

## INTERSTATE COMMERCE COMMISSION

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF THE BUREAU OF SAFETY IN RE  
INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED ON THE  
OKLAHOMA CITY-ADA-ATOKA RAILWAY AT ADA, OKLA., ON  
JANUARY 8, 1929.

March 30, 1929

To the Commission

On January 8, 1929, there was a collision between a work train and a cut of standing cars on the Oklahoma City-Ada-Atoka Railway at Ada, Okla., which resulted in the death of two persons and the injury of five persons, all of whom were carried under contract

Location and method of operation

This railway extends between Oklahoma City and Atoka, Okla., a distance of 132.9 miles, in the 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 yard limits of what is known as the north yard at Ada. Approaching the point of accident from the north there is a 2° curve to the right 1,379.1 feet in length, from which point the track is tangent to the point of accident, a distance of 2,720 feet, and for more than 1 mile beyond that point. The track is level at the point of accident.

Rule 93 of this railway states that the main track may be used within yard limits, protecting against first and second-class trains, third and fourth-class and extra trains are required to move prepared to stop unless the track is seen or known to be clear, responsibility being placed on the approaching train or engine. Rule 93(b) provides as follows:

"When the main track is obstructed within yard, water or fuel station limits, it must be protected by flagman when for any reason the obstruction cannot be seen for at least 750 ft. (25 rail lengths) At night lights must be displayed on each end. . . Failure to protect by light or flagman will not relieve approaching train from responsibility. . . ."

The weather was cloudy and a light fog prevailed at the time of the accident, which occurred at about 10.15 p m.

#### Description

Yard engine 458, in charge of Conductor Ware and Engineman Geria, left a cut of 10 cars standing on the main track, with the north end of this cut 2,092 feet south of the north yard-limit board, and due to engine trouble the engine proceeded to the roundhouse, where it was located when the accident occurred.

Southbound work train extra 521 consisted of one baggage car, one coach, one box car, and a caboose, hauled by St.L-S F engine 521, running backwards. At Tyrola, 9.8 miles north of Ada, the entire crew of this train was changed. The train then proceeded southward, in charge of Conductor Hardie and Engineman Lynch, and was moving through the north yard at Ada at a speed estimated to have been about 6 miles per hour when it struck the cut of standing cars.

Engine 521 had its tender cistern torn loose from the frame and shoved forward a distance of about 3 feet, denting both ends of the cistern and slightly crushing the rear of the engine cab. The front end of the engine and the first car in the work train were also damaged. One pair of wheels in the south truck of the first car in the cut of cars was derailed and the car damaged to some extent. None of the other equipment was derailed or damaged. The persons killed were riding on the work train.

#### Summary of evidence

Conductor Ware, of yard engine 453, stated that during the course of switching, 10 cars were set out on the main track near the south end of the yard after which the engineman sounded a distress or call signal, four short blasts on the whistle, and as they had been experiencing difficulty with the engine he presumed it would be necessary to go to the roundhouse, consequently he instructed the field man to protect the rear end, he was not certain whether the field man acknowledged his instructions but thought he might have said "all right". Conductor Ware then proceeded southward to the engine and accompanied it to the roundhouse at which point it was still located at the time of the accident. He said that he understood the rules required that under certain conditions flag protection must be afforded within yard limits against third and fourth-class trains and it was

for this reason that he told the field man to look out although he did not instruct him to place lights on the cars

Engineman Gerin, of engine 458, stated that at about 9.50 p.m. the netting in the front end of the engine became clogged, making it necessary to go to the roundhouse to have it cleaned. He sounded a distress signal and at that time noticed that both the conductor and the field man were in the vicinity of the lead switches at the south end of the yard. He did not whistle for flag protection before departing for the roundhouse and did not know whether any arrangements had been made to protect the cars standing on the main track. He had no knowledge as to the location of the work train although he knew that it arrived at Ada each evening at about the same time. The statements of Fireman Smith added no additional facts of importance.

Switchman Abington, who was on duty as the field man at the time of the accident, stated that he had been working with this shift for a period of four nights, three of which were with Conductor Ware. He could not recall any conversation being held with the conductor just before the engine was taken to the roundhouse and was positive that the conductor did not tell him to protect the rear of the cut of cars. He said his understanding of the rules was that flag protection within yard limits was required only against first and second-class trains and that he made no effort to afford protection as he had no knowledge that a train was approaching. He also understood, however, that it was the duty of the field man to protect when necessary, and that the rules require that when cars are left standing on the main track a light must be displayed on each end but this was not done as he only had a white lantern with him, he made no attempt to procure the proper flagging equipment. He further stated that the cars had been standing on the main track only about three minutes prior to the accident which he did not think would have given him time to go to the north end of the cut of cars and to afford protection even had he made an effort to do so. There was other evidence, however, that he had ample time to provide flag protection had he so desired. He heard no whistle signals sounded and did not see the work train approaching as he was located near the south end of the cut, his first knowledge that an accident had occurred was when he was informed of the fact by some one running down the track. It also appeared that Switchman Abington had only been employed on this railway since January 3,

of this year and that he had not been examined on the rules, he had had considerable experience on other roads.

Braseman Poling, of the yard crew, stated that after setting out 10 cars on the main track at a point north of the south switch, another cut of about 12 cars was pulled out and left standing on the main track at a point south of the south switch, the two cuts being separated by about 10 car-lengths. When the engine went to the roundhouse he took a position at the south end of the latter cut, at which point he remained until after the accident. He had no conversation with the conductor before the engine left for the roundhouse and did not hear the conductor instruct the field man to protect the cars. Braseman Poling said he did not know that a train was approaching as he heard no whistle signals and did not see any lights from that train.

Engineman Lynch, of extra 521, stated that he took charge of the work train at Tyrola at 9.35 p.m. and at that time he noticed a white lantern burning on the rear of the tender which gave a rather dim light. After departing from that point he made a running test of the air brakes, and as the train passed the north yard-limit board at Ada he sounded a station whistle signal which was followed by a crossing signal upon reaching a point just north of the north switches in the yard. He said that the deck light on top of the engine cab was burning but this did not interfere with his range of vision while there was nothing about the engine that obstructed the view. He was constantly looking ahead from the side window of the engine cab but did not see the cut of cars standing on the main track until the tops of some box cars came into view about five car-lengths distant, he did not see the coal cars, four of which were located at the north end of the cut, until he struck them. The reason he saw the box cars at that distance was due to the reflection of a light at a nearby industry shining on them, but this light did not shine on the coal cars on account of some cars standing on the sidings adjacent to the main track. He said that he had applied the brakes when within about 8 or 10 car-lengths from the cut of cars reducing the speed to about 5 miles per hour, and that he did not again apply the brakes prior to the accident. Engineman Lynch further stated that he was familiar with the rules which require that failure to protect by light or by flagman will not relieve approaching trains from responsibility, and that third and fourth-class and extra trains must move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the track is seen or known to be clear. He had no

such information and could not see beyond the rear of the tender on account of darkness but thought his train was under proper control moving at a speed of only 5 miles per hour, which he said would have enabled him to bring it to a stop within two car-lengths.

The statements of Fireman Winke and Brakeman Allen, of extra 521, were to the effect that while approaching the point of accident they both were leaning out of the side window of the engine cab looking ahead but saw no lights to indicate that the main track was obstructed and did not see the cut of standing cars until after the accident had occurred. Fireman Winke said that a station whistle signal and a road-crossing whistle signal were sounded after passing the north yard-limit board, while Brakeman Allen could not say whether any signals were sounded. They estimated the speed at the time of the accident at 6 miles per hour. They also stated that the deck light on the engine cab was burning but neither of them knew whether a light was displayed on the rear of the tender as the train approached the point of accident.

Conductor Hardie, of extra 521, stated that at the time he took charge of the work train at Tyrola he noticed a white light in a small box or case on the rear of the tender. This light had no reflector behind it but appeared to be bright and could be seen for a considerable distance. He said the train arrived at the north yard at Ada at 10.15 p.m., and he thought he heard a station whistle signal after passing the yard-limit board, but was not certain on this point. He could not estimate the speed of his train at the time of the accident, although he did not think it was excessive.

#### Conclusions

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman Lynch, of extra 521, to operate his train under proper control within yard limits, and by failure to provide flag protection for the cut of standing cars, for which Conductor Ware and Switchman Abington are responsible.

The rules provide that third and fourth class and extra trains must move within yard limits prepared to stop unless the main track is seen or known to be clear, and they also provide that failure to protect by light or by flagman will not relieve the approaching train from

responsibility. According to the statements of Engineman Lynch he did not know whether the main track was clear while on account of darkness and cars on adjoining tracks, together with the fact that the only light displayed at the rear of the tender was a white lantern, his range of vision was restricted to such an extent that he did not see the leading car in the cut until after his train had collided with it. Under the circumstances as they existed in this case it was necessary for Engineman Lynch to take unusual precautions for the safe movement of his train and had he done so it is probable that this accident would not have occurred.

The rules also provide that when the main track is obstructed within yard limits it must be protected by a flagman when for any reason the obstruction can not be seen for a distance of at least 750 feet, while at night lights must be displayed on each end of cars occupying the main track. The evidence is conflicting as to whether or not arrangements had been made to provide for such protection. Conductor Ware maintained that he instructed Switchman Abington to look out for the rear end but did not tell him to place lights on the cars, he was not certain that his instructions were understood, he then accompanied the engine to the roundhouse without having seen to it that the switchman complied with his instructions. Switchman Abington, however, positively stated that he received no instructions from the conductor to protect and that he made no effort to do so but remained in the vicinity of the south end of the cut of cars until after the occurrence of the accident. He fully understood that it was his duty to protect if necessary and that such protection was required when cars were left on the main track, but said he failed to do so for the reason that he had no knowledge that a train was approaching. Had either of these employees made any real attempt to obey the rules and furnish the required protection this accident probably would have been averted.

Brakeman Weller was employed on August 8, 1928 and Fireman Smith on December 14, 1928, these employees had had no previous experience in train service. All of the other employees involved had been employed within the past six months but had had several years' previous experience. 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.