

IN RE INVESTIGATION OF AN ACCIDENT WHICH
OCCURRED ON THE PEORIA & PEKIN UNION
RAILWAY NEAR ACME, ILL., ON JULY 3, 1920.

August 3, 1920

On July 3, 1920, there was a head-end collision between two passenger trains on the Peoria and Pekin Union Railway near Acme, Ill., which resulted in the death of 1 employee and the injury of 16 passengers. After investigation of this accident the Chief of the Bureau of Safety reports as follows:

That part of the railroad on which this accident occurred is known as District B and extends between Bridge Junction, Ill. and Hollis Junction, Ill., a distance of 6.2 miles; Bridge Junction is 1.2 miles south of Peoria. Between Bridge Junction and Iowa Junction, a distance of 1.6 miles, this is a double-track line; between Iowa Junction and Hollis Junction, a distance of 4.6 miles, within which territory the accident occurred, it is a single-track line. Train movements over this district are governed by time-table and train orders, no block-signal system being in use. Northbound trains are superior by direction to southbound trains of the same class.

Approaching the point of accident from the south, beginning at the station at Acme, the track is tangent for 3,200 feet, followed by a 1-degree curve to the right 3,508 feet in length, the accident occurred on this curve 75 feet from its southern end. Approaching the point of accident from the north, beginning at Iowa Junction, the track is tangent for 1,056 feet, followed by the curve on which the accident occurred. The grade at the point of accident is .4 percent descending for northbound trains. The range of vision for both engine crews was restricted to about 625 feet by coal and box cars standing on two tracks on the inside of the curve which parallels the main track. At the time of the accident the weather was clear.

Peoria and Pekin Union northbound passenger train No. 206, en route from Hollis Junction, Ill., to Peoria, Ill., consisted of engine 23, 1 combination baggage and smoking car, and 2 coaches, and was in charge of Conductor Forsythe and Engineman Kendall. This train left Hollis Junction, and last open train order office south of the point of accident, at 4.50 p.m., on time, left Acme at about 5:02 p.m. on time, stopped at Colliers to discharge passengers, and collided with train No. 209 at a point about 1,500 feet north of Colliers or about 3,275 feet north of Acme Station. The accident occurred at 5 05 p. m., at which time train No. 206 was traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 5 miles an hour.

Toledo, Peoria & Western passenger train No. 5, operating over the tracks of the Peoria and Pekin Union Railway as southbound train No. 209, en route from Peoria, Ill., to Keokuk, Iowa, consisted of engine 57, 1 combination mail and baggage car, 1 smoking car, and 6 coaches and was in charge of Conductor Randall and Engineman Thomas. This train left Peoria at 4 47 p.m., 22

minutes late, and passed Bridge Junction, the last open telegraph office at 4:55 p.m., 23 minutes late, passed from double to single track at Iowa Junction and after the train register in the telephone booth had been checked departed without orders about 4 minutes before train No. 206 was due to arrive, and collided with train No. 206 while traveling at a speed estimated to have been about 4 or 5 miles an hour, 4,500 feet south of Iowa Junction.

Engine 57 on train No. 209 was partly derailed and considerably damaged. The first car in this train had both ends crushed in but was not derailed, while the second car was partly derailed and slightly damaged. Engine 23 of train No. 206 was slightly damaged, while the tender was forced forward into the back end of the engine cab. The employee killed was the engineman of train No. 206.

Brakeman Hellingberg, who was riding on the engine of train No. 206, and Fireman Atewell, saw train No. 209 at about the same time and called to the engineman, who immediately applied the air brakes in emergency. Brakeman Hellingberg thought train No. 209 was about 5 car-lengths distant when he first saw it. Conductor Forsythe was riding on the rear platform of the second car; when the brakes were applied he heard a whistle sounded and on looking ahead saw train No. 209 about 10 car-lengths distant. These employees estimated that the speed of their train had been reduced from 10 miles an hour to about 5 an hour at the time of the accident.

As train No. 209 approached Bridge Junction the train-order board was displayed in the stop position, its normal position according to the rules, and Engineman Thomas whistled for and obtained a clear signal while, according to Brakeman Landon, the train-order board was in the clear position when he saw it from the rear of the train, and throw off a register slip. The operator said he called to the fireman that "6", meaning train No. 206, and to Brakeman Landon that "206" was on time, but this was denied by both the fireman and the brakeman. On reaching the end of double-track at Iowa Junction, Engineman Thomas brought his train to a stop. Brakeman Landon got off the rear of the train and started ahead for the purpose of throwing the switch, but after walking about one car-length the train pulled ahead and stopped on single-track clear of the switch, the switch having been thrown by one of two men with suitcases who had been standing near the switch. Brakeman Landon then closed the switch, registered his train, checked the train register against opposing trains, among them being train No. 206, and gave a proceed signal, having taken it for granted that when Engineman Thomas pulled out upon single-track he had received orders against train No. 206. Brakeman Landon registered at 5 00 p.m., while train No. 206 was scheduled to leave Acme, 1.5 miles distant, at 5:02 p.m. He did not make any effort to see if orders had been received because the conductor had instructed him to assist in taking up tickets after leaving Iowa Junction.

Train No. 209 had been delayed in leaving Peoria on account of a large number of passengers and the necessity of

adding another car to the train, and at that time Conductor Randall had figured on passing train No. 206 on the double track north of Iowa Junction. After the train had started, however, he was engaged in collecting tickets and forgot about train No. 206. Conductor Randall did not see the train-order board at Bridge Junction, did not supervise the movement of the train from double to single track at Iowa Junction or know that the switch was properly lined up, and at no time did he have any conversation with Engineman Thomas about meeting opposing trains, leaving to Brakeman Landon, who at one time had been a conductor on the Peoria and Pekin Union Railway, full responsibility for the supervision of the movement of the train. Conductor Randall said it was his custom when the train was crowded to have Brakeman Landon get orders at Bridge Junction and to register and check the register at Iowa Junction.

Engineman Thomas had not received any orders against train No. 206, as supposed by Brakeman Landon, but took it for granted that that train had arrived, although not then due at Iowa Junction and, therefore proceeded when Brakeman Landon gave him a proceed signal, while Fireman Ritter admitted that he had overlooked train No. 206. Fireman Ritter was the first to notice the approach of train No. 206 and at once called to Engineman Thomas, who applied the air brakes in emergency and reversed the engine. Fireman Ritter estimated that train No. 206 was about 200 feet distant when he saw it.

This accident was caused by train No. 209 occupying the main track on the time of a superior train, for which Conductor Randall, Engineman Thomas, Brakeman Landon and Fireman Ritter are directly responsible.

Conductor Randall was paying no attention to the operation of his train, Brakeman Landon assumed without any justification whatever that the engineman had received orders against train No. 206 and therefore gave a signal to proceed; Engineman Randall took it for granted that train No. 206 had arrived, although it was not then due, while Fireman Ritter overlooked train No. 206.

Rules 83 and 84 read as follows:

"83. A train must not leave its initial station on any division (or subdivision), or a junction, or pass from double to single track, until it has been ascertained whether all trains due, which are superior, or of the same class, have arrived or left.

84. A train must not start until the proper signal is given."

Conductor Randall and Engineman Thomas, being in charge of the train, are chiefly responsible for the violation of these rules. The engineman did not know the time of train No. 206, did not have a time-table with him, and unwarrantably assumed that train No. 206 had arrived leaving Iowa Junction without trying to obtain any definite knowledge concerning that train or its time. Had the conductor who stated he had forgotten train No. 206, made any attempt to comply with rule 83 by checking the train register, he probably would have remembered train No. 206 and not have allowed his own train to proceed until it had arrived. These two employees are also at fault for allowing their train to pass from double to single track

without a proper signal being given. The switch was opened by an unknown person, but the engineman knew that it was not a member of his crew, and under the circumstances he should not have moved his train without proper authority, and without knowing positively that train No. 206 had arrived, while the conductor should have been in position to supervise the movement of his train and to see that the proper signals for its movement were given.

While the rules of this railroad do not require enginemen to show their orders to their firemen, or conductors to show them to their brakemen, yet on account of the active part he was taking in the operation of his train Brakeman Landon was extremely negligent in not finding out if any orders had been delivered to his train giving it rights over train No. 206. This was a matter of paramount importance and he could easily have obtained the desired information without materially delaying his work of assisting the conductor in collecting tickets.

Rule 13 of the special instructions in the time-table provides that passenger conductors will register in the conductors' room at the Union Station in Peoria, but there is no rule which makes it the duty of any particular employee to register at any other point or to check train registers, although time-table rule 34 specifies Hollis, Iowa, and Bridge Junction as registering stations for all trains. Brakeman Landon was practically acting as conductor so far as the operation of the train was concerned, throwing off a register slip at Bridge Junction, and registering and checking the train register at Iowa Junction. Under ordinary operating practices these are among the duties of a conductor, and while by delegating these important duties to his brakeman, Conductor Randall was not violating any rule, but was only following what he said was his usual custom when he had a large number of passengers, it was his failure to attend personally to these duties that was one of the primary causes of this accident. There was also no violation of the rules involved in Engineman Thomas' failure to know the time of train No. 206, there being no rule requiring employees to have with them a copy of the current time-table.

There were numerous instances of violations of rules not directly involved in the accident, also of inadequate rules governing important operating practices.

Conductor Randall made no attempt to comply with the requirements of rule 104, which reads as follows:

"Switches must be left in proper position after having been used. Conductors are responsible for the position of switches used by them and their trainmen, except where switch tenders are stationed."

After train No. 209 had passed from double to single track at Iowa Junction the switch was closed by Brakeman Landon, but the conductor had no knowledge as to whether or not this had been attended to by the brakeman.

Train order No. 25 had been issued to train No. 206 at Hollis Junction on form 31, giving train No. 209 right over train No. 206, train No. 209 being delayed, train order No. 25 was annulled by train order No. 27, addressed to the operator. Under Form L of the forms of train orders, Operator Hughes at Hollis Junction should have destroyed all copies of the order

annulled except his own copy. Notwithstanding this requirement of the rule, Operator Hughes gave Conductor Forsythe of train No. 209 copies of each of the orders, the conductor not signing for either of them, and also gave him a clearance card, filling out the card to indicate that the signal was clear but not filling out that part of the card which is supposed to show whether or not there are orders for the train. Under time-table rule 39 a clearance card was required before train No. 206 could leave Hollis Junction, but it is to be noted that there are no rules on this railway governing the use of clearance cards except in manual block territory, and those rules merely say that a clearance card shall be issued under certain conditions, nothing being said as to the manner in which they shall be filled out, or specifying the information they should contain.

Operator Hughes, in writing train order No. 25, had failed to show that it had been repeated, although other evidence indicated that this had been done, he also failed to show on train order No. 27 the date and the name of the station. In his statement Operator Hughes also said that he generally signed form 31 train orders and had them made complete without obtaining the conductor's signature, although he knew it was against the rules, and this statement was verified by Dispatcher Colson, who said that at times form 31 train orders were completed without conductors' signatures. It was also shown that Conductor Forsythe of train No. 206 did not register at Hollis Junction, this being done for him by Operator Hughes, there being no rule prohibiting this practice.

This accident resulted directly from the failure of all four members of a train crew properly to perform their duties, any of them, by the exercise of the ordinary precautions expected and required of experienced men engaged in train service, could have prevented this accident. The investigation disclosed inadequate operating rules, extremely lax methods and practices, and habitual disregard of existing rules, these conditions rendered this accident possible, and require immediate correction by responsible operating officers.

All of the employees involved in this accident were experienced men and none of them was on duty contrary to the provisions of the hours of service law.