and a caboose, hauled by locomotive 381, and was in charge of Conductor Christian and Engineman Clem. This train left Parrish at 1:25 p.m., arrived at Hayes Mine at 2:35 p.m., and as it was leaving that place was struck by train 92 at 2:45 p.m. while running at a speed of 3 or 4 miles per hour.

Northbound train No. 92 was a Mobile & Ohio train running over the tracks of the Northern Alabama Railway, and consisted of 14 loaded cars, 14 empty cars, and a caboose, hauled by locomotives 313 and 345, and in charge of Conductor Roberson and Engineman Allen and Smith. This train left Parrish at 2:25 p.m., 50 minutes late, and collided with extra 381 at Hayes Mine while running at a speed of 15 or 18 miles per hour.

The caboose of extra 381 and the two cars just ahead of it were destroyed and two other cars of that train slightly damaged. Locomotives 313 and 345 and one box car of train No. 92 were badly damaged while two steel gondola cars were slightly damaged. The weather at the time was clear.

The Northern Alabama Railway is a single-track line extending between Parrish, Ala., and Sheffield, Ala., a distance of 95.6 miles, and is operated as a part of the Southern Railway system. The movement of trains is governed by train orders. The Mobile & Ohio Railroad operates freight trains over this road from Parrish to Saleyville, Ala. In the vicinity of the point of accident the track has a great number of curves with a descending grade for northbound trains varying from $1\frac{1}{2}\%$ to $2\frac{1}{2}\%$. Approaching Hayes Mine from the south there is a 7° curve leading to the right about 2,500 feet in length. On the outside of the curve there is a high bluff which obstructs the view of engine crews, while on the inside of the curve the extreme range of vision does not exceed 297 feet. At the point of accident the track is laid in a deep cut.

Conductor Christian of extra 381 stated that he received a clearance card at Parrish and left there at 1:25 p.m., 10 minutes ahead of the regular leaving time of train No. 92. The operator at Parrish informed him that train 92 was about 50 minutes late but did not give him an order to that effect, nor was it the practice to receive one. He informed Flagman Slay that train 92 was about 50 minutes late, and as extra 381 would stop

at Calumet and Hayes Mine for him to get off before reaching the former place and remain there until they had finished their work at Calumet. When they were ready to proceed to Hayes Mine he would be called in and for him to come down the hill below Calumet and remain there until called in again. The flagman got off the train with torpedoes and fuses at a point about three-fourths of a mile south of Calumet. Extra 381 left Calumet about 2:50 p.m., arrived at Hayes Mine at 2:35 p.m., and after finishing its work there the flagman was called in. The flagman appeared in sight in about five minutes, Conductor Christian gave the engineer the signal to proceed, and extra 381 had moved but two or three car lengths when the collision occurred. During the three years he had been employed on this run it was the practice for the flagman to get off at the same place he did on this occasion and put down two torpedoes when his train was to stop at Calumet, and when the train moved down to Hayes Mine the flagman would be called in and would then come down below Calumet and remain there until again called in. He did not consider it necessary for the flagman to place two more torpedoes below Calumet but admitted it would have been safer to have done so. In his opinion two torpedoes above Calumet and a fusee below Calumet was sufficient protection for his train at Hayes Mine, and after striking the two torpedoes train 92 should have proceeded under control until it reached Hayes Mine.

Flagman Slay of extra 381 stated that when his train left Parrish he was informed that train 92 was 40 or 50 minutes late.

Conductor Christian told him that as his train would stop at Calumet he should get off before reaching there for the purpose of flagging and remain there until called in, at which time he was to come to a point just below Calumet and remain there until called in again. Flagman Slay stated that he got off his train at the trestle about three-fourths of a mile south of Calumet with torpedoes and fuses, placed two torpedoes on the rails at the north end of the trestle, walked about one-fourth of a mile in toward Calumet and put down another torpedo and remained there until called in, whereupon he removed this last torpedo, walked to a point below Calumet, and when called in from that place left a burning fuse one-half mile from the rear of his train. He had not reached his train when he heard train 92 approaching and when within about four car lengths of the caboose of his train he called to the fuel inspector, who was riding in the caboose, to get out, started back to flag train 92, and had reached a point about six car lengths from the rear of his train when train 92 passed him at a speed of about 40 miles per hour. In his opinion Hayes Mine was a dangerous place to approach but he thought he had gone back sufficient distance to protect his train. He stated that the collision occurred about 5 minutes after he lighted the fuse.

Conductor Roberson was riding on the leading engine of train 92 and stated that upon checking the train register at Ferrish he found that extra 301 left there at 1:25 p.m. Train

92 left Parrish at 2:25 p.m., 50 minutes late, and when within about one-third of a mile of Calumet exploded two torpedoes while running at a speed of 20 or 25 miles per hour. He stated that his train had frequently been flagged at Calumet and Hayes Mine by the crew of extra 381 and when the two torpedoes were exploded south of Calumet he thought they were placed there by the crew of extra 381 and expected to see the flagman of that train at or near Calumet. When his train passed Calumet and the flagman was not in sight he assumed that extra 381 had finished its work and proceeded on its way. Inasmuch as the torpedoes were located so far south of Calumet he assumed they were for protection at that station only and did not think it necessary for his train to approach Hayes Mine under control. His train passed Calumet switch at a speed of about 20 miles per hour and at the time of the collision its speed was 12 or 15 miles per hour. He did not see a fusee after leaving Calumet and the first intimation he had that extra 381 was near was when he saw the caboose about four or five car lengths away.

Engineman Allen of train 92 stated that he was familiar with the work done by extra 381 and that it usually did work at all the mines located between Parrish and Jasper. By consulting the train register at Parrish he learned that extra 381 left there at 1:25 p.m., and when his train exploded the two torpedoes about three-fourths of a mile south of Calumet he reduced its speed expecting to find extra 381 at Calumet, and kept his train under control for over three-fourths of a mile.

He did not think the torpedoes were intended to protect a train at Hayes Mine, which was a mile and a quarter from where the torpedoes were located, but admitted that it was a dangerous place to approach on account of the steep grade and sharp curves. However, he did not think he was required to proceed with his train under absolute control until he reached Hayes Mine. He said that he did not see a fusee after passing Calumet and saw extra 381 when only about four car lengths.

On previous occasions when extra 331 would be working at Hayes Mine, the torpedoes would be located at the same point they were on the day of the accident and either a torpedo or a flagman between Calumet and Hayes Mine.

Coal Inspector Keefer stated that he was in the caboose of extra 381 at Hayes Mine. He heard the flagman being called in and in seven or eight minutes he saw him running toward the caboose shouting for him to get out. Upon looking up, he saw train 92 rapidly approaching about four or five car lengths away.

Rule 99 of the operating rules for this road provides in part as follows:

"When a train is stopped at an unusual point or is delayed at a regular stop over three minutes, or when it fails to make its schedule time, the flagman must immediately go back with danger signals to stop any train moving in the same direction. At a point one-half of a mile from the rear of his train he must place one torpedo on the rail, on engineman's side; he must then continue to go back at least three-fourths of a mile from the rear of his train and place two torpedoes on the rail ten yards apart, when he may return to a point one-half of a mile from the rear of his train, and he must remain there until recalled."

"On descending grades, or during blinding storms or fog, the flagman must go as much farther than the distance named above as will insure absolute protection, placing the torpedoes at relatively greater distances from the obstruction."

Special rule M, contained in time table No. 26, reads as follows:

"When a train explodes two torpedoes thirty feet apart, it must run at reduced speed a distance of at least three-fourths of a mile on level or ascending grade, but if on a descending grade or during foggy or stormy weather, as much further as may be necessary to insure absolute safety."

Neither of these rules were observed.

This accident was caused by the failure of flagman Slay properly to protect the rear of his train, and by the failure of Engineman Allen properly to control the speed of his train. Although Flagman Slay claims to have left a fusee near Calumet switch when called in the second time, it is doubtful whether he did so as both the conductor and engineman of train 92, who passed there shortly after the time he claims to have lighted the fusee, stated that they saw nothing of it. Even though he did place a fusee where he said he did, in view of the steep grade and sharp curve in this vicinity and the fact that the torpedoes were about 6,600 feet from the rear of his train, a proper regard for the safety of his train would have caused him to put down torpedoes when called in the second time instead of a fusee. He also exercised poor judgment by failing to run back and flag train 92 as soon as he heard it approaching.

Engineman Allen was aware that extra 361 usually stopped at all the sines between Parrish and Jasper and at this time could not be very far in advance of his train. He also knew

that Hayes Mine was a dangerous place to approach and after striking the torpedoes should have so controlled the speed of his train as to insure absolute safety.

All of the employees involved were experienced men. At the time of the collision, the crew of extra 381 had been on duty 6 hours and 45 minutes, while the crew of train 92 had been on duty 4 hours and 50 minutes.