

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH OCCURRED  
ON THE PENNSYLVANIA RAILROAD NEAR ROSSTON, PA  
ON OCTOBER 24, 1920

November 9, 1920.

On October 24, 1920, there was a rear-end collision between two freight trains on the Pennsylvania Railroad near Rosston, Pa., which resulted in the death of 1 employee. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

This accident occurred on that part of the Allegheny Division which extends between Oil City, Pa., and Kiskiminetas Junction, Pa., a distance of 92.2 miles. In the territory within which this accident occurred, this is a double-track line over which trains are operated by timetable, train orders, and a manual block-signal system. Under Rules 317-A and 318-A permissive blocking is authorized for following movements except in the case of passenger trains. The accident occurred about 1,100 feet south of the station at Rosston. Approaching the point of accident from the north the track is tangent for several thousand feet, followed by a 3-minute curve to the left 433 feet in length, 1569 feet of tangent, and a curve of  $3^{\circ} 58'$  to the right 1,075 feet in length; the accident occurred within a few feet of the southern end of this curve. The point of accident can be seen by the engineman of southbound train a distance of about 700 feet. The grade is practically level. The weather at the time of the accident was clear.

Southbound freight train extra 2831 consisted of engine 2831 and a caboose, in charge of Conductor Say and Engineman Hutn. According to the train sheet, extra 2831 passed the block station at Ford, a little more than 1 mile north of the point of accident, at 11.34 a.m., and on approaching the station at Rosston was delayed a few minutes by southbound extra 2906 pulling out of the passing track, the south switch of which is just north of the station at Rosston, or about 175 feet north of the curve on which the accident occurred. Extra 2831 followed extra 2906 closely out of Rosston, and was moving at a speed variously estimated by its crew to have been from 5 to 10 miles an hour when its caboose was struck by extra 3021.

Southbound freight train extra 3021 consisted of 59 cars and a caboose, hauled by engine 3021 and assisted by helper engine 3292 on the rear, and was in charge of Conductor Earley and Engineman McCool, with Engineman McElravey in charge of the helper engine. Extra 3021 passed the block station at Ford at 11.45 a.m., according to the train sheet,

and was travelling at a speed estimated to have been from 10 to 15 miles an hour when it collided with the rear end of extra 2831 at about 11.48 a.m.

Extra 2831 was driven forward against the rear end of extra 2906, some of the draw bars in that train being damaged, while the caboose was derailed; the caboose of extra 2831 was demolished. Engine 3021 was derailed to the left and came to rest in an upright position on the north end of a bridge, about 150 feet beyond the point of accident. The employee killed was a brakeman in the caboose of extra 2831.

Flagman Stanley, of extra 2831, did not put down any torpedoes while his train was waiting for extra 2906 to pull out of the passing track at Rosston. When his train proceeded behind extra 2906 and he saw that it was not increasing its speed, he said he got off and put down two torpedoes immediately south of a road crossing at the northern end of the curve, started ahead to overtake his caboose, and had nearly reached it when he heard extra 3021 approaching. He said he then went back on the run and was near the road crossing where he had placed the torpedoes when extra 3021 passed him, his stop signals not having been acknowledged. He estimated the speed of extra 3021 at the time of the accident to have been at least 20 miles an hour. Flagman Stanley later stated that according to measurements made by him immediately after the accident the distance between the point where he stood when extra 3021 passed him and the point of accident was 5 telegraph poles; this distance was afterwards found by measurement to be 670 feet.

The statements of Conductor Say were indefinite, although he verified Flagman Stanley's statements that torpedoes were put down and that the flagman had returned nearly to the caboose when extra 3021 was heard approaching, at which time the conductor said he told the flagman to go back. Conductor Say heard the torpedoes explode and said that Flagman Stanley had gotten back far enough the second time to enable him to be seen a considerable distance by the engineman of extra 3021. Conductor Say estimated the speed of extra 3021 at the time of the accident at about 20 miles an hour.

At the time Conductor Say told Flagman Stanley to go back, Brakeman Gonen was riding on the front end of the caboose. He said the conductor told the flagman to "Get off and get them," and that on looking back he saw Flagman Stanley get off the caboose and go back to flag. The point where he saw Flagman Stanley get off was about half way between the road crossing and the point of the accident, instead

of near the road crossing as stated by Flagman Stanley. The spot where Brakeman Goneen said Flagman Stanley told him he was standing when passed by extra 3021 was 670 feet from the point of accident.

A caution signal was displayed when extra 3021 passed the tower at Ford, indicating that there was a train in the block, while the operator gave to the engine crew a hand signal to indicate that they were closing up on the preceding train. Engineman McCool merely eased off on the throttle, however, and was working a light throttle, travelling at a speed estimated by him to have been 20 or 25 miles an hour, when he saw some one near the station at Rosston pointing down the track. His engine exploded two torpedoes and at about the same time he saw the rear end of extra 2831 and made an emergency application of the air brakes, reducing the speed to about 12 or 14 miles an hour at the time of the accident. At no time after passing Ford had he seen anything ahead of his train on the straight track approaching the station at Rosston. Engineman McCool admitted that he did not have his train under proper control, and said that he had seen smoke about 1 mile distant and that he had been under the impression that it came from the engine of extra 2831, which had run around his train at a previous station.

The statements of the other members of the crew of extra 3021 failed to develop any additional facts of importance.

B. B. Coleman, a former employee of the railroad, was in the vicinity of the station at Rosston when extra 3021 approached, and realizing that there was danger of an accident ran toward the track and gave the engineman a signal to indicate that he was closing up on the preceding train. He estimated the speed of extra 3021 to have been about 35 miles an hour. He did not hear the explosion of torpedoes or see the flagman of extra 2831. Another eye-witness, Mrs. Miller, heard the torpedoes explode, and the spot she pointed out as their approximate location practically agreed with their location as fixed by Brakeman Goneen.

This accident was caused by the failure of Engineman McCool, of extra 3021, to have his train under proper control after passing a caution signal indication. Conductor Say and Flagman Stanley of extra 2831, are also at fault for their failure properly to protect their train by flag.

Engineman McCool stated that he was deceived by seeing smoke about 1 mile distant which he thought came from the engine of extra 2831, when as a matter of fact it came from the engine of a 76-car train which was just ahead of extra 2831.

He was not justified in making any such assumption, as was proved by the occurrence of this accident, as well as for the reason that the smoke might have come from some engine on the northbound track, and in any event he should not have allowed an assumption of this character to interfere with proper observance of the caution signal indication he had received, which authorized him to "proceed with caution."

The weight of evidence in this case indicates that the torpedoes placed on the rail by Flagman Stanley were located several hundred feet south of the road crossing and that he was back only about 700 feet from the point of accident when he was passed by the following train. His train had stopped while extra 2906 was pulling out of the passing track at a low rate of speed, had waited for the switch to be closed, and had then followed extra 2906 at a correspondingly low rate of speed. In view of the fact that there was a curve immediately ahead on which the view was materially obscured, a proper regard for safety should have prompted him either to throw off a fusce or to put down torpedoes before his train started around the curve. Conductor Say was in position to know what was being done and what protection was being afforded his train, and is at fault with Flagman Stanley for his failure to provide proper protection.

Engineman McCool was employed as a fireman in 1910 and promoted to engineman in 1913. Conductor Say was employed in various capacities between 1903 and 1909, when he was employed as a freight brakeman, being promoted to conductor in 1912; his last employment as conductor dates from January 1, 1919. Flagman Stanley was employed as a brakeman in 1909 and resigned in 1913. He was reemployed as brakeman in August, 1920.

The crew of extra 2831 had been on duty less than 3 hours, previous to which they had been off duty about 14 hours. The crew of extra 3021 had been on duty about 9 hours, previous to which they had been off duty about 23 hours. The crew of the helper engine on extra 3021 had been on duty nearly three hours after about 16 hours off duty.